

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Colin LaVie

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Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise again today and see everyone joining us in the gallery, everyone watching from home. Another beautiful day on PEI, lots of tourists around and I just want to wish everyone a great day.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much.

It is indeed another beautiful day. There's a few people I'd like to mention who are with us in the gallery today, I see Daniel Boudreau there, I see Sarah Stewart-Clark with her family and her brother principal Andrew and John MacLean is with us here today and I also want to make special mention of George Hunter who is a regular here in the House and I think one of the members has already mentioned that he travelled here every day he comes on public transit and it's quite a trek from Kensington so thanks for coming again George, it's nice to see you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly is a pleasure to rise and welcome another great crowd into our gallery today; I see a lot of familiar faces that are visiting today with us.

I see Sam MacPhail, former president of our young Liberals of Prince Edward Island, it's great to have Sam in the House visiting today as well with Sam today is Blake Doyle who is president of Island Recruiting who, I

think, Sam now has a part to play at Island Recruiting as well.

So great to have you both in the House.

I see the Myers family is here today visiting. The minister of transportation will be on his best behaviour today the way he always is when they're in the House. Great to have them in as well.

On the way in today, it's quite to see two cruise ships in the harbour, our beautiful Charlottetown Harbour and the streets just abuzz with tourists taking in all of our shops and restaurants in the Downtown Charlottetown area.

So I know it's alive in Downtown Charlottetown and it's alive all across Prince Edward Island with our tourism sector doing as well as they can do during this busy time of the season.

I also want to mention briefly, today is National Lineworker Day, and I want to say thanks to all power line technicians that work all across our province with Maritime Electric and some contractors.

Many of them I know very well from my past experience who work very hard 24 hours a day to ensure the power stays on for all of us on Prince Edward Island.

So I wanted to pass along my thanks to all linepersons that are working in the Province of Prince Edward Island, and as well, to all that are viewing in from today.

I hope they're all having a wonderful day and will enjoy the proceedings especially those that live in District 10 Charlottetown-Winsloe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly a pleasure for me to rise as well today in the House and to bring greetings to a few individuals that have joined us.

John MacLean, Blake Doyle great to see you both here. Mr. and Mrs. Myers, just want to remind you he's over on this side now.

I'd also like to recognize Sarah Stewart-Clarke who's joined us, along with her son, Rory. I know Rory last year started at a game called Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, while he would be tuning in to watch the proceedings.

I'd also like to recognize Andrew Stewart, of course best known as the principal of Bluefield School. He was named and recognized as one of the top 30 principals in all of Canada this past year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aylward: And if you know the school and if you know this gentleman, you do know why. Of course, Andrew's daughter, as well, Meg, has joined us today. It's great to see you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand here to represent Stanhope-Marshfield an honour and a privilege, as I do every day.

As minister of justice, I got the opportunity to tour family law centre this morning and the excellent work that the people down there are doing. It's a heartwarming feeling to know that what the work that those people do in that centre down on Harbourside Drive.

As minister of agriculture, I want to give you; it's another great hay day, so farmers are out making hay.

I want to recognize a special guest, Derwin Clow is here today. He's a fellow dairy farmer from Freetown. Him and I went to the college together and our fathers were the best of friends when they were both living, and it's great to see Derwin here today as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't often get up to do greetings, but I guess I feel compelled to with my parents here today. So I want to welcome my mom and dad.

I know that mom still follows along closely because I get text messages when I answer questions in the Legislature from her. So I know she's watching close.

Mom and dad just recently sold their home and moved to Montague, so I know that they've been quite busy. I heard from dad probably more in the past couple months though than I have in the past year because he kept calling me saying when are you coming to get your stuff?

I had to also go and help clean out the house and get rid of my stuff there.

I'd like to also say hello to John MacLean. I haven't seen John in a while, and John's looking quite good. I hope things are going well for him.

I'd also like to give a shout-out to Blake. Blake has been after me on and off to go back out and play rugby, which I did many years ago.

I'm quite tempted but the 46-year-old part of my brain keeps kicking in and saying don't do it, so I think I'm going to listen to that side for a change, for probably one of the first times in my life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I won't be very long, I just wanted to say hello to Mr. Clow, Derwin, as the minister said, he does operate a great operation on the Freetown Road.

I wanted to say one thing, it sure is professionally run, and when you go into his place nothing's out of place. That's for sure.

Speaker: The hon. member Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd just like to rise and also acknowledge Derwin Clow, I've been bumping into him at the farmers market every weekend it seems and we're having great conversations about agriculture, dairy and how things can progress here on our Island in a sustainable way. So it's fantastic to see Derwin here.

I'd also like to recognize the power line technicians today as the hon. member beside me here mentioned. I'm the son of a linesmen, all my life I've been around linesmen and seeing the culture that they have and watch them going out into all the weather and have to come back and always doing it for the greater good of everyone around them, so a kudos to them.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just wanted to rise to say hello to everyone in the gallery and to everyone watching from home from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

I had the great honour of attending a lunch event today for the Canadian Mental Health Association of Prince Edward Island with the guest speaker Clint Malarchuk and he shared his experiences and struggles around mental health, particularly around an injury he sustained and PTSD as a result when he was a goalie in the NHL.

I appreciated the bravery it takes to share that story and it's a reminder that stigma is very well present in many areas of our society around mental health and it can be hard to come forward when you need that help. So anything that we can do as a government or in our communities to help reduce that stigma is something that we should be working toward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you hon. members.

I, also, would like to welcome everyone to the gallery. I was elected first in 2011, I made a lot of friends since I was elected

over the last eight or nine years, and there's quite a few of them in the gallery here today. Mr. and Mrs. Myers, Steven's parents; I don't think there was too much control over him so I don't think you'll see the behavior that everybody expects to see. And John MacLean, I made good friends with over the last number of years and Blake Doyle, I have made good friends with and especially in the last couple of years was Dr. Stewart-Clark and their son Rory.

So if anything comes from this it's the friendships we make over the years and I'm kind of a chat-able fellow and I like to chat and make friends and I like to continue that friendship on as the years go on.

So thank you for being here today.

Statements by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Housing Now

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Probably the biggest concern of everyone I talk to is housing. Not just more apartments of the kind developers are already building; we need housing that works and supports all kinds of Islanders, like seniors who need the occasional assistance, young families with children who need a place to play close by, and students who plan to live here all year, immigrants who need help settling here and many more individuals and families. Above all, most need their living quarters to be affordable so there is money left over to pay for food, medicine and other daily needs.

To think that the private sector can deliver these much-needed housing units alone, simply by offering them cheaper or free land, or tweak the by-laws a bit for less parking or allow more stories, is a complete pipedream.

What is clearly needed is a concerted effort involving all three levels of government. The provincial government must take the lead as they used to 20 to 40 years ago, when most of the seniors and housing corporation homes that we enjoy today were built.

The problem is that due to inaction in the past 20 years, we have a huge need for housing right now and a promise to provide 1,000 new affordable units. The need is so large that if they were available today they would probably all be filled instantly.

Yet I see no urgency in the government. Where are the action teams scouring for suitable land, determining what type of housing is needed now or in the future, what funding can be tapped and what standards the building will meet in order to be suitable for our sustainable future.

As an architect, I'm well aware that building 1,000 units does not happen overnight. It will probably take 1 to 2 years to do so, but the first steps: the planning, the design and the financing schemes have to start right now or we will have little progress in two years.

What we need now is for the government to provide us with a long-term vision so we can discuss as a community what our living quarters of the future will be like, where will they be located? Will they be sustainably built? Will they be so well planned that all Islanders could enjoy living there? Will they be governed and owned so the residents feel secure for their future with an equity stake in the project.

To the government, please show us all what you are doing about housing, right now.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

St. Anne's Sunday

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly is a pleasure for me to speak to you today about Prince Edward Island's oldest cultural festivals, St. Anne's Sunday, it is held annually on Lennox Island and this year it will be held on Sunday, July 28th.

According to the Bible, St. Anne was the grandmother of Jesus. The history of St. Anne's Sunday began in the late 1500s and early 1600s when French missionaries introduced Roman Catholicism to the

Mi'kmaq people. In 1610 Grand Chief Membertou was baptized and since then many Mi'kmaq have combined their traditional spirituality with Christianity.

The Mi'kmaq people adopted St. Anne as their patron Saint. The mission of St. Anne was established on Lennox Island in 1800 with the construction of a log chapel. Its replacement was also constructed in 1842 which was later destroyed in a fire. The present day church was erected in 1895.

St. Anne's Sunday begins with mass at the church at 11:00 a.m. and there will be a parade at 12:30 p.m. in the main streets of Lennox Island and lobster dinners will be served from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. A number of events will be held throughout the afternoon, games and things of that nature and early evening concludes with fireworks at dusk.

I would like to wish organizers Kate Aresnault and her team for this special cultural event; all the best.

As the MLA for O'Leary-Inverness, which includes Lennox Island, I plan to be attending St. Anne's Sunday and I will invite all members of this Legislature and Islanders in general to take the opportunity to attend our oldest cultural event on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Good News from Summerside

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I attended a welcome announcement of investment into my community yesterday. A new 100 unit hotel will be built and attached to Credit Union Place. It's expected to create 100 construction jobs and 30 full-time operational jobs once completed. This has been a piece of the puzzle that the city has been looking to add to the offering at the CUP for quite some time.

Now, travelers will be able to attend concerts and have accommodations on site, or parents of children attending sports events will be able to stay on site. All of this extra traffic at the site will help to add to the

bottom line of the CUP as its facilities are made use of by the travelers, and make it more financially self-sufficient in its operations costing taxpayers less.

The developer hopes that by having a premium location and charging higher rates for this hotel that other hotels in Summerside will be able to raise rates and make a better return on their own operations.

Short term jobs, long term jobs, less burden on taxpayers, and lifting the local accommodations industry are all achievable through this project. It is great to see and I stand here to recognize the hard work the city staff put into making this happen.

We have also had another good news story come out recently in my district. We will have a new water refill station installed on our boardwalk, and I expect more to come in the near future. Credit to Councilor Cory Snow for responding to constituent Jill MacIntyre who asked for the infrastructure.

In this age of waking up to the realities our actions and lifestyles have on our environment, encouraging less waste through initiatives like using refillable water bottles may seem like a small step to some, however, the only way to get to the destination is one step at a time.

I look forward to many more steps in the right direction and Summerside is helping us to lead the way.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Social Development and Housing about the new secure income pilot proposed by government. In this pilot, government will invest \$225,000 providing 400 people with additional funds over a three month period, January to March 2020 with an average of \$187 per person, per month.

As I expressed, I am very concerned about this approach. When I got home I received an email from a constituent who has been working with a case worker to receive support under the current accessibility program.

During the intake interview, this pilot was mentioned and it was indeed presented as a lottery by the case worker who said: we don't have any information on who will be selected yet but there's always a chance.

My constituent had a number of questions that I am unable to answer, so I thought I'd just read them to the Minister of Social Development and Housing to see if he can provide an answer.

Development of a basic income pilot program (further)

First, the constituent asks: What I don't understand is why there is a need to pilot this at all. Is there some question about providing more money to people that needs to be answered?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you to the hon. member for the question.

It certainly a valid one: why do we need to pilot a program such as this?

As mentioned previously, I think going forward like we are in the process of developing the criteria for this program for this pilot, we want to make it as positive as possible that we do get it right, but at the end of the day too, once that pilot is being rolled out over the first three months of January to March 31st of 2020, will there be other changes that we will see? Criteria that should be added to it; there very well may be.

So that's why we're looking at it as a pilot.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: The minister has made it clear that this is a pilot despite the commitment in the Poverty Action Plan to a program.

My constituent also wanted to ask: Even if there is a need to pilot, is doing so via a *Hunger Games* style system anything other than cruel?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

Mr. Hudson: Well as we look forward, you know after the period of the end of this fiscal year, March 31st, 2020, moving forward after that, there is an additional 900,000 that this program will be budgeted for and that this program will continue with, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: I'm encouraged that every time I ask questions we find a little bit more money, so maybe I'll just keep going and we can fund the whole program.

\$900,000, though, will not help maintain this program much longer with the 400 people already on it, that will take us forward for probably another six to seven months. So it's still a pilot, minister.

Pilot program of small business tax rate

My constituent's final question, which I think really speaks to this government's priorities: Given that you're committed to only a pilot, why isn't the decrease in the small business tax rate also being piloted in the same spirit?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to thank the member for the question.

As far as the small business tax goes, the decrease is just the beginning of that

decrease that we have promised during the election campaign. I know you all have the platform over there.

We will move forward with that, this is early days and we've decreased it by 0.5% and we'll continue to do that.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The first week of this sitting, I asked the Minister of Agriculture and Land by how much was an Irving owned corporation under their allowable limit of aggregate land, and the minister responded: "Happy to announce that everything has been in the spirit of the law since we've taken government."

Irving's allowable limit of aggregate land

Question to the Minister of Agriculture and Land: Is the minister still prepared to stand behind this statement?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, thank you for that question.

I know your concerns are for the best interest of Prince Edward Island and the landholdings and our job here is to protect the land. We are going through to review the land act, of course, and I hope to make you a part of that land act.

According to IRAC, every week when I review the IRAC papers that come across my desk, I ask: are these in proper holdings and they tell me yes. That's all I can ask for.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Island farmers are proud stewards of much of our Island's land and many pay close attention to activities they feel contravene

the spirit of the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*, including the excessive concentration of land under one corporate owner.

Recently, there have been some murmurings among farmers in the Bedeque area, of a soon-to-be finalized transfer of over 2000 acres from arable land from a local family operator to a new corporation owned and operated by the Irvings.

Land sale to Irvings

A question to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land: Are you aware of the land sale in question?

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member opposite, that has not come across my desk yet, so until it does, no.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The land in question appears to be the same land that just this past April was almost sold to corporations owned by the Irvings, this sale of course was denied by the previous government following IRAC's recommendation that the sale contribute the steer of the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*

Though this rumored new deal does not yet appear to have gone through IRAC for review, it seems likely that given the apparent similarities between it and the proposed deal from a few months ago, the agency will offer a similar recommendation to the government and deny the sale.

Recommendations from IRAC and land sale

A question to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land: Will this government follow any potential recommendation from IRAC to deny the sale in question?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker and to the member opposite, our government doesn't operate on rumors. When its facts and it

comes across our desk and if IRAC advises us to not approve it, that's what we will do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Mr. Speaker, it was made abundantly clear during the past election, just how important the issue of corporate land ownership was to Islanders, farmers and non-farmers alike. Indeed this government was elected on a platform which significantly indication that a PC government went and I quote: Respect and restore the spirit and intent of the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*

Allowing land sales like the one I just described would indicate that this government intends to do just the opposite and in doing so, put the entrust of large corporations above those of Islanders.

Details of land holdings of Irving family

A question to the Minister of Agriculture and Lands: Will the minister put an end to all these rumors by providing this Legislature with detailed information on all of the land holdings of the Irving family and associated corporations?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the member opposite.

I understand your concerns and I understand the empathy for the farmers that are concerned about this and our government. I can assure you, we are on top of this. As the minister of also, justice, I have to find out the legal implications of releasing all that information. but if I can, I will come back to you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Mr. Speaker I would like to remind the minister that as a member of this Legislative Assembly he has the choice to

exercise his privilege and table that information.

A question to the Minister of Agriculture and Lands: Will you table the information.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I will get back to you on that.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When I asked yesterday about the intended outcomes of the grants within the department of environment the minister spoke of the electric power rebate portion and how it was flagged by the department is potentially not a good use of funds.

We already know that free licenses encouraging more vehicles on the road is not a good carbon reduction policy and the minister has spoken that he is open to changing that policy.

Reduction of impact on energy decisions

A question to the minister: Is it fair to say that all of these funds are intended to be used to help reduce the impact our energy decisions are having on our environment?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course the intent of a low carbon economy fund and the money that's collected through things like the carbon pricing that was put into effect, I believe, should be used to either mitigate and lower our carbon dioxide equivalent GHD Gas Emissions, or adapt to the problems that we are experiencing because of climate change and that's exactly the direction we want to move.

Have we been able to fully explore the options and make changes, the answer is no.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Does the minister feel that these funds are being effectively used to achieve those goals?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thanks for that question from across from the member.

I think I've stated a number of times on the floor during budget estimates and other times that, in particular, the funds that we're allocating to free licenses and discounts on registrations are not actually really helping achieve our goal of mitigation or adaptation.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Gas powered vehicles to electric

The idea to encourage fuel switching was also mentioned in the minister's response yesterday. With transportation being listed as one of the biggest issues for us to tackle for emissions, will the department be looking at encouraging fuel switching from gas powered vehicles to electric?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. member knows that falls under me because I've spoken about it in this House numerous times, and what I've said and I'll continue to say is, we are first going to roll out our solar program.

When we have a solar program that is going to be aggressive and people are going to take us up on, when we get people onto solar into their homes and the cost of electric cars comes down to a lower level where the average Islander can afford it, we will look at – as we promised in our platform that you guys have all read over there – we will come forward with a rebate for an electric vehicle

and follow through on our commitment that we made during the spring election.

As I have said in this House before, once we have people on their own solar with their own electric car, we'll help them become energy self sufficient. I think that's important, and I think that's a step that through the fund, my department is helping to bring programs that will help Islanders reach those goals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notably, the only form of energy we seem to not subsidize is actual clean energy. We have no HST on diesel heating oil, and rebates on gasoline, electricity, propane, wood and wood pellets. While burning trees can have a net zero effect over the long term, it certainly does work against the notion of planting more trees to help with our carbon issues.

All of these energies release carbon into the atmosphere when consumed.

No subsidization for clean renewable energy

Question to the minister: Why is clean, renewable energy the only form of energy not subsidized by the department of the environment?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The member raises a really good point and it's an excellent question.

I think it's something that we need to look at. We have to be very attentive to the fact that there are many people who heat with oil and having the provincial portion of the HST or around that 10% back onto it would impact them.

But, this is exactly the sort of discussion – these are sort of the costs and benefits that

I'd like to have at a standing committee with respect to the climate change file.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, in reference to that committee, we could empower them here.

The cost to Islanders to transition to a carbon-neutral society would be significantly lessened if the funds that are supposed to be used to encourage clean tech were not being used to encourage the opposite by using price signaling, favouring the behaviour we want to discourage.

Grant funds used for clean energy

Will the minister commit to ensuring the grant funds of the department of environment now budgeted at \$13.6 million are used to encourage Islanders to make use of clean tech, such as Islander-owned electric cars or wind and solar?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Those are some really great suggestions. I'm not going to stand here on the floor today and commit to anything specific. Like I said, I want to have those discussions at the standing committee.

But, there are a lot of different things we need to look at. For example, there was a decrease in the excise tax on gasoline that was really presented in an offset through the climate tax that was added. That would be other money that potentially should go back towards these clean initiatives.

Before I commit to anything, I want to have that fulsome discussion and really, that's what I keep talking about with the standing committee. That way, it allows all parties and all members of the House to participate instead of me going back to the department and making those decisions behind closed doors.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Access to local health services is a key factor in maintaining and building vibrant and resilient rural communities. With an aging rural demographic which will increasingly have health care needs and reduced mobility, this is going to become even more important into the future.

The PC platform certainly had a wide variety of points on health services generally, but it actually had very little to say specifically about services in rural Prince Edward Island.

Plan for expansion of health services re: rural PEI

A question to the hon. Minister for Health and Wellness: What is your government's plan for maintaining and expanding health services in rural Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

First and foremost, one of the key things that we've stated already is we are investing more dollars into primary care. That's not just here in Charlottetown or Summerside, that's across Prince Edward Island.

I'm very proud that there's two new family physicians that are actually starting today in Western PEI. We continue to recruit for other areas of the Island as well. We believe as well that it's fundamentally important to treat people to provide health care as close as possible to home as we can and that is our commitment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The PC Platform's only specific point on rural health services was a commitment to and I quote: Increase the current family practitioner compliment from 92 to 100 and with a focus on rural recruitment.

Indeed the minister has just referenced two doctors who started work this week, I think perhaps enlisted under the previous administration.

This is a fine goal but government and communities have been attempting to recruit medical professionals across Prince Edward Island for years.

Recruitment of medical professionals in rural PEI

Could the minister clarify what this government will do different from previous administrations to increase the recruitment and retention of medical professionals in rural Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Very early in my mandate as Minister of Health and Wellness, I had discussions with the medical society of Prince Edward Island and those are ongoing and I'm looking forward to having further conversations in the very near future with the medical society.

We firmly believe that in addition and in cooperation with our retention and recruitment secretariat, that doctors recruiting doctors is an integral part of getting new physicians here to Prince Edward Island. Doctors, health care professionals that are already practicing have a network that we need to tap into and I'm very happy to report that the medical society is very welcoming of this.

As I said, these dialogues are going on and we're coming forward with a plan to do just that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It seems that in recent decades rural communities have constantly had an ongoing fight to maintain access to local services and health services in their communities. Indeed in my district and in the South Shore area we've recently seen some incremental improvements with the arrival of a part time nurse practitioner but that's a long way from local provision of comprehensive health care in rural Prince Edward Island.

Support for centre in South Shore region

A question to the minister: Will your department be supporting the development of a collaborative community health care centre in the South Shore region?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Throughout the summer period my plan is to go out and meet with local communities and to best ascertain where health care can be best provided with regards to exactly what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is referring to.

A collaborative hub model in the community so that we can better provide health care, particularly in rural PEI, where it's closer to home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the Green Party platform we had proposed developing rural health care hubs, based on Ontario's very successful and improved model. This would involve co-locating a variety of health services such as diagnostics, preventive chronic health care services, long term care counseling and primary care services in rural hospitals, to make services more effective, more accessible and more efficiently delivered so

we can keep those rural services and rural communities.

Developing of rural health care hubs

A question to the minister: Would you be open to this approach or do you have some other plans for our rural hospitals?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, we're certainly open to that approach; we're open to any approach that will ensure that we're providing the very best health care to Islanders close to home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning stated: that it is his government's inclination to put at least the grade 3 assessments on hold. I find this concerning.

Since PEI introduced standardized testing, student achievement has substantially improved. Island students have made tremendous gains. In fact, I remember the previous minister of education receiving calls from other jurisdictions asking what we were doing here on PEI to have such remarkable improvements.

Grade 3 assessments on hold

My question is for the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Is your government still prepared to put Grade 3 assessments on hold?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can understand the Leader of the Third Party's concerns; assessments do play an important role in how we roll out our education system. In the end, it's about

student achievement, right? That's what we're all focused on.

We're very focused on the frontline and helping teachers help our students and that's exactly what we're doing. We've been collecting data through assessments for many years in the department of education and they've done a fantastic job. The assessments have collected very good data.

What we're hearing from teachers is that it's time to put that data to work. One of the things that we're looking at – and I'm not going to make a big announcement about it today is really – we are going to look at putting at least the Grade 3 assessments on hold for the near future to do just that.

I think if the member wants to go and talk to Grade 3 teachers, I think he'd find they're all in agreement.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly sounds like the minister is not flipping on that decision this week.

It isn't hard to see why standardized testing makes a difference, since it ensures that curriculum outcomes are taught.

PEI's gains in the PISA and PCAP assessments coincide almost precisely with the introduction of provincial standardized testing.

Prior to 2007, PEI students wrote no standardized exams and ranked near the bottom in student achievement in Canada, near the bottom.

After the province introduced standardized testing in several grade levels, student achievements have substantially improved.

If educators do not know where students' weaknesses are, it's difficult to improve those weaknesses.

Evidence to suspend Grade 3 assessments

My question is to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Where is the

scientific evidence to suspend the Grade 3 assessments?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Mr. Trivers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You know, as I've said before, assessments do play a role and as the member said, they are important, yes they are and that's why we are not getting rid of assessments, we're continuing with them. We might put the Grade 3 assessments on hold for a year or maybe two, we're looking at that.

I look forward to the members input.

There's some people that assess the students every day, day-in, day-out at the (Indistinct) –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: – they're teachers and they know exactly how their students are doing and that's who we are listening to in the department of education right now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party, your second supplementary.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly sounds like this is being driven from the minister's office, or perhaps the office of his deputy.

An Hon. Member: Whoa.

Mr. Mitchell: RMJ assessments, an Ontario-based consulting firm issued a report earlier this year that said PEI standardized tests had a positive impact on student achievement. To quote the firm's leader Richard Jones: The assessment program is operating well the way it is right now.

Last week CBC quoted the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning saying: the question was what are you doing with the data and do we really need to continue collecting data?

Teachers and staff have used the data to set schools goals, plan interventions and bring positions to teaching. This helps to ensure that Prince Edward Island continues to be one of the highest achieving provinces in Canada.

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Do you not want PEI to continue being one of the highest achieving provinces in Canada?

Are you not concerned that this particular cohort of students in Grade 3 needs these assessments?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure if the member across is getting the message but we're not getting rid of all assessments, we're going to continue to use assessments, they're a valuable tool. We have some just fantastic staff in the department of education that develop assessments and they apply assessments and we've collected the data, they do a great job at using the data. There are some areas though where we feel, like the Grade 3, we could use a little break from that and really it would benefit the teachers and the students.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Going forward, I mean, assessments are done at a number of grade levels and we're going to – we're thinking reducing the frequency of assessments, as is in our platform, is something that will benefit everybody in the end, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Finance: Prior to the recent election, this minister called for immediate action to help with rental costs. Yesterday in reference to a rental rate freeze, the minister stated and I quote: If it needs to happen, it will happen.

Great news to see the Deputy Premier and the finance minister who controls the purse strings make such a statement.

Action on rental and housing crisis

Based on this answer, are we to assume the minister doubts there's a rental crisis and that there is no need for immediate action?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for the question and as the former finance minister, I think you understand quite well how this job works.

We take into consideration all requests coming forward and we deal with them on one-on-one and we decide what's best for not only the province, but for government, and the purse strings of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank your first supplementary.

Mr. Henderson: People can't afford rents.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm having déjà-vu, Mr. Speaker.

The minister likes to claim that there's no money to deal with all priorities. Yesterday, the minister stated: We did what we could with the money we had.

Well there is money. The government has a surplus contingency slush fund of almost \$18 million.

Some Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Henderson: I can't believe that.

Mr. MacDonald: This is more than enough to fund such initiatives as the rental voucher initiative for low-income Islanders and seniors or to increase the George Coles Bursary or to initiate the school food program or perhaps if we're not doing assessments –

An Hon. Member: Pick one.

Mr. MacDonald: – She could take the money from the assessments and put it into the school food program.

All promises of this government.

Mr. Henderson: Lots of money.

Mr. MacDonald: This government is becoming unreliable.

Why is the minister reluctant to fulfill these promises?

Fulfilling campaign promises

My question to the minister: Why are you not fulfilling these promises when there are clearly available funds in the budget to deal with contingencies like a rental crisis? Is a crisis a time to draw down on the contingency slush fund?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank would understand, because it was there when he was minister of finance, there is a contingency fund.

It's in the general government, you can look at – there's a budget line for you in the budget book for that. It is there for unforeseen circumstances and there a number of those, usually maybe bridge washouts, whatever we need to use the money for.

But we will look at that on a need to do basis. The contingency fund is there for a reason, we need to keep it where it is right now and as we go forward we will look at all the needs and wants of the province.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank your second supplementary.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is becoming clear that this government neglecting election promises, and those Islanders struggling to pay for rent when they Premier's office increases his budget by \$200,000 or each of the Cabinet ministers all get an EA. It didn't happen under this government.

I think we see where these government's priorities are: build an empire from the top down.

Action on rental and housing crisis (further)

Minister: When will this government take immediate action on the rental crisis and help low-income Islanders, our seniors, persons with disabilities, and our most vulnerable Islanders.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Appreciate the question.

I'd like to point out that we have eight cabinet ministers on this side of the floor; I think there were 11 when the third party became the third party.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Big cost saving right there.

Ms. Compton: Big cost saving there. I believe there were six EAs at that time. Yes we've increased it to eight. I will admit that.

The contingency fund, which we're not in the Ron McKinley, it's not the slush fund, the contingency fund when you were the finance minister –

Mr. MacDonald: (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: – and it will remain that.

The contingency fund is established so that we can maintain our budget surplus and that is something that we have promised. We would maintain our budget surplus. As the demands come forward we will address them one by one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's easy to poke holes and ask questions about current physician vacancies, I have more interest in putting plans in place so there is a continuum of care when doctors retire or move on.

Patient access to care

A question to the minister of health: What is the process to ensure patient access to care when their family doctor retires or relocates?

Mr. MacEwen: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

We do talk a lot about recruitment all the time, but when I was critic for health I had a strong focus on retention as well. That's what we need to focus on, not just recruitment, but retention.

Recently the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island did a poll to the members, and there are some shocking, alarming numbers there that have come forward with regards to doctors that are planning on retiring, doctors that are potentially looking at leaving to go to another jurisdiction.

Those are all very serious issues that this government and myself as the health minister is addressing internally and we are working hard as I said, measures to work alongside the medical society of Prince Edward Island to get them to help us to recruit more doctors on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Plans in place for physician crisis on PEI

Well the Montague area may see upwards of five physicians retire over the next five years. Minister, what plans does your department have in place to deal with what could be a potential crisis in five years time?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

There's several things that we need to look at and again I'll go back to the new initiative that we're looking at and we're going to be moving forward with and that is engaging Island physicians to help us to recruit their peers. Whether they're coming from another jurisdiction or whether they're coming out of medical school.

There's lots of work to be done; there's lots of conversation to be had in addition with the college of physicians who actually license physicians to see if there is a better way to license foreign doctors as well.

That's just another example of things that we're doing and those conversations that we're having to alleviate this potential problem.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, your second supplementary.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Potentially in five years we're going to be in a crisis situation in Montague where we have upwards of five doctors retiring. No one wants to see disruptions to patients accessing care when a doctor transitions out of a practice. The big thing is to make sure the patients have consistent access to care when a doctor retires or locates.

Minister, is there anything the community, or even myself, can do, to help address this situation and help with the process to ensure that in five years time we're not scrambling to find doctors when upwards of five retire.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

We just have to look to other regions of Prince Edward Island, particularly some of the rural regions, like Western, O'Leary and Tignish as an example they work very, very closely in collaboration with recruitment and retention. They have committees that work very hard when we do have respective new doctors coming to look at an area. They take on the role of engaging with these individuals, of touring them around, to highlight how great of communities they have.

To me, working together, not just with our secretariat with recruitment and retention and with our doctors recruiting their peers but it's also the department, it's our communities, it's all Islanders. We can make this happen and we can improve health care here on Prince Edward Island if we work together.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Cultural and creative industries were added as a strategic sector to the mandate of Innovation PEI along with a clean tech when the then third party passed an amendment to the legislation last year. This was specifically to recognize the economic and social value of these sectors and to ensure they are placing the overall economic plan for the province.

Update for cultural and creative industries

A question for the Minister of Economic Growth, Culture and Tourism: Has the mandate of Innovation PEI and the overall strategic plan and direction for that organization been updated to reflect the inclusion of cultural and creative industries and clean technology s key strategic sectors?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you hon. member.

That's something I'm not sure of, but I will go back to the department and ask for you and bring it back tomorrow.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Cultivating growth, a five-year action plan for culture and creative industries on PEI was launched in November of 2017 and is being implemented by dedicated staff and programming coordinated at Innovation PEI.

Implementation of five-year plan re: Innovation PEI

A question to the hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture: Will this government commit to continuing the implementation of the five-year plan and its goals as part of the overall mandate of Innovation PEI.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you hon. member.

Yes, we certainly will. The arts and creative industries are a very important economic driver for PEI, so I assure you that it's something we're going to take to the next level. I've talked to the department on this on a couple of occasions, they're excited about it. Once again as we proceed over the summer and do a review through everything, our plan is to work within the industry itself. Culture is a big part of PEI and I can't say enough how big of an economic boom it would be. I've taken it for granted and I've certainly looked at it with a whole new light since I took over the department, so I assure you yes, we will proceed.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you minister for your response. It was very reassuring.

I've learned from the minister earlier that new jobs in other sectors are typically

supported by a value of 50% of the yearly salary.

Support for salaries in cultural sector

A question to the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture: Will salaries in the cultural sector be supported by an equal 50% subsidy?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, hon. member.

I think it's something to look at, for sure. Anything is a possibility at this point. Like I say, we started discussions here now. I'm open-minded. My door is always open. If we feel there's a need and it will help the economic outlook of PEI and whatever we can do to contribute, I'll look at it.

It's something I can take back to the department and start a discussion for you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are currently facing a nursing shortage here in PEI with RNs being in high demand.

Addressing shortage of RNs

A question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: What is your department currently doing to address the shortage?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

That is a very correct statement. We do have a serious issue here on Prince Edward Island with regards to a nursing shortage.

We've had preliminary discussions with the nurses union here on Prince Edward Island and those conversations are going to be ongoing. We plan on having conversations with the nursing school at UPEI to see if we can increase the enrollment there as well.

Those are just a couple of measures that we're doing, but you know what? The nurses that we do have in place here on Prince Edward Island, we're extremely proud of the hard work and the commitment they have to providing excellent health care to Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The provincial government in New Brunswick recently announced funding for a bridging program to support LPNs to upgrade their training to RN level. This program will allow LPNs to be certified as RNs in two years, rather than needing to go through the full four years of training that involved repeating material covered in the LPN training and experience.

Bridging program for RNs

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Do you feel this type of bridging program would be a worthwhile initiative for Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I think it is an excellent program that they have in New Brunswick. But you know what? We can't always look outside of the jurisdiction. Sometimes we have to look internally and find the best solution for a homemade cure.

In 2018, there was a nursing incentive program put in place. The program is four streams of graduate registered nurses, experienced registered nurses, graduate nurse practitioners and experienced nurse practitioners. Since that program was put in place in 2018, Health PEI was able to successfully recruit 50 new nurses. That's just one other measure that is put in place, and I applaud the previous administration for doing that.

What we're doing as a new government is working over and above that and moving forward with new initiatives, such as I said, meeting and talking, having discussions with the nursing school to see if we can increase enrollment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would highlight that it is important for us to look at best practices outside of the province while also, I agree, looking at what is needed in our province and listening to the frontline health care professionals as I am listening to the many LPNs who have contacted me since the program was announced in New Brunswick, hoping that we would have a similar program here and wishing to upgrade their skills in a bridging program that would allow them to become RNs in a shorter period of time, and something that would make it much more accessible for them to do. I think it's important that we listen to our frontline healthcare professionals as well.

This type of bridging program is designed to recognize the experience and education of LPNs, while addressing the knowledge and training difference between LPNs and registered nurses, consisting of a combination of classroom learning and clinical experience.

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Will you be implementing a similar RN bridging program in collaboration with UPEI and if so, what's the timeline for implementation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I can't stand here today and announce that we're going to be doing that. It's something that's interesting. I'll guarantee you, I'll assure you that I will look into it, but until I have an opportunity to do that and have the staff in the department actually do the research and have the conversations with our

educational facility, I can't really commit to it.

I'd also like to note, that since we put in place the incentive program to recruit RNs here to Prince Edward Island, I'm very proud to say that we've had 92 applications to that incentive program.

So in addition to the 50 nurses that we hired, we have another 92 that have applied through the incentive program. Those are actions that are measureable.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Members, that's the end of Question Period.

[End of Question Period]

Speaker: Before we go into statements, I'll give way to the hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities to recognize guests.

Recognition of Guests

Mr. Fox: Well thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to recognize today in the gallery, Ian MacPherson and also, Bobby Jenkins, with the PEIFA.

I've had several opportunities to talk with these gentlemen and actually go out on Bobby's boat and something I want to push in the department to grow a stronger bond between the organization and the fishers as we move forward in this new department.

Thank you.

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

Adapting to Climate Change

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I had the pleasure of attending a funding announcement that will advance Prince Edward Island's work adapting to climate change.

The Atlantic Canada Water and Wastewater Association announced \$645,000 project that will update design guidelines for municipal water and wastewater infrastructure to include climate change.

Here on Prince Edward Island, we see the challenges that come with climate change every day. Impacts such as storm surge, coastal erosion, and heavy rainfall are becoming more frequent and intense.

Ici à l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, nous constatons chaque jour les défis associés à l'infrastructure et au changement climatique.

Les répercussions comme les ondes de tempête, l'érosion côtière et les pluies abondantes deviennent plus fréquentes et intenses.

Here in Prince Edward Island, we see the challenges of infrastructure and climate change every day.

Impacts such as storm surges, coastal erosion and heavy rains become more frequent and intense.

Through our Climate Change Action Plan, the province is committing to integrating climate change into government decision-making. We know our approach to new and existing infrastructure needs to change.

To that end, Prince Edward Island will be providing close to \$42,000 towards this project, including a commitment from staff to participate in the technical work.

Morley Foy, approvals and compliance engineer with the drinking water and wastewater section from my department, is a project committee member for this work, as is Richard MacEwen from the City of Charlottetown. This work is very important.

Just last week, new research was released by the Council of Canadian Academies. They concluded that some of the biggest risks we face in Canada are risks to coastal communities and their physical infrastructure from extreme weather events, sea level rise and coastal erosion.

The panel of experts went on to say many costs and damages can be avoided with

prompt and thoughtful adaptation. That's what we are talking about today. The design, location, and ongoing maintenance of our water and sewer treatment systems must be informed by future climate scenarios.

The project presents a great opportunity for New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island to bring together our collective expertise. The project will update water and wastewater design guidelines that were written in the early 2000s, and ensure climate change scenarios are considered.

It will make sure we are building our communities for the future. It will help us protect our ocean resources and support economic sectors like fishing, tourism and aquaculture.

It also includes valuable training opportunities for water and wastewater professionals, as the updated guidelines are shared with communities, developers, regulators, and engineers.

This project highlights the benefits of regional collaboration. By drawing on our collective expertise, experience, and resources, we can enhance the capacity of Atlantic Canada's engineering community.

Au nom de toutes les provinces de l'Atlantique, je tiens à remercier le gouvernement du Canada et l'Association des eaux potables et usées du Canada atlantique pour leur travail.

On behalf of all Atlantic Provinces, I would like to thank the Government of Canada and the Atlantic Water and Wastewater Association for their work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the member for bringing this forward. This is a fantastic announcement.

Using climate change as a lens whenever we're making policy decisions is always going to be smart, and allows for us to use evidence when making those decisions.

Wastewater treatment systems are certainly one area where we have to consider the impacts of climate change, and I would say there are very few departments where we don't need to be considering what future climate scenarios will bring to the table in those areas.

SO I thank the minister for bringing this forward, and I look forward to talking about it further.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the minister for this announcement. I welcome the statement.

I think it's very positive that we are taking – how to say it – waste water and water is kind of where I came from before and it's very important that they're putting some emphasis on this with the changes in climate because water is our most precious natural resource as we all know and we have to deal with changes in our climate and the minister is taking a forward approach on this and working with other jurisdictions in Atlantic Canada will be a benefit to all Islanders.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Fisher Assistance Program

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we all know, fishing can be a dangerous and stressful occupation. We're all too mindful of tragedies that have taken place in this industry, at the same time we recognize that fishers are facing constant challenges in their daily lives, including diverse weather conditions, rising costs, uncertain catches, fluctuating prices and the like.

These and other issues can only have an impact on the mental health and the well-being of fishers and their families. They can affect home life and also work performance that can lead to even more serious problems.

Today, I'm pleased to announce that a new program has been established to provide confidential professional counseling services to fishers and their families.

The Department of Fisheries and Communities is providing financial assistance to the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association and the Prince Edward Island Aquaculture Alliance to deliver the new Fishers Assistance Program.

This program will be free to members of these organizations.

We recognize that help may be required in resolving problems through the assistance of a trained professional counselor.

Counselors can provide individual and family assessments and can make referrals if needed.

Services are offered for a wide range of problem areas, including stress and anxiety, alcohol and drug issues, bereavement, depression, marital and family conflicts. Again, I must stress that this service is confidential.

This program is based on a similar program and supported by the Department of Agriculture and Land and delivered through the Prince Edward Island Federation of Agriculture. It is a very successful program and has helped many individuals and their families through difficult times.

We are pleased to be able to support this invaluable service. The health and well-being of those who work in the fisheries and aquaculture is of prime importance to us and our department.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a wonderful announcement. I can absolutely agree that fishing can be a very dangerous and very stressful profession. As I mentioned earlier today, I attended a lunch for the Canadian Mental Health Association where the speaker was Clint Malarchuk who

had worked in the NHL and he described his work as dangerous and stressful and he had experienced a traumatic injury and the importance of being able to get timely and effective mental health supports for him.

I can see how working in the fishery industry and experiencing dangerous conditions and possibly seeing others of being harmed on the waters or experiencing that themselves, would be something that we need to acknowledge and reduce any stigma that might be there for fishers and their families.

Mental health does not just impact the individual, it impacts individuals and families and communities. So, I am pleased to hear this announcement and my only thing I would add is that I do hope that we evaluate the effectiveness of this program moving forward to make sure that it is working for the fishers and their families in the way that we intended but, it is a wonderful announcement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the minister for this wonderful announcement in the work that he has done with – we have in the gallery Ian MacPherson and Bobby Jenkins. I want to thank both of you guys working together on this.

The program is for our fishers and their families and recognizes many problems that the minister had mentioned, along with stress and anxiety, mentioned alcohol and drug abuse, legal matters, financial concerns, anger management, learning disabilities, depression and many other problem areas. These can have a huge effect on their home life and on their work performances.

So it's great to know that now these fishers and their families have help for their problems through this assistance of a confidential and a professional counselor and anything that we can do to help our fishers and their families is welcomed by me.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the Holland College 2017-2018 Annual Report and I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Introduction of Government Bills

Government Motions

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Member from Morell-Donagh, that the first order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 1 Consideration of the Estimates, in Committee.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Honourable Member from Morell-Donagh that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the grant and supply to Her Majesty.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road to Chair.

Chair (Perry): The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to further consider the grant of supply to Her Majesty.

A request has been made for a stranger to come onto the floor?

Some Hon. Members: Granted.

Chair: Thank you.

Could you please state your name and title for the Hansard, please.

Mary Kinsman: Mary Kinsman, Director of Finance and Corporate Services.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. members, we left on page 24, the department of agriculture; under the division farm businesses risk management.

That section has been read, shall it carry?

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: I had a question, there's an extraordinary large salary component there, the largest one in any of the departments. Why so many people, do we get involved in assessing every field of every farmer on PEI? Or something like that?

Mr. Thompson: What section are we at?

Mr. Hammarlund: Farm business risk management, salaries over 2 million dollars.

Mr. Thompson: So that's 23 full-time and six part-time positions. That's where crop scouts and crop insurance agents and –

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Thompson: Crop scouts.

Mr. Hammarlund: So they do actually go out?

Mr. Thompson: Yes, these are their front-line workers.

Mr. Hammarlund: Ok, thank you.

Chair: The hon. member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Chair.

So in this section we talk about AgriInsurance and AgriStability. Can you tell me approximately how many agriculture operations receive funding? Or did we receive funding in the last year?

Approximately how many farmers received funding?

Mr. Thompson: We'll have to come back with that, it's a large number.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Based on that forecast for the funding we're at 16.9 million, we talked about this before. Have we done any risk planning, around if we have another year of high losses because we didn't get the crops out on time, have we done risk planning against that in other years?

Mr. Thompson: We have insurance on insurance; so, if we do happen to have another bad year, which hopefully we don't, but the insured is insured. We are insured – we have enough insurance to cover that.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: So do we have a long-term plan so that the government is insured? Do we have a long term plan for our farmers?

Mr. Thompson: Yes, so every year – I discussed this with the department this morning – every year you sit down and we're always pivoting with climate change, with certain crops, we evaluate this every year. Its partnership with the federal government too, so they are aware of the circumstances too. So we're always pivoting and evaluating what is the best route to go.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: No, I'm fine thanks.

Chair: Great, shall this section carry?
Carried.

Members, I've been reading for the last two weeks, in each section line for line. Is it the

pleasure of the House that I now just read just the title and the total?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Chair: Thank you very much.

Total Farm Business Risk Management: 19,357,100.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Policy and Agriculture Resources

Policy and Agriculture Resources Division Management

Total Policy and Agriculture Resources Division Management: 657,700.

The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Mr. Henderson: Minister, seeing in some of your grants there, there's 8,000 contributed to weather, data pilot project with weathercloud.com to provide weather station data. Can you tell me if that's up and running at the moment and whether farmers or the general public could access that information?

Mr. Thompson: Yes, thank you member from O'Leary-Inverness.

That's the weather cloud online project and it is up and running now. It was a one year subscription but we renewed it and the farmers can access it now. I got a briefing on it last week and it's working pretty good. The farmer's are liking it, we need to tweak it a little bit, we have some more requests in for fine tuning the totals of precipitation but it is accessible and it's being used.

Chair: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Mr. Henderson: So can people of the general public get this too?

Mr. Thompson: Yes.

Mr. Henderson: I'm just on it here now. I haven't gotten it figured out here yet.

Mr. Trivers: Just login.

Mr. Henderson: I'm still trying to get that figured out.

Mr. Thompson: Send it to IT.

Chair: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Mr. Henderson: So will the O'Leary site be – the new weather station that was put in last year, so it will be included in the up and access –

Mr. Thompson: Yes.

Mr. Henderson: Good work.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: I just noticed that the grants we're cut by more than 50% and I'm just wondering if we could find those grants reflected somewhere else in the department?

Mr. Thompson: The grants we're cut by 50% because the grant funding to the beef plant has been reduced. The beef plant is doing amazingly well, for many different reasons, mostly management. So we transferred those to dead stock removal.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: I think I'm good for now.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Policy, Planning and FTP Relations

Total Policy Planning and FTP Relations: 1,051,900.

The hon. member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Can you give me a little bit more information on the 4-H grant program. I know it's a great program but can you just tell me what the grant program entails?

Mr. Thompson: Yes I can.

There are not a lot of details but it's a three-year agreement and its 264,000 a year and we fully support that program.

Chair: The hon. member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Yeah, absolutely. Do you have a sense of what percentage of their total operating budget that this grant would subsidize.

Mr. Thompson: I'm not, I can come back.

Ms. Beaton: I agree, it's a great program which I think that we need to really support it.

Mr. Thompson: I'd say we're almost 100%.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you.

Is there nearly 1,000 – 100,000 increase in salaries for new positions, what are the new positions? So in the salaries, we're looking at what was 456 and now we're at 552.

Mr. Thompson: There's one new position.

Ms. Beaton: There's no new positions?

Mr. Thompson: One position.

Ms. Beaton: There's one. What's the new position?

Mary Kinsman: It's a legislative and policy coordinator position.

Mr. Thompson: It's vacant right now, but we're going to fill it.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Sorry, did I hear legislative and policy –

Mr. Thompson: Legislation and policy coordinator position. It's added for the reorganization of our department.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Mr. Thompson: Because we lost some to fisheries.

Ms. Beaton: Okay so, that will be a full-time – an FT.

Mr. Thompson: Yes.

Ms. Beaton: Okay. Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Chair.

About 4-H, I was just wondering I know that they received provincial funding from us and then also federal – they did receive federal funding in the past but I believe some of that funding, if not all of it was cut recently federally, and I was wondering if we had considered increasing the funding from an provincial level for 4-H?

Since it is such a fantastic program, and particularly here in Prince Edward Island so many children and youth benefit from it.

Mr. Thompson: Absolutely. I'm not aware of the funding cut from the federal, but if we receive a request, we will definitely look at it. Yes.

Chair: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Okay, thank you. That's it.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Sustainable Agriculture

Total Sustainable Agriculture: 3,609,600.

The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: I was just wondering if this would be the section – we hear a lot of talk about precision agriculture, which is fantastic. Is this the section where – there's quite a few grants here (Indistinct) half a million dollars or so.

Are we encouraging farmers to develop those practices through this department?

Mr. Thompson: Yes, this is the department and going over, like, this budget has mostly been made from the previous government so going forward, precision agriculture is –

Mr. Howard: Yes, I didn't see it anywhere there.

Mr. Thompson: Yes, it's coming. Actually, we have at the end of August a UPEI Department of Engineering is putting on a precision agricultural conference for everyone who wants to come and invite you to come. It's going to be awesome.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Chair.

Would this department also be responsible for monitoring the organic matter of our soil on various farms?

Mr. Thompson: That would be under the labs, would it Mary?

They do have a soil health testing program.

Mr. Howard: Sorry?

Mr. Thompson: They have a soil health testing program. Soil health is in this department.

Mr. Howard: Yes.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: And how much do we spend on that? I couldn't find it really.

Mr. Thompson: It's throughout. Mary says it's throughout the budget and there's 7,400 in lab services, so it's throughout.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Yes, I noticed in another section there was \$1,000 budgeted for lab services for soil analysis. Nothing spent, and another \$1,000 budgeted this year.

Just, I would hope that we're spending all those dollars to keep good track of our soil.

So, it is scattered all about.

How many operations do we monitor? How many samples do we take?

Mr. Thompson: I'll have to get back to you on that.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Okay, the hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Chair.

As I look through here, I don't see – this is sustainable agriculture in this section. So anything that we're looking at moving forward to ensure that farmers are set up for success would be in this section, am I correct?

Mr. Thompson: Yes.

Ms. Beaton: So I don't see much increase anywhere in any of the lines here to see how we're going to handle sustainable agriculture different from last year. Can you give me a little bit of detail on that, and how we would be preparing for that?

Mr. Thompson: So through the Canadian, the CAP program, over the next five years we're budgeting \$37 million. That's through soil quality monitoring programs, ground water contamination risks to reduce soil, surface contamination.

So the Alternative Land Use, the ALUS program is through this. Perennial Crop Development, environmental sustainability, the Future Farmer and the public trust to social sustainability is through this as well.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Chair.

Will this division, will that lead to the development of a land bank initiative?

Mr. Thompson: Probably not, because we haven't decided that yet. I can't really divulge too many details because we really haven't had a whole lot of discussion on the land bank yet and where it's going to sit.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: But foreseeably, it will sit within agriculture somewhere this year?

Mr. Thompson: We're not sure. It won't be this year because it could be with – a Crown corporation owns the land and who's the owner of the land. So we'll probably manage it. We won't be the owners.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Was there a budget allocation for this year to acquire any land or to do any work towards the land bank?

Mr. Thompson: We're still in planning phase, so there's nothing budgeted this year.

Ms. Beaton: So there's nothing in agriculture.

Okay, thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: So the ALUS program, obviously a great program, do you have a sense of how much the land was retired last year through that program?

Mr. Thompson: There are approximately 400 clients enrolled, approximately 11,000 acres.

Ms. Beaton: 11,000 acres, thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Are there annual targets that are set for that program?

Mr. Thompson: Yes, and we're actually in discussions now about possibly increasing that budget going forward, and maybe a different way of paying it out. I think it was discussed different ways of paying it out, a different model maybe.

Because it's a great program, and I think it needs to be modernized and updated a little bit, so that's going forward.

Ms. Beaton: Okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: So detailed notes in the budget handout indicates 90% of PEI farmers have developed an environmental farm plan on their property. And I assume then that the program's retention rate is quite high for that program?

Mr. Thompson: Yes.

Ms. Beaton: Okay. And how often do operators lose agricultural stewardship funding for failure to maintain to keep that up to date.

Mr. Thompson: Have to get back to you on that.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Which programs specifically support the increase of soil organic matter in our arable land?

Mr. Thompson: So the new Perennial Crop Development Program is one of those crop programs that are trying to retain soil matter, organic matter.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Is there anything specifically set out for the organic sector?

Mr. Thompson: No, but we're having great talks with the organic people and we're going to make great strides in that sector for sure.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: I feel the same. We met with them also, yesterday, and there's a real liking to work together, the two industries, traditional farming and organic farming, which is very positive.

Mr. Thompson: Yes, and I encourage that to work together not against each other. They bring a lot to the table with soil quality management that they have to have. It would be a great combination.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Just to touch on, I know last year was a terrible year for it because we didn't get a lot of crop out of the ground, but I understand that a lot of the farmers have introduced the practice of ground cover right behind digging or plowing or harvesting.

Do you have any sense of what percentage of farmers are doing that? Doing that practice?

Mr. Thompson: I don't know, and I'd be guessing but it's – I'll have to bring that back.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: And have we looked at developing new guidelines for rotation soil or corn rotation.

Mr. Thompson: No, but we haven't had that discussion yet. It's probably going to come with the land use side. And when we get to that review, that will be one of our – probably something we'll talk about.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Is the department exploring the use of lighter mapping and data from drone flights to help inform sustainable agriculture crop.

Mr. Thompson: Yeah, we have two drones and staff specialized in that and we're having a great uptake with that, it's only going to move forward and upward. Pretty excited about those guys.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: So am I because it was in our platform that that was one of our wants for during the election campaign.

Do you have a sense of what percentage of the land has been mapped at this point in time?

Mr. Thompson: We can't give exactly but we do work with forestry. Every 10 years

they do a complete map. So I'm not sure what the cycle is when was the last time it was updated.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford, I will come back to you.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, chair.

Just have one question; it's actually regarding LIDAR and precision agriculture. There's a gentleman in my district actually John Parent, he's setting up a business called Island Mapping. Not only is this – it's not just topographical mapping but he does multispectral imaging which allows at a very precise level, to not just disease in plants but moisture and nutrient levels, an unbelievable level –

Mr. Thompson: It's amazing.

Leader of the Opposition: – of precision–

Mr. Thompson: It's amazing.

Leader of the Opposition: – which helps farmers look after the land better, reduces their cost, they don't have to spray so often, they don't have to use unnecessary fertilizer, they can identify when disease is breaking out in a field almost immediately.

He's in the process of trying to set up this company and I'm just wondering whether you had any talks with Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture about supporting that, because I mean to me, that marriage of agriculture with technology can be a very powerful thing.

Mr. Thompson: We haven't had the talks yet, Leader of the Opposition, but it's high on my priority list. From day one (Indistinct) since I came in, its precision agriculture is the way we have to go. I will take your suggestion and we will have that talk.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you minister.

Again, it's Island Mapping is the name of the company and it's a startup, it's through the IIDI I believe is where the –

Mr. Thompson: Great story.

Leader of the Opposition: – application i.

Thank you.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: I just have a question quickly under note 34 and the grants just going back to the section there.

It says: funding to the UPEI sustainable engineering funding in collaboration with the environment to support a masters or doctor degree. That line in there. There was 8,000 forecasted, but there's no, is that program not going ahead?

Mr. Thompson: The funding to UPEI sustainable engineering it was only a one-year.

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, so that was all our commitment was.

Mr. Thompson: Yeah, just a one-year pathway to environmental (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: They didn't ask for any more than that?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. McNeilly: Okay perfect.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: No, that's good.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I think this is probably what she was going to ask. There's money set aside for reviewing the *Planning Act* and *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* that we talked about this morning in Question Period, but I don't see any money committed to a review of the *Agricultural Crop Rotation Act*.

Given the level of organic matter in our soils is plummeting – we have that 18 or perhaps 19-year-old study now, and I'm wondering whether there is any thought within the department to do a review *Agricultural Crop Rotation Act*?

Mr. Thompson: There is interest and we are going to look at it. So I will take that back and we do have an appetite to look at that.

Leader of the Opposition: Okay.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I'm good.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Agricultural Industry Development

Total Agriculture Industry Development
4,202,400.

Shall it carry?

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: So we know that the dead stock disposal services, the agreement is up by the end of this year. I'm wondering what consultations you're going to do as you develop a new dead stock program.

Mr. Thompson: The request for proposals has closed and we do have an interested party.

We are working with the party now to come up with a long-term plan. Dead stock is a very important service that nobody likes to talk about –

Leader of the Opposition: ep.

Mr. Thompson: – but it's important to a lot of things, to our farming community, our tourism industry. It affects a lot of people. So it's – we're working on a long-term plan that will perhaps create some different opportunities for the waste products from that. We're just looking at different options.

Leader of the Opposition: I'm good, yes.

Chair: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Mr. Henderson: Just to follow up on that question then. As you can see in the budget, it significantly increased to 850,000. I'm not asking you to say what's your RFP results would be, but you should have a pretty good indication is that enough money to fulfill the service based on, that your RFP closed back in June.

Mr. Thompson: Go ahead Mary.

Mary Kinsman: We can't discuss what the RFP is –

Mr. Henderson: (Indistinct)

Mary Kinsman: – and we're still going through the process. We do feel we have enough money within our budget to handle that and if not, the process with a request for a proposal this large is we have to go back to Treasury Boards anyway, but we do feel we have enough funding.

Chair: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Mr. Henderson: So are you saying that 850,000 is enough or you have enough money within your overall budget?

Mary Kinsman: I think probably, if we had to reallocate, we would have maybe enough within, but we don't think it's going to be too far off.

Mr. Henderson: Right.

Chair: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Mr. Henderson: You always have that contingency fund with general government, correct?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) slush fund.

Mr. Henderson: Same fund, right?

An Hon. Member: Slush fund.

Chair: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Mr. Henderson: My next question, obviously, we had a motion that was brought forward yesterday regarding the livestock strategy. Is there a set amount of money allocated to implement a live stock strategy in your budget? I'm assuming this would be the section as its agriculture industry development.

Mr. Thompson: No, but going forward we definitely will, because I'm a big supporter of that.

Mr. Henderson: But you're saying then for this year there will be no strategy implemented under this fiscal year? And if you've no money for it, it's not allocated. That's a bit of a concern for me again because once again, it's kind of like the same issue we had with the watersheds. This party, we had made some advice to the government to implement a number of things in the budget and livestock strategy was one of those, hence the motion and some of those types of things.

I guess it's a big issue to know that there's no money in here or there will be money in here or if it's under a different section or department. I'm open to any of those options.

Mr. Thompson: I'll have those discussions.

Chair: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Mr. Henderson: I guess that's it.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Chair.

So how many agricultural operators are part of the perennial crop program?

Mr. Thompson: Perennial crop – there were 17.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Do you have a breakdown of the perennial crops that they're growing?

Mr. Thompson: I do actually; asparagus, high density apple production, haskap

production, cider apple production, vineyard expansion, and high bush blueberry production.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Any sense why the funding for the project to develop a hydroponic growing system was discontinued?

Mr. Thompson: I don't know.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: And you provided a breakdown on the different types of projects that were funded through the Organic Industry Development Program. Do we assess that application on a per-applicant basis? Or do we have an envelope with a ceiling in it?

Mr. Thompson: No, it's per-application.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: I made a mistake, Chair, and I missed asking questions on the previous section –

Mr. Thompson: It's passed, it's passed.

Ms. Beaton: Would I be able to go back?

Mr. Thompson: Sure.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Oh that'd be so much easier on you.

Mr. Thompson: Give and take.

Ms. Beaton: What's that?

Mr. Thompson: Give and take.

Ms. Beaton: You know I don't negotiate very well, do I?

I'd like to go back to the stewardship program grants, and there's a number I just would like you to give some details on what

those programs actually are. I'd like to understand the irrigation efficiency program.

Mr. Thompson: Sustainable water supply, irrigation efficiency, well water management –

Ms. Beaton: I'm going to ask you about every single one of them so do you want to start – you could start at the top, if you want.

Mr. Thompson: Can I hand these to her, or no?

Chair: You have table them.

Mr. Thompson: I have to table them?

Chair: Yes.

Mr. Thompson: Soil conservation – so just table them?

Ms. Beaton: Oh, sorry, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: If he wants to table that, then that would be great and then I'm fine to move on as long as all of the programs are in there, then that would be great.

Chair: Do you have another question, hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford?

Ms. Beaton: No, I'm great.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: Shall this section carry?

Leader of the Opposition: I have one question on (Indistinct)

Chair: Sorry –

Leader of the Opposition: – the section (Indistinct) –

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

It's about the Buy PEI initiative. There are a few aspects to that. That's a potentially enormously beneficial thing, both in terms of finding markets for local farmers, giving

an economic boost to the province here and keeping production local – reducing carbon footprints and stuff like that.

I'm wondering whether there is any thought to increase that Buy PEI initiative, or the various aspects of that program, in the years ahead because it has so many benefits.

Mr. Thompson: We had this discussion not too long ago. Right now there's almost 100,000 funding given out to it and I think we can – actually, 96,000.

I really agree with you and it's an important initiative and I will be fully supporting increasing the funding on that going forward.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

I'm really, really glad to hear that. I see there is a number of projects here as well, all now very successful but it took a while for them to be established; the Fall Flavours, Burger Love – we all know how huge they are now, but the sort of seed funding from government that allowed them to establish themselves has just shown to be such a huge benefit to farmers, to consumers, to the economy.

I'm glad to hear that you're planning to expand that program, minister, thank you.

I'm good. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Policy and Agriculture Resources: 9,521,600.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Animal Health Regulatory and Analytical Labs

Animal Health and Research

Total Animal Health and Research: 544,000.

Shall this section carry?

Ms. Beaton: Question.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Can you tell me – so there's a significant change and I understand that there might have been something that was moved out of this department into another department.

Can you just clarify if there have been any changes in the animal health research area, or why there's the change in the funding?

Mr. Thompson: In salaries?

Ms. Beaton: Increase of (Indistinct) –

Mr. Thompson: That is the provincial vet so we added a new director position. She was kind of with fisheries and agriculture, and we didn't want to lose her in agriculture so we added her into our budget.

And then she's also with the labs, director of the labs as well, so that's what her new position is.

Then, we had to fill her old position with doctor – a new veterinarian.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Would that be the only change that's planned this year in this department?

Mr. Thompson: Yes.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Does this area – does the department have any plans at all to do any public engagement on animal welfare in this upcoming year?

Mr. Thompson: Yeah, we have some of the strongest animal welfare regulations in the country and we're quite proud of that. We're going to work forward to educating the public on what we have and we're going to continue – Dr. Caroline Sanford is excellent and she's going to be (Indistinct) –

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Okay, just a quick question. Or no, sorry, I don't have any other questions.

Chair: Thank you.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Regulatory Services and Product Development

Total Regulatory Services and Product Development: 2,134,400.

Shall it carry?

The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Does the 75,000 allocated to pollination expansion project represent an increase from the last fiscal year or is that the same?

Mary Kinsman: Could you refer me to your note, member, that you're looking at there?

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Sorry, I had it when I was looking through this before.

Mr. Thompson: It's still budgeted for 75,000.

Ms. Beaton: It's still budgeted at 75,000? Okay.

Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Mr. Thompson: We had poor uptake on it last year.

Ms. Beaton: Sorry, what's that?

Mr. Thompson: We didn't have great uptake on it last year so we kept the funding to try to increase.

Ms. Beaton: Okay, do you – I know we spoke at the beginning of this – probably before we even sat in this House, about some of the issues that we have within our over-wintering with pollinators. Can you give me a little bit of information of – I

think that there was some work that was being done – plans?

Mr. Thompson: So, I have two meetings the end of this month; one with the beekeepers association and one with the blueberry growers, wild blueberry growers association, and this is going to start our plan to working to improve our bee herd on Prince Edward Island and so I'm looking forward to those conversations.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: I'm good.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Soil and Feed Lab

Total Soil and Feed Lab: 863,200.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Dairy and Plant Diagnostics Lab

Total Dairy and Plant Diagnostics Lab: 711,700.

Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Animal Health Regulatory and Analytic Labs: 4,253,300.

Land Division

Land Administration

Total Land Administration: 296,500.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Myers: Carry the budget.

Chair: Inspection Services

Total Inspection Services: 1,932,200.

Ms. Beaton: Question.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: When is the consultant that's been hired to review the *Planning Act* expected to complete their report?

Mr. Thompson: January.

Ms. Beaton: January of the upcoming year? And can you provide an overview of the consultant's mandate in doing this review?

Mr. Thompson: The mandate is to keep national standards in line with the country on the code.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Is the consultant consulting with any municipalities as part of the review?

Mr. Thompson: Yes.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Provincial Planning

Total Provincial Planning: 1,067,200.

The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: When is the consultant that's been hired to review non-residential and corporate land ownership under the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* expected to complete the review?

Mr. Thompson: We don't have an affinitive date, so when I find out I'll (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Can you provide an overview of the consultant's mandate?

Mr. Thompson: That hasn't been determined yet, but it will be very soon.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Has the consultant started?

Mr. Thompson: No.

Ms. Beaton: No?

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Is it intended that that review will happen within this fiscal year?

Mr. Thompson: I hope so, yes.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Mr. Thompson: It's going to be a long process but I'm really hoping the timeline will be this year.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: I think the Premier had committed that there would be a mandatory training session on the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* within the first six months. Is that still the plan and that all MLAs will be trained on that?

Mr. Thompson: Yes.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Will the review involve taking a look at how lands owned by separate individuals belonging to a corporation and how that's tabulated be reviewed?

Mr. Thompson: (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Do we currently have a sense of a percentage of total provincial farm land that's owned or leased by corporations?

Mr. Thompson: I don't have that information (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: How about owned or leased by non-residents?

Mr. Thompson: I don't have that information (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Is the government taking a look at closing loop holes that allow corporations to own more than 3,000-acres through the multiple corporations owned by families.

Mr. Thompson: I'm going to review the act and make changes where it needs to be, yes.

Ms. Beaton: When we talk about reviewing the act are we talking about taking that to a standing committee, minister?

Mr. Thompson: I'm not sure about that.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: I understand your new in government but this is not a new issue. And I really think that at this point in time –

Mr. Thompson: It's not the issue I'm new at –

Ms. Beaton: It's not the issue that you're new either? I understand –

Mr. Thompson: The government procedure is what I'm new at.

Ms. Beaton: But I would strongly recommend that this goes to standing committee and that we have public engagement and we actually look at this through the lens of –

Mr. Thompson: I've been engaging in every farm group I've met with now and I am already starting the conversation with them and get them thinking about it. Every meeting that I've had so far we have ended with land use discussion and I will collaborate with you as well. When we put this out, we're going to do it right.

Chair: Do you have one more question?

Ms. Beaton: One more question.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: The throne speech included a commitment to develop educational material

to help farmers better understand the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* When will this material be available?

Mr. Thompson: Soon.

Education is important. The *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* is readily available but everyone has to understand it.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: The provincial planning title of this sounds really intriguing. Is there an actual plan? Is there like a plan for where you want to be in 20 years, whether it's agriculture or PEI as a whole? Or is it all kind of more bureaucratic stuff related to provincial planning?

Mr. Thompson: Provincial planning and grants deals with the creation of new provincial land use policies, legislation regulations under the *Planning Act* – subdivisions, development regulations, the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* The branch assists individuals and organizations to work towards sustainable development.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Is that plan what PEI is going to look like in 20 years, thanks to your planning?

Mr. Thompson: I think it's everyone's planning, but I don't know how far ahead they go. Do you want to know how far ahead they go, is that the question?

Mr. Hammarlund: I think there's some important questions like how many people are going to live in 20 years on PEI, where the food is going to be grown, where are the houses going to be, where are we going to have agriculture.

I think they're all important questions, so I'm wondering is there a plan? Presumably the plan will tell us where we're going to be in 25 or 50 years.

Mr. Thompson: Absolutely and the land use plan is what we are going to develop. Protecting the land and, you know, we have the municipality act now and you need to

work with them to come up with the land use plan for all of Prince Edward Island.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: I'm looking forward to seeing the division of the plan whenever it comes out.

Mr. Thompson: Me too.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Chair.

Can I ask questions on this (Indistinct) I got here?

Chair: Sure. The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive, go ahead.

Mr. Howard: I just noticed there is energy system upgrades on here (Indistinct) what kind of projects. I'm wondering what the details are about these energy system upgrades. I never heard of anything available for farmers.

Mr. Thompson: I will get back to you on that.

Mr. Howard: Okay.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Chair.

In response to the hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford when you were asking about if government was going to review the land holdings and things like that.

As part of a standing committee member, if you're on that committee you kind of ask when you get together for your first time and you're developing your work plan to perhaps look at exactly at that and to call witnesses in to review it and discuss it as a committee. We've done it. It's great exercise and really I find that's what committee work is mostly important about.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: So I'm going to go back to the educational materials and I think you said that it was soon, that we could expect it soon. Has it been started?

Mr. Thompson: No. I have had that discussion with my directors and we're at that point now.

Chair: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: And is the plan to have this ready prior to the mandatory training on the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* for the MLA's or in advance of that?

Mr. Thompson: (Indistinct)

Ms. Beaton: Will this material also be available to the general public?

Mr. Thompson: Yes, nothing to hide.

Ms. Beaton: Perfect. Love to get that.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to go back to the issue of province-wide land planning and I know in the department which was communities, land and environment, the *Water Act* and the MGA were the two big things that happened in the last administration and then Island wide land use plan was the next big thing that was being currently worked on.

I'm wondering, I know you've already answered some questions on this, but this is not – a project, big project, complicated project that's been going on for a long time.

So any sense of when that work will be at a point when you will be able to present something either in legislation or otherwise?

Mr. Thompson: As soon as we get out of the House, it's going to be a top priority. So I don't want to commit anything this fall but it might be a rough timeline, something to protect.

Leader of the Opposition: Okay.

Mr. Thompson: Again I want to, it's going to be an important – and I'm not one to present something that's not ready, so we are going to work hard at it. We all are.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Appreciate that, minister.

One of the things regarding land use planning and development is, I personally feel and sort of best practice in other jurisdictions that those decisions be made at the most local level possible – or appropriate I should say, yeah the most local level appropriate to land use development.

We are in the process now of some municipalities.

Mr. Thompson: When you say local you mean?

Leader of the Opposition: At a municipal level. That's where again; it's considered best practice that land development decisions be made, at again, the most local appropriate level. We're in the middle of, you know, expansion of some municipalities, amalgamations and I'm presuming that that – and all of those new municipalities have to have a land use plan of manage it themselves.

So there presumably will be a transfer of monies from the centralized provincial planning department to those new municipalities as they develop their own land use plans. So I'm wondering whether that will just be an instrument or whether you expect that to cost the purse more money or whether there will be a saving there at the central level.

Mr. Thompson: I expect a savings. Again, we're going to look at it. We have to talk to all the stakeholders involved and see where we're at.

I assume it's not going to cost us any extra, but I can't guarantee it.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: On one of the big issues surrounding climate change is sea level rise and coastal erosion and one of the planning elements – a very contentious one of course – is allowing new development permits in coastal areas. Typically and traditionally, the most valuable land a lot of people own that land.

Has there been any discussion within the department about changing the policies regarding the issuance of those building permits in those now very vulnerable areas?

Mr. Thompson: Just very high level so far. Once we get into this, we will.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Thompson: It is on our radar.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair.

So I assume by that, that your answer, that will mean that it will be incorporated in this Island-wide land use plan that you were talking about that may come this fall.

Mr. Thompson: May come.

Leader of the Opposition: May come. Yeah, I (Indistinct) hold you to that, minister.

Thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Land Division: 3,295,900.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Department of Agriculture and Land: 36,977,100.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Ready to go?

Mr. Trivers: Ready to go?

Chair: You're bringing someone on the floor?

Request to permit a stranger to the floor?

Some Hon. Members: Granted.

Chair: While we're waiting for our stranger to get on the floor, hon. members, we are doing the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning that would be page 46.

Could you please state your name and title for Hansard, please.

Chris DesRoche: Chris DesRoche, Director of Finance Administration.

Chair: Thank you very much, Chris.

Minister, do you have an opening statement?

Mr. Trivers: Just really looking forward to the great things we're going to do in the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning. It's a combined department. We've got the early learning, we've got the K-12, we've got Skills PEI. There's a lot to it.

Looking forward to your cooperation and working with you while we make some progress.

Chair: Great. So we're going to start off with Finance and Administration.

Total Finance and Administration:
2,593,300.

Shall it carry?

Sorry.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Yes, finance and administration. So the budget for professional services has gone down to 12,000 from 182,000. Could you just provide an explanation for that change?

Chris DesRoche: Yes, last year we had a coding project for Maker Carts. So it was a deployment of Maker Carts into a bunch of schools, and it was a onetime cost. Going forward there's a staff in the technology curriculum section that'll be taking over that program.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you.

So I understand with the role of the Maker Carts that you needed professional services to get kind of teachers or specialists up to speed with those, or was it the training of the teachers ongoing, or was it the actual implementation of the carts themselves.

Chris DesRoche: Yes, it was both, it was materials. Most of it was materials, but in our English curriculum section we also had a staff dedicated to going around to schools and providing professional development.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you.

So how is the ongoing training need for that being provided now? Where you're down to only 12,000, but technology and training turnover is a constant, how is that being covered?

Chris DesRoche: In the English curriculum program there's a technology curriculum specialist that'll be taking over that project ongoing.

Ms. Bell: Okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: No, that's it. Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Chair.

So I'm not sure where to ask to this question, but I'm trying to find where the funding would be for the sexual health curriculum that is currently being written that you had spoken about?

Chair: Hon. members, we are on, just to remind you, Finance and Administration. We're just on the first section here, and that section is: "Appropriations provided for

operation of the Minister's and the Deputy Minister's offices".

Ms. Altass: So if I need to locate it, how do I?

Mr. Trivers: It's the English program section.

Ms. Altass: I just don't know where it is, so I don't know when to ask it.

Mr. Trivers: It's in the English program section.

Ms. Altass: Thank you.

That's it, thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: The PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation, that's a new program this year?

Chair: Again, can we wait until we get to that section?

Mr. McNeilly: Oh, fine.

Chair: Right now, we're in Finance and Administration.

Mr. Trivers: I think it might be in this section, Chair.

Chair: Under grants?

Mr. Trivers: It's in the grants.

Chair: It's in the grants. Okay, sorry about that. We're going to go ahead with that.

Mr. McNeilly: (Indistinct).

Chair: He's going to answer your question. Yes.

Mr. McNeilly: Oh.

Mr. Trivers: What was your question again?

Mr. McNeilly: Under the PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation, there was – is that a new program? There's 26,000 allocated there this year.

Chris DesRoche: It's essentially fieldtrips to museums. Children used to pay the entrance fees. I think it was 5.00 dollars to go on the field trip and now we cover that for the students.

Mr. McNeilly: Well that's good news.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: No, that's the only question (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: I have another question.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Mr. MacEwen: Did you say the only question?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, you have the floor.

Ms. Bell: Thank you.

I just wanted to know is this the area where they're – because I see breakfast programs are in this section. Where was the school food program funded under?

Mr. Trivers: So that's under grants to public schools.

Ms. Bell: Grants to public – okay.

Chair: Shall the section carry?

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Provincial Learning Materials Distribution Centre.

Total Provincial Learning Materials Distribution Centre: 993,400.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

Grants to Public Schools

Total Grants to Public Schools: 247,694,200.

Ms. Bernard: Question.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: I'm just curious if this is where we'll find the new teaching and EA positions? What's the breakdown of those positions?

Mr. Trivers: Yes, so this is the correct section for that and in terms of breakdown, I mean it's – there's the 32 teaching positions and then 42 educational assistants.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: I don't see much of a change in salaries to support that many new positions. Am I looking at it wrong?

Mr. Trivers: Go ahead.

Chris DesRoche: We went from 208 million to 225 million.

Ms. Bernard: But that's like –

Mr. Trivers: Yes, so it's \$16 million (Indistinct) salary –

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Mr. Trivers: So –

Chair: Sorry, did you want to keep –

Ms. Bernard: This may not be a question for this, but I'm wondering – actually I might save that question for later. What I'm curious about is how you selected what schools they would go to, but I don't think that's really a budget question.

I'll save that.

Mr. Trivers: I just wanted to comment as well, I mean this was a significant budget expenditure, something that hasn't been seen for a long, long time in the department of education; 32 new teachers, 42 new EAs, 1.6 FTE school psychologists, 16 million and really there's a lot of talk about priorities in the budget and this was obviously one of the priorities.

I want to thank the Minister of Finance for her work on this front, as well. So this is what I would call a big deal.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: That's good.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: I have next the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Chair.

I'm wondering about equipment and repair. So is this where – you know, we've heard so much about schools in need of immediate repairs, so for example, I heard Montague needs a gym, but I know that there are many, many schools.

I'm just wondering if this is that line?

Mr. Trivers: No, it's not. That's in the capital budget, which we'll debate in the fall.

Chair: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: So what would be under this line then?

Mr. Trivers: So this is – well you go ahead.

Chris DesRoche: Which line, the capital line?

Ms. Altass: Sorry, the equipment and repairs line. So if it's not things like a gym replace measure, those are in the capital budget, what sort of repairs fall under this budget line?

Chris DesRoche: That would be like classroom furniture, audiovisual equipment, smart boards, that – small items.

Chair: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: How do you distinguish the difference between a small and a large item? Just where's the line, I'm wondering?

Chris DesRoche: We typically use a \$10,000 a school as the threshold for capital versus operating. So things like sinks and fountains, they would be in our maintenance budget operationally. Larger things like gym floors would be capital.

Chair: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: So practical question then, so schools applying for the grants under this line then do they have to – is there a different process to apply for the \$10,000 or less versus more depending on what – like how do they –

Chris DesRoche: These are grants to the education authorities, the Public School Branch and the French Language School Board, and then they work with the schools.

Ms. Altass: Okay, and then the school board decides?

Chris DesRoche: Yes.

Chair: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: That's it, thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thanks.

School food program, you had mentioned that that's something happening then as a grant to public school, so it's incorporated somewhere in here?

Could you speak to how much was allocated to that and what is currently allocated (Indistinct) break that out anywhere?

Mr. Trivers: You're aware the general – what would happen with the school food program.

Ms. Bell: I know that there was a pilot had been initiated and was completed the first year with nine schools being under the pilot. That pilot was to be extended for a second year under the same terms and that that pilot would be establishing the – an evaluation criteria for the success of the program on those nine schools with the intention that it

would then roll out to the full 56 schools across the English School Board in year three.

Mr. Trivers: The first year there were only two schools. It was more of a proof of concept than a pilot really, is the way I would characterize it. Then indeed, the plan was for this fall, this coming September, was to start a non-profit corporation that would essentially be a catering company and have a board of directors and staff them up and go into these nine pilot schools and those would be the pilot schools. There's really three families of schools.

So what happened was the election came along and all work was put on hold during the election, so when we came back in, they said okay: we have to start this new catering company from scratch and we need to know by June 15th when the Chartwells contracts come up for providing services to some of these schools. We didn't know whether it's a go or not for September.

The staff came to me and said: I don't think that we can get everything in place to assure that we're going to be able to provide school food by September given the tight time frames.

If we cut loose, Chartwells who is the current food services provider, they could be left without food in some of those schools. So we had to make that tough decision, and we did. We met very shortly after that. This is back in early June with the PEI Home and School Association, and I steadied myself and I said: okay, this is a program I deeply care about myself and I can just imagine because the PEI Home and School Association, who have been advocating for this for years, how disappointed they're going to be. They said: you know what, we'd rather have it done right than have it done right now. They basically said: we want to have somebody work over this year to make sure we get everything set up perfectly, we get that non-profit corporation in place, we get the board of directors, and everything is really set in stone so we're set up for success.

That's what we're doing. We have a full-time person who is continuing this year, and we're going to continue forward. We're going to make sure all the legal work is done

from the non-profit, get the board of directors in place.

The person at the public schools branch is going to develop things like the menus and how we're going to source that locally, as well as really work on the payment model because that was another thing, there were a couple of different choices there, and there were a few questions on exactly how that would work. It was kind of like we were going to go in and sort of do a pay what you can model, but there were questions around exactly how that would work.

So that's what's going to happen. If we're ready to go, this school year at some point, there are three of those nine schools, I think we could roll it out too, say as early as January, and that's still a possibility. But we would have to do that in probably a little bit of different way than was the original plan.

So that's where we're at with the school food programs. Like I said, the stakeholders, the ones who have been driving this from the very beginning, are on board with what we're doing here. There is some disappointment, understandably. I know I'm disappointed as well but that's where we're at.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: I think the kids who aren't going to have food are going to be probably the most disappointed, minister. You have priorities that you can set as government and I understand when a new government comes in and has to look at priorities and about making decisions, but I also know there's a huge amount of work invested in, not only bringing partners on board, but also doing a lot of the legwork and the research and the background.

Yes, it is complicated, but this is not an impossible piece, and we do know that the system, for instance, of pay what you can, has been incredibly successful in Newfoundland and Labrador where this is being delivered across what is more probably geographically challenging space in terms of (Indistinct) delivery than it would be in PEI.

We also have had the expertise of Morgan Palmer who has been driving and really leading this program. To hear you speak about the need to maybe do it differently than was originally piloted. It's a bit of a concern in that again, evidence-based decisions are critical.

A pilot, as we talked about in terms of pilots, other pilots can do, allow us to sort of make informed decisions on what the data tells us, but take a short-term pilot, put it on pause, then perhaps redesign it internally doesn't sound like evidence-based decision-making, it sounds like bureaucratic decision-making and the people that are suffering at the expense of that are the children who this program is actually designed to help.

I find it very difficult, honestly minister, to hear you speak about a lot of this was driven by the challenges of breaking or having to make a contract decision with Chartwells, because frankly, you're the government, you get to decide the contracts. If you needed to tell Chartwells you needed to wait another month, you could've done that.

I'm making it very clear, that not just on my behalf, but in terms of the constituents who have been contacting me about this, this is a very disappointing decision. The all or nothing approach is very disappointing. It would be very helpful to hear is, if there is a commitment to accelerating this. We don't need to wait another year or 18 months and that there is enough money in the budget to bring something forward as quickly as possible. Because every child we can feed is a child that is going to have a better educational outcome and a better outcome in terms of addressing food insecurity and poverty in PEI.

Could you commit to what the fiscal commitment will be to that and whether are you prepared to accelerate?

Mr. Trivers: I think I already spoke to that. And hopefully by January we'll be able to something.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: No. I'm done, thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: So whose fault was this with this food program that's being – was being established in 2014? You're talking about the federation, you're talking about administration, you're talking about students, you're talking about Morgan. Whose fault was it that this program was not obtained this fall?

Mr. Trivers: As I've explained many times, (Indistinct) questions on the floor as well, really the key driver of delaying the program, the primary one – there will be a couple – was the timing of the election and the inability to get a non-profit catering corporation set up and running for September.

Chair: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: That's it? That's the whole thing?

Mr. Trivers: That's the prime driver.

Mr. MacDonald: Bureaucratic process stopped because of an election.

Mr. Trivers: That's correct. I got in there, in early June –

Mr. MacDonald: –we're blaming it on the bureaucrats?

Mr. Trivers: In early June there was no non-profit corporation set up because they couldn't go ahead and do it.

Mr. Aylward: Fixed election date –

Mr. Trivers: What can I say, have you guys had of actually stuck to the fixed election dates, we'd be further ahead.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Chair: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Ms. Compton: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: Whoa.

Chair: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank has the floor.

Mr. MacDonald: I think we started it. I hate to burst your bubble on the number of front line staff, but if you look at the Liberal track record on schools, it was over 150 close to 170 –

Mr. MacEwen: He tried to close them.

Mr. Trivers: Yeah in 2015 you cut staff that was the first thing you did.

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct)

Chair: Order!

The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank has the floor.

Mr. MacDonald: It's funny minister that we can't have a serious discussion about the school food program. When you start getting – we talked about chirping and collaboration and cooperation, to me this is likely one of the most important issues that you have to deal with.

This could be a leader for the country; it's been worked on since 2014 with a number of groups. Your Minister of Health and Wellness over there making snide comments about it.

Mr. Aylward: Statements.

Mr. MacDonald: I think, minister, you should take a real hard look at this.

Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: Yeah so I have a couple questions in this section only.

I'm going back to the salaries, about a 20 million increase. With the investment in 74 new front line staff, that's probably like a 5 million dollar investment. Is this due to contract negotiations for the other (Indistinct)

Chris DesRoche: Yeah. 9 million would be contract increases and also carry-forward increases from previous year investments. So any given year we add instructional staff,

they start in September. However, the following year we have the April to June costs.

Mr. Mitchell: Around 4 or 5 million would be the accurate cost of the additional staff?

Chris DesRoche: The 32 teachers are approximately 2 million, the 42 EAs are approximately 1.2 million, psychologists are around 125,000 –

Mr. Trivers: So approximately, that's approximately, right?

Mr. Mitchell: About 4 million.

Chris DesRoche: One other item is in a previous year, some of our EAL staff were funded by another department and now they're included in this budget, so that's approximately 4 million.

Mr. Mitchell: Oh, so that's a transfer over into there?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah.

Mr. Mitchell: Okay, that adds up.

Provision for the rest of your 40 will probably be seen in your next budget then to get up to 110?

Also then, I know it's capital budget but there was a significant amount of work that went on, I think, the next big work for the department of education as far as a school built is in Sherwood (Indistinct) Sherwood school. There was an intent for moving forward with that this year and start some of the ground work that's involved in that, minister.

Where's that stand for that work?

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Mitchell: Even though it's a capital, I understand that.

Mr. Trivers: There's been no holds or no delays on the – you go ahead.

Chris DesRoche: I'm actually on the construction planning committee for that. The planning committee has finished its – I'll call it space program – how many

classrooms, gymnasium, that kind of thing, and we're now just finishing the RFP for an architect, so we're moving into the design phase.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: So the time required for that design phase, that'll probably be shovels in the ground next spring at earliest?

Chris DesRoche: It depends. That could take longer or shorter depending on what concepts the architect comes up with and whether or not it meets the community and school's needs, but it could be six to 12 months, anywhere in between there (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: So as far as your equipments and repairs for Sherwood school, do you have a budget line for things that are required there for the next 12 months?

Chris DesRoche: That would be in our capital budget.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: That'll do for now.

Chair: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, just a question – and it may be off the grants to the public schools, but Ecole Evangeline, they came up to number one on the list for renovation or a rebuild. Have you met with the parent committee or the group in the area that are looking at what's needed for the school?

Mr. Trivers: That's a capital project, of course, and we have not yet in our eight weeks in government – I haven't had a chance. I met with the French Language School Board and we had a really good meeting.

One of the board members, of course, is a key member of that parent group and so yeah, I look forward to (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Mr. Gallant: Was there an indication that they would like to see Ecole Evangeline as their number one priority?

Mr. Trivers: For the upcoming capital budget? I don't have that information in front of me. I believe that was correct though.

Chair: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Mr. Gallant: I had another question, and I came in on the end of this.

I was talking about \$10,000 for the French Language School Board and \$10,000 for the Public Schools Branch for maintenance. Is that correct?

Chris DesRoche: That's just our threshold between operating and capital.

Mr. Gallant: Okay.

Does that really seem like a realistic amount of money when we – the Member from Montague-Kilmuir the other day was asking to have a gym floor fixed and the Member from Morell-Donagh last year was looking for a roof repair. I needed a roof repair.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Gallant: We got them done too but (Indistinct) –

Mr. Trivers: I think you're getting just a little mixed up.

There's \$2 million in the capital budget for repairs every year for schools, which you might argue should (Indistinct) not enough either.

Mr. Gallant: Excuse me, minister. I don't think I'm mixed up. I'm asking about the \$10,000 for each school –

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, it's not \$10,000 for each school.

Mr. Gallant: – the difference between capital and maintenance.

Chris DesRoche: Oh, sorry.

That only distinguishes which budget it goes into. That's not a per-school ratio. It's just if we surpass \$10,000 on one project it goes into our capital budget. If it's under \$10,000 it's in our operating (Indistinct)

Mr. Gallant: So the French Language School Board doesn't have the authority to spend up to \$10,000 with your blessing for repairs?

Chris DesRoche: They do, yeah. But when it goes over \$10,000 it's in the department's capital budget.

Mr. Gallant: Okay so my question is: Is that \$10,000 in this day and age an adequate amount? Should that not be like 40 or \$50,000? I'm sure you couldn't get a gym floor fixed for \$10,000. So I guess what I'm asking is: Is that a reasonable amount?

Mr. Trivers: The way it works, and correct me if I'm wrong, but we've got 1.147 million that's in the equipment and repairs budget-

Chris DesRoche: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Is that the wrong one?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah, so under maintenance there's \$13.5 million for school maintenance, which is divvied up to the two school boards and they decide up to \$10,000 what they want to fix and if it's over \$10,000 they come to us and say: We have a capital repair. And they submit for it.

Mr. Trivers: That's \$10,000 per school, yeah.

Chris DesRoche: That's an accounting policy through the Comptroller's Office.

Chair: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Mr. Gallant: So there's the \$10,000 and then there's the \$2 million capital repair fund? Is that correct?

Chris DesRoche: If they go over \$10,000 they would submit into the \$2 million capital repair fund.

Chair: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you very much.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

I have a few questions here.

I'm wondering if the province's school infrastructure review is under this section.

Mr. Trivers: That's a capital item.

Ms. Bernard: That is capital? Okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

Getting back to the teaching positions, so there are 34 new teachers, the 42 new EAs, and I'm wondering if we are – because there's a big difference between hiring 74 brand new positions and filling retirements and filling positions that are vacant. So keeping in mind the difference between filling retirement and vacant positions and brand new positions, are these brand new positions?

So these 74 new positions are new and then we will also be filling in the retirements and the –

Mr. Trivers: That's correct. Yes, that is absolutely correct.

These are brand new positions. These are not back-filling retirement. There's no attrition here. This is new positions.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: I'm wondering if at some point you and I could sit down together and just – I'm curious where these positions went and how they were divided and all of that stuff, if we could have a chat at some point.

Mr. Trivers: We can, yeah.

Ms. Bernard: Okay, thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: I am good for now.

Thanks.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Well, some of my questioning is – did they go towards the English or French? Can you give us a breakdown of how many the English language school district got versus the French in those?

Chris DesRoche: At this point, neither have received anything because we haven't had our budget passed yet. So after our budget passes we'll do budget letters to the two education authorities with the amount (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: We don't have that breakdown.

Mr. McNeilly: You don't have that breakdown?

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay, are you familiar with itinerant teachers?

Chris DesRoche: Yeah.

Mr. McNeilly: Those are teachers that can kind of float through the system based on needs, kind of resource teachers that float from school to school.

I'm worried about the recent cuts for the assessments that we were talking about just today because how are we supposed to know the need where we can send teachers based on need throughout the province if we cut the measurements at a Grade 3 level?

Mr. Trivers: Just to clarify, we haven't actually cut assessments. I'd say that's probably an incorrect characterization.

Mr. McNeilly: Sure, okay.

Mr. Trivers: The only thing that I have committed to as minister is putting Grade 3, one, one particular Grade 3 assessment on hold and we still have all the data from years and years worth of data that we can use in order to decide, for example, and your example was itinerate teachers would be allocated.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: But we won't have data from the suspension of this grade. So there's a group of kids, hundreds of kids in Grade 3 that we'll lose the data on. Is that correct?

Mr. Trivers: No, that's not quite the way I characterize it either. There are a number of assessments that take place.

And going forward, there's talks of Grade 4 assessments, Grade 7 assessments, Grade 9 assessments, Grade 11 assessments and so – and the assessments aren't about targeting a group of kids either and that's one of the frustrating things that I think teachers have, is it's not actually about helping an individual group of kids, it's actually looking at things on a more abstract higher level, which honestly a lot of people question a lot of the value of that.

Rest assured that the students will continue to be well looked after in terms of their in-class assessments and in terms of the teaching and helping them achieve the curriculum goals and outcomes.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, I'm just worried because I remember as a father, when my daughter came home and had national standard testing or regional testing, we all sat together and found out where she was and what she needed to work on and it was a help to a parent and I just don't know. I can see people that I represent being a little bit upset that their children are going to be without those standards for a year; and if they come back in in the future, and especially at such a critical age as being in that level, that we're going to lose that data.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, your experience is probably a lot different from most parents I've talked to. I know, as a parent myself who had a child who was just in Grade 3, it was more or less we got back the assessments, it didn't correlate at all with what we thought our child's abilities were, and when we asked for the details we're told we weren't allowed to see them.

That's more of the experience that parents talk to me about. Again, the assessments are used at a high level across schools, and this is why – that's a good conversation to have –

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah.

Mr. Trivers: – and I appreciate that, and we might even – the standing committees might even choose to talk about assessments there, but we'll see.

Chair: Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, because I just look at these tests when they came in. They came in because Prince Edward Island students were having a problem, and we were falling behind national averages, so we put the test in for 12 years and we've done really well. Our students are right on top of things, and now we're looking at a systemic cracking of an assessment. I mean that's something that I just don't want to see our children not be able to get measured.

Mr. Trivers: Thanks for raising this.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) kindergarten (Indistinct)

Chair: Charlottetown-West Royalty, are you finished?

Mr. McNeilly: I'm good.

Chair: Okay.

The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: I know that there was monies going to be set aside for an evaluation of infrastructure throughout the schools by an independent party at some

point. I think it was \$500,000. I know the Member from Montague-Kilmuir has raised it a few times on school maintenance and school renovations. Is that still a possibility, or is that door being closed?

Mr. Trivers: That's a capital budget.

Mr. MacDonald: Was it? I don't think it was a capital budget, \$500,000 investment, when we were going to do it. So I'm not sure why it would be – it was a study through the department by an independent third party. It wasn't a capital budget.

Mr. Trivers: Yes, I believe – I think you may be correct.

Chris DesRoche: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Right, so we did decide not to do – I believe it was a \$400,000 consultant we were going to hire to do an infrastructure review. We already know what schools have problems. The problem is there's a limited amount of money to fix the problems.

The \$2 million, we're finding, is inadequate. They ran out of money. They even had the tender ready to go for the school in Montague. It was next on the list, but weren't able to do it because they didn't have enough funding – under last year's capital budget, which you were responsible for.

So what we did was we took that \$400,000 and we were able to actually increase schools and repairs. So this would be in those under \$10,000 thresholds by \$314,000 this year.

Mr. MacDonald: So nothing's going to change? So if the hon. Member from Morell-Donagh's roof starts leaking again –

Mr. Trivers: Well, this –

Mr. MacDonald: – where's the money coming from?

Mr. Trivers: This is why it's a capital budget issue, because what we're going to have to look to doing is increasing the money in our capital budget for school maintenance.

Mr. MacDonald: So you're not spending the money, I guess. You're not spending the money on the independent survey to find out which infrastructure is basically next on the list, because from what I understood, Montague-Kilmuir was first, Eliot River was second.

Mr. Trivers: Well, so we have a list of 325 items that are on the list. They've already been prioritized. Our government is about taking action, not hiring consultants to do another strategy and plan. That's why we're going ahead and we're using that money to do real maintenance and take action at that \$10,000 under; and then in the capital budget, I know I'm going to be advocating for more budget to actually go to those 320-plus school actions and school repairs we know need to happen.

Mr. MacDonald: So on the number of teachers and EA's that you're hiring, are you guaranteeing that they're going to be all hired by September?

Mr. Trivers: Well, that's –

Chris DesRoche: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, I mean, obviously that's the plan. Again, this is what we heard about in Question Period. This is a tricky thing for the administrators, right? Because again, because the timing of the election, the fact we're still here July 10th and we're on the floor with a budget, they're going to be working –

Mr. MacEwen: They're waiting.

Mr. Trivers: They're going to be working a lot of August to do the hiring, so –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: I'm not going to stand here or sit here and say I guarantee they're going to be able to get it done, but I'm pretty – they're very, very motivated to get those hired. As soon as this budget is passed, the numbers are being given out so they can go right at it.

Mr. MacDonald: So are they interviewing now?

Mr. Trivers: Well, what we did was – we said we wanted to get them started, so we said: Staff according to status quo. Because that's what you're allowed to do under the rules, the budgeting rules. We said: Use last year's budget, start doing your staffing. The Public Schools Branch and the French Language School Board did allocations, and that's what they've been doing to try and get a head start on that.

It's been a bit of a mixed bag, is the feedback I've had, because they may believe there could be more positions coming but they have to make decisions and teachers have to make decisions to take positions based on the status quo budget. So it's been very painful. It's been very painful for teachers, for principals, and this is what happens when you don't follow fixed election dates.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank?

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair.

The discussion we're just having is – it exposes, it's not just this year's, it's a perennial problem in the education system –

Mr. Trivers: Yeah.

Leader of the Opposition: – where the budgetary cycle, the timing is out of whack with the school calendar. So it's every summer that our principals are scrambling to figure out how to allocate the teachers and: Oh, no, we need less, no, we need more, oh geez, we have a whole bunch of people who just moved into our catchment area.

I've spoken to a number of principals who have some ideas about how we can deal with that, how we can mitigate for that discrepancy between the calendars. I'm wondering whether you have on an ongoing basis, whether or not it's an election year, any plans to deal with that so that we don't have this scramble every summer.

Mr. Trivers: Well, there's two pieces to that, I think. The one that I think we can

affect here as legislators, is maybe change when the sitting happens and when the budgets are actually approved. I personally would like to see that happen, say, end of February sitting so that we'd have the budget approved by end of March, for example. That's one change; and there will be a standing committee looking at those sort of issues, so changing when we sit and when the budget is approved.

The second thing is looking at the staffing model and how we do that and how that works. That's also a big one as well.

Mr. MacEwen: The same thing happened (Indistinct) –

Chair: Sorry, intervention by Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: I just remember in 2015 we ran into the same issue because we had a late election and we were here in the House debating it. Actually, at that point, we were debating the cut of teachers –

Ms. Compton: Yes, we were.

Mr. MacEwen: – and then there was a reversal of decision and (Indistinct) so the principals were trying to decide who was to let go from schools, and then there was a reversal, and then that cut was reversed, and so they had to go late into the year that year as well. You're right, it's a perennial problem.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) I remember that.

Ms. Compton: This is a good news story –

An Hon. Member: I remember that.

Ms. Compton: – as opposed to that.

Mr. Trivers: So the staffing model – and for example, there's a ministerial directive with ratios and these sorts of things.

Mr. MacEwen: Were you in Cabinet then?

Mr. Trivers: It's something we're going to look at.

Mr. MacEwen: I can't remember. Were you in Cabinet?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: I don't know. I'd hesitate to say it's all on the table, but it's definitely top of mind. It's something – you're probably aware that our deputy minister in the department is from the PEI Teachers' Federation, and so she definitely understands the issues of administrators and teachers, and they'll be items, I'd say, fairly high on our priority list to address.

Leader of the Opposition: Yeah, of course. Bethany would be fully aware of what I'm talking about here. Again, I've had conversations with principals who have ideas, initiatives that they feel can somehow bridge this gap and get rid of, again, the perennial problem that exists between the budget cycle and the school cycle. I can give you their names, minister.

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, and there's a principals advisory council as well –

Leader of the Opposition: Sure.

Mr. Trivers: – which would be a great group to engage.

Leader of the Opposition: Sure. I would also like to add my voice to the dismay about the loss of the school food program as well. I know a couple of people have spoken passionately on that, but it's just such a loss. It's a loss to the children in the school, for their educational and their health, it's a loss to farmers and access to markets –

Mr. Trivers: Okay, it's not –

Leader of the Opposition: – job opportunities (Indistinct) –

Mr. Trivers: Member, with all due respect, it is not a loss. It's continuing on. We have a full-time person who's working on it. We're getting the legal structure in place. We're moving forward with it. The reason we had to delay it was we couldn't get it done for September and we didn't want to leave students without any food at all for their lunches, for example.

Chair: Leader of the Opposition?

Leader of the Opposition: I'm good, Chair.

Chair: Okay, Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Chair.

So I just want to return briefly to the discussion around the costs spent on assessments, and particularly around the Grade 3 assessments.

So I think putting this on hold for a little bit will allow your department to review the current research on assessments for primary and elementary aged students and what you will find when you do that will be that there are many other ways to assess students at this age.

I'm not sure if you're familiar with that, but one would be, for example, portfolio assessments. There's been a considerable amount of research on that, so it's not to say that we can't assess students at this age or that that's not important, but that there are other ways to do that that new technologies make much more effective and allow teachers to use their skill and experience and knowledge and knowing the students.

So I just wanted to point that out, and I'm wondering, I guess, as a question if you will be considering putting any funding or resources in the future into more modern approaches to assessment for primary and elementary age students?

Mr. Trivers: Thanks for making those points and something we'd consider.

In fact, it's the achievement and accountability section that's coming up where the assessments are budgeted.

Ms. Altass: Thank you.

Mr. Trivers: But thank you for your comments.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: Yes, just another question that came to mind in relationship to the new addition of the frontline staff so just what's your opinion on capping of class sizes?

Mr. Trivers: Well, it's a good question.

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct) answer.

Mr. Trivers: I think that class size, there should be a directive as to use as to how many should be in a class based on age.

Mr. Mitchell: So in your opinion, what would be that size that you would suggest?

Mr. Trivers: But what I would suggest is that one of the biggest problems that our teachers and our administrators are facing is class composition.

So you could have a class that had 15 students, but if eight of them were high-need students, then that class might actually be unmanageable and be too big.

Whereas you could have a class that had 30 students, but they're all high achievers, let's say it was a Grade 12 Advanced Physics class. I know one exists at Bluefield High School, I think it even had up to 45 and the teacher said you know what? I can handle this.

So I think they're great as guidelines and they're very important guidelines, but class composition is really what needs to look at, and that's the challenges our administrators are facing.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: So is that something that you're continuing to look at as minister or you're going to work at or you're going to try to come up with some kind of ratios that work if your class is experiencing students that have challenges in particular areas to say: that class should be X amount versus another class and then rate your frontline staff to those class sizes?

Is that where you're heading or?

Mr. Trivers: Yes, that's probably a decent description of how the process works.

Mr. Mitchell: How long will it take you to get there?

Mr. Trivers: So the Public School Branch, right, goes out and what they do is they ask administrators how many teachers would you like, what's your ask? How many EAs do you need?

Then based on those asks, they allocate. Of course, not every administrator is going to get the number they ask for, but the administrators – the principals in the schools and vice-principals, they're looking at exactly what you talked about: class size, class composition.

The teachers are allocated based on that.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: That's good for now, thanks.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Finance and Administration: 251, 280,900.

Shall it carry? Carried.

External Relations and Educational Services

Total External Relations and Educational Services: 1,171,500.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Is this where we're going to find the funding for the community engagement to see what the community-based universal four-year-old preschool looks like on PEI?

Chris DesRoche: No, that's in the early childhood division coming up though.

Ms. Bernard: Okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: I think that's all I have for now.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Achievement and Accountability

Total Achievement and Accountability: 1,266,500.

Shall the section carry?

Mr. McNeilly: Just a question.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Is this the section that we would find the assessment stuff?

Mr. Trivers: Yes.

Mr. McNeilly: So how much will that save you here if you – whatever you could suspend next year?

Mr. Trivers: Yes and so, in fact, I don't think you can put a number on savings because the majority of this section is salaries and we're not eliminating any positions by putting the Grade 3 assessments on hold. So it's not about cost savings in that way.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: So that 67,000 there, that's a cut that's not reflective of – in professional services it was 142 last year. That has nothing to do –

Mr. Trivers: There was a contractor brought in, we paid them \$75,000 last year to perform a review of provincial assessments. So they reviewed and there was a report they produced.

Mr. McNeilly: Oh, okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. Trivers: We don't need that again this year.

Mr. McNeilly: And did that review say that you should not do the assessment?

Mr. Trivers: The review – I'll have to get back to you on that, I don't have the report on me.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: That's okay, I'm good. Thanks.

Chair: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Chair.

So okay, I guess I won't repeat what I said earlier, but I will just add that putting the Grade 3 assessments on hold is not to necessarily say that we shouldn't be doing any type of assessment, but we need to look at the way that we're doing assessment and if it still achieving the goals that we are hoping to achieve.

So the question that I did have was in putting it on hold then where will the resources come from to do a targeted evaluation, exploration of the Grade 3 assessments to see what the next steps really should be? How are you going to fund that?

Mr. Trivers: Yes, so I mean we have staff at the department of education that are assessment specialists, and this is the exactly sort of thing they look at.

I mean, we're looking at actually having teams of people that are based on subject and grade level to develop curriculum and assessments and delivery as a package.

We're hoping that maybe some of those innovative techniques will be used, but using in-class assessments that are standardized will allow us to have both the in-class assessments and the standardized assessments sort of at the same time in a way that works really well for teachers and students, as well as the overall administrators.

Chair: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Chair.

I guess we'll just – I won't ask any further questions about that now, but I do have a few sort of little red flags that are popping up in what you're describing and I'm curious to see what the full plan's going to be but we'll just leave that.

Mr. Trivers: Looking forward to that.

Ms. Altass: Me too.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: I may have missed this on the last section, but I'm flipping through here.

I'm looking for a budget amount for – I think you referenced the school food program to come into play in January, but I don't see in January because this budget will carry through to next April where that sits for January start? Did you say that or am I dreaming that?

Mr. Trivers: Yes, I said there's an opportunity if we can get the non-profit and everything in place that in January we might be able to do some sort of school program –

Mr. Mitchell: But you have no investment set aside for that in this budget, is that correct?

Mr. Trivers: That's correct. It wouldn't be implemented in the same way that it was previously budgeted under your administration.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: So are you saying that it's going to be funded by NGOs entirely, is that what you're saying – suggesting?

Mr. Trivers: Well, we're not sure at this point. That is one possibility for this year.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: That's interesting. Okay, thank you.

Chair: You're welcome.

Shall the section carry? Carried.

English/French as an Additional Language

Total English/French as an Additional Language: 548,600.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: I'm just wondering how many people are represented under the salaries section here?

Chris DesRoche: There are four.

Ms. Bernard: Four.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: We've seen media reports and I have worked in the school system for a very long time. There's a very significant number of new students who require EAL support, and I'm just wondering if you think that this funding is enough to support their learning?

Chris DesRoche: So these four positions at the department are more in the assessment side when they arrive. There's 115 positions in the system that help with EAL students.

Ms. Bernard: So this is just kind of the admin side.

Chris DesRoche: This is the department (Indistinct)

Ms. Bernard: Thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total External Relations and Educational Services: 2,986,600.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Innovation, Education and Programs

Total English Innovation, Education and Programs: 2,321,500.

Shall the section carry?

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you.

There's been a lot of discussion about changes in curriculum. I'm just wondering, minister, is this a section where we would allocate funds for exploring new curriculum? Because I see the support through the grant section in here, this is where we do things like junior achievement and literary alliance operational which are pretty sort of core funding – you know, they're very important, it's great to see them, but I'm wondering whether we do things like develop or plan or think about new curriculum?

Mr. Trivers: This is exactly where that happens.

Ms. Bell: Has there been any discussion, minister, about civics education?

Mr. Trivers: Maybe you could expand on that.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Chair.

There was an interesting news article just today, very recently, that Ontario, believe it or not, is actually the only province that has any kind of curriculum where they actually teach civics 101 to high school students so effectively: how does government work. What is your role as a member of (Indistinct) society? How do you vote and why do you vote? All those kind of things that we need to know as adults. So we know we do things like entrepreneurship training and life skills and financial literacy, I hope.

One of the things that it's more and more we're hearing about for engagement of youth in democratic society is the need to actually teach Civics.

Mr. Trivers: I'd like to get back to you after consulting with some of the curriculum experts in the department on that but I do understand your point. Particularly on the financial literacy is a concern I would have. With the easy availability of credit cards and that sort of thing.

I would say one of the challenges is trying to find the space, the actual time in the schedule of the student to put that in. There is a program right now called the CEO program or the course that in fact, a lot of students are not taking because they don't have room for it. So that's one of the challenges we're facing.

But yet again, I'd like to consult with the curriculum experts on that and get back to you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: I appreciate that, Chair.

I guess minister, one of the things in there is about – I absolutely get this, two really big considerations, one is it the amount of things

you can pack into a day for the student but also I don't want to download additional responsibilities to learn another thing on to the educators either.

We know we can see some really innovative delivery of new curriculum where the curriculum outcomes are determined by the department but the delivery doesn't have to be done by the educators, it can be done by experts in the room from another source, for example. That's a way to really leverage that community engagement. In terms of sort of making space in the curriculum, that would perhaps be something else that may happen in this department is when we look at this curriculum as a whole, what are the things that need to be refreshed and revised? Are we just doing things because we've always done them? I absolutely take your point about sort of having to make space but we also have to determine priorities.

Mr. Trivers: I should mention there's a lot of work going on.

Ms. Bell: I'm sure.

Mr. Trivers: I mean each project sort of has three phases where they develop it, they pilot it and implement it. So there's six projects impacting 22 courses at phase three, and there's 11 projects impacting 65 courses at phase two, and two projects impacting six projects at phase one and go across all the different grade levels right from K-12.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Again, as I said with the school food program comments earlier, that I absolutely understand we're looking at things from a budget perspective. We're talking about numbers and buckets and funds but we're also talking about kids and their outcomes as adults as they grow into the future as.

As a parent and somebody who's had a lot of conversations with other parents in my constituency, probably the number one things I hear, both from young adults and from the parents of young adults, is how much they wished that we would help better prepare our kids to enter the real world.

That's not necessarily just doing an entrepreneurship training course or CEO course, but the real world which is about sexual health education, it's about financial literacy, it's about Civics 101, it's about how to manage as an adult.

While I understand the process of that, there's also about priorities. So in the same way it's a priority to feed our kids, it's also a priority to give them the best tools we can.

Passing that on, both as a parent and as a representative of many others, I would really hope that innovation really does look like that creative spark of doing the right thing.

Mr. Trivers: When I just sat on the opposition I said very similar things.

Ms. Bell: There you go.

You're welcome.

Mr. Trivers: Looking forward to really digging in. Eight weeks in right now. We're really just starting.

Ms. Bell: Even at eight weeks, minister, you can still set priorities.

Mr. Trivers: And we are.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: A couple of questions here.

Was this the section that you said we would find the work that's been going on with the sexual health curriculum?

Mr. Trivers: 56 days.

An Hon. Member: Who said that?

Ms. Bernard: This is where we would find it. So I'm wondering – I'm seeing an awful lot of – what section am I under here?

Chair: Innovation.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, innovation, okay.

I'm seeing not a whole lot of changes to any of these lines. I mean, there's a couple of changes, but I'm wondering was the development of that curriculum, did it start

before? Is it something that's been ongoing a little bit? Or should it be reflected in this budget? Is it reflected in this budget?

Mr. Trivers: No, this definitely was already underway.

Ms. Bernard: So there would be nothing new –

Mr. Trivers: It's not a project-based budget. It's full-time individuals and the projects they're working on changes over time. You know what I'm saying? So that's why you don't see the budget varying with a number of projects.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: I'm going to piggyback on Charlottetown-Belvedere and add, I've been talking, of course, to a lot of teachers, I was surrounded by them, I was one of them. We're seeing an awful lot of areas where change is crucial. Most recently I was talking to some math teachers and the math teachers were saying how universities are having to change their expectations. It's not just in math but I'm going to use math as an example.

Our students are graduating from high school with no problem. Little to no problem-solving skills, this is a huge, huge problem for me personally, but for all of us in this House, it should be.

What I would like to see, I have always said right from the start, hence one of the reasons I'm here, I think that PEI can be an innovative leader in so many areas. It began with the idea of being an innovative leader in education because everything ripple effects out from education.

If you have a solid education system, the people who are graduating from that education system are solid in their skill and they're very capable of being productive and happy adults.

So I would love to see the way we do our planning not to be – I get the impression, and I don't think there's anything that can be said today, and I know people are doing great work, I'm not taking away from that, but I think that system under which they

operate is more of a putting out fires, responding to crises, and I think that that is a real detriment to what we could be doing here.

I would love to see us be able to swap things around a little bit and engage with the people who are doing this crucial work and look – and take a breather, step back, and look at the big picture and see where the gaps are missing, talk education to graduates, talk to people who are working with them as they get older to really look at the way we do this, because it's not working. I fear that if we just keep putting money into it, we just keep going further down this dark hole that we're not going to come out of.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you so much for your input, member.

We do have issues we need to address. As much as eight weeks can seem like a long time, it's really just the very beginning. I look forward to working with you on that.

I just mentioned about all the different curriculum renewal projects underway, and perhaps we need to look at the number of curriculum projects we have. Maybe we're doing too many curriculum renewals and we need to regroup and say: what are our real priorities and focus on those.

I think in the coming weeks and months, that's exactly the direction we want to go in. And again, with your input.

Ms. Bernard: There's a lot of awesome things that we could be doing. I'm not going to get into them right now. Just to clarify too, there was mention the CEO, of course, was an elective but it's actually a requirement for graduation.

Mr. Trivers: Sorry. You're right.

Ms. Bernard: Just a clarification.

Mr. Trivers: My apologies. It's a requirement. People are having trouble fitting it into their schedule.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. McNeilly: Just a couple of very quick things in these sections, innovation education programming. I see in that section and the section following – the two sections – great things that we're funding here: literacy alliance, the summer tutoring program for kids, that's at 95,000.

There's some really good things in here. But I notice in both those sections there's no growth. If we're growing with the amount of teachers, we're kind of flat lined from one year to the next. These seem like very incredible programs.

FRENCH 17.00.10

ENDS 17.00.14

Maybe in the future we might look at if the student –

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Mr. McNeilly: There is no growth. If we're growing with the amount of teachers, we're kind of flatlined from one year to the next and these seem like very incredible programs.

French

Maybe in the future we might look at if the student population and teachers are growing

French

Grow as well.

Mr. Trivers: French

Mr. McNeilly: French

Mr. Trivers: French

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: No, that's it.

Thanks.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: (Indistinct) a minute.

It was just brought to my attention and I had this horrible flashback. Classrooms are full of binders and ring-bound things that say Draft on them for years and then they go out of print and we have never even received an actual copy and they change all the time. The big joke in schools is: Oh no, another pretty binder with pretty much the same information or, completely different information and then teachers are having to – there's an awful lot of demands on teachers.

So just as a little caution or a little perhaps something we could think about, again, I know people are working really hard on this, but that's another huge – there's really – the curriculum, although some of it's there, some of it's not even complete.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you.

And as I said, I think in the coming weeks and months we're going to address issues just like that.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

French Innovation, Education and Program

Total French Innovation, Education and Programs: 3,198,400.

Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Innovation, Education and Programs: 5,519,900.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Leadership and Learning

Total Leadership and Learning: 3,917,200.

Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Leadership and Learning: 3,917,200.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Early Childhood Development

Total Early Childhood Development: 18,178,800.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: This is where we're going to find the wage increase for early childhood educators?

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Can you explain the plan for the wage increases?

Chris DesRoche: They've already been implemented; they were April 1st. There was anywhere from \$1.00 to \$3.00 an hour depending on what level they were at. So they're already received it.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: That doesn't sound like quite enough, but okay. Is this where we will find the funding for the Best Start Program as well? And how much will that be?

Chris DesRoche: So the base funding is 1.28 million and there is also another 150,000 going to be provided this year.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Is it safe to say that we aren't anticipating much of an expansion of early childhood services this year?

Mr. Trivers: Yea, I think that's safe to say. This year what we've got is this early childhood project manager that we're going to have assigned to really work with the various stakeholder groups to develop our changes that we'll implement next year.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Is this the person who is going to take our four-year-olds into consideration?

Mr. Trivers: Yes, this is the person we talked about, the special advisor to the Premier on the first 1,000 days on the Pre-K Program.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Who was consulted in the decision for the four-year-old preschool?

Mr. Trivers: You know what? I'm going to have to get back to you on that one. I don't have that information. Yeah, I'll just get back to you with that info.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: I would love to have a very full discussion on that and I'm also wondering about if your department has done research on best practices and to see if what you found actually matches that it is a good idea to go forth with the universal preschool full day (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: I know one of the – a lot of the research (Indistinct) by the McCain Foundation and (Indistinct) for sure, they were included. This would be a great topic. I'd love to have maybe even a special advisor come into a standing committee and discuss this very issue. That might be appropriate if standing committee wants that.

This year is all about having those discussions and I've offered that to you before. I think we'd love to include you in them, make sure we take into account your input.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: I'd just like to make sure that the problem we're trying to solve is actually going to be solved by things we're implementing, because I would consider our education system, including the early years, extremely strained right now to the point where one more little thing could break it. I just really fear that this would be a decision that we would regret, so I'm very much looking forward to be a part of that discussion.

Mr. Trivers: And thank you for your input on that.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Oh no, I don't have anything.

An Hon. Member: Sure you have.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Going back to the early educators' wages, we know there was an identified wage gap that was around \$7 an hour, I think, was the gap in terms of (Indistinct) to the equivalent educational assistant wages. You're saying there's been increases of between one and three dollars an hour. What's the plan going forward in terms of when is the next wage increase going to come, and is the goal to get them up to that kind of balanced level equivalent to the educational assistant wages?

Mr. Trivers: That's something we're going to consider for next year's budget. We're still developing that plan, is how I would characterize it.

Ms. Bell: So prior to the election that we met with – the opposition, then the third party, met with both of the kind of advocacy and representation groups for early educators and they were really clear about what they wanted, which was revision of the wage grid to reflect special needs assistance, trained workers, the increase of those wages, and then a review of the allocation of accredited centres. Have you had any consultation with either of those organizations at this point?

Mr. Trivers: So far I've only had informal conversations with some of the – like, the executive director of one of them, and that sort of thing; but no, we're not there yet. We have those meetings scheduled. They're coming up in the schedule here relatively soon.

Ms. Bell: One of the things in that is, in all the complexity of this, is the core of it: if we're not paying our early educators appropriately where we can't retain them. If we can't retain them, we can't meet the need for spaces and there's a massive waiting list. That list is only going to get longer.

So this is – again, I understand you've only been here eight weeks, but at the same time

we have, again, a critical tip point. We're losing people out of the industry. So it being critical in terms of getting to parity is really essential if we want to try and address that gap.

The special needs assistants within early education, minister, is also another area of particular concern because they're not on the wage grid at all. I know the next section is autism services, but for example, in early years educators' systems, a special needs educator is basically paid minimum wage to take care of children who are actually a higher need and at a higher – and they have to have special qualifications to do so.

Mr. Trivers: These are all issues that we're very well aware of, very much aware of, and the experts in the department are very much aware of, and even though we haven't had our formal meetings with those groups post-election, we will be having those, and those are issues that we're going to tackle head on.

Thank you for bringing up the urgency of those issues, because they are urgent, and I think going forward we're going to have to have an immediate short-term plan, medium-term plan, long-term plan, when we address that.

Ms. Bell: My last question, and it's – this may not be the section, minister, please forgive me if not – but we also have a need to provide child care and appropriate child care support for after school care.

While it's not as formally managed as the early childhood development pieces, it's actually still a critical piece of our child care story in the province, and it would be really good to hear from your department how that reflects in terms of an educational commitment and a budgetary commitment. Obviously it's – I don't imagine it's here right now, but it would be something that I think would be very important to talk about if it doesn't currently appear in the plans.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you for raising that.

Ms. Bell: (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: Yeah. Thanks, Chair.

My question was somewhat asked by the opposition, but certainly there is a bit of an angst or concern on the 4-year-old program and what it would mean to early learning centres and especially in rural PEI so I think as a bit of an echo, I think we need a really clear approach to be articulated very clear, exactly what that would look like moving forward.

Obviously, is there compensation for early centres because of some of it, does the parameters and criteria – how many zero to 2-year-old children they can take in, I think there's a lot that needs to be addressed here. So I just want to be on the record as stating that we need it really clearly laid out what this would look like before you'd have full support.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, member, and I tend to agree. Clarity and communication is going to be very key for this project.

Mr. Mitchell: I look forward to seeing whatever comes back.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to piggyback on what Charlottetown-Belvedere and the Leader of the Third Party just said; that I met a woman yesterday in Charlottetown who has just started her own daycare at home. She has two young children. She didn't do that by choice. She did it because she could not find places for her own kids, so she set up her own business. Actually, it seems to be working out fine. She looks after three or four others in an unregulated situation; but it's sort of indicative of the lack of spaces that are – perhaps not the lack of spaces. It's the lack of early childhood educators to maintain the ratios in order to fill those spaces that are there.

I just wanted to echo what, again, what Charlottetown-Belvedere said about the importance of ramping up those salaries so that people can enter that field and feel that they are starting on a career, that they will stay there. The turnover rate in early childhood education is horrific.

So my question is: Do you keep statistics on the turnover rate of educators in the early childhood centres? Early learning centres?

Mr. Trivers: I would say – I don't know that for a fact, but probably not. They're private-run centres, and so – but I don't know. Chris, do you know?

Chris DesRoche: The ECDA might, but our department doesn't.

Mr. Trivers: No, okay; but thank you for (Indistinct) – there's many challenges in this area. They're great, and I think that if you talk to – in my informal discussions with, for example, the ECDA and some of the folks there, wages are only part of the answer. They're an important part, but – we've got some challenges, and there are some steps already being talked about in the department that predate me.

The former administration was trying to move forward – things like allowing some of the folks who want to become an early childhood educator and get that ECDA designation to continue to provide child care while they pursue the designation in a blended learning-type model, these sort of things.

That brings into – you know, for example, we might be able to use the SkillsPEI programs to allow them to do that. There's lots of talk about different solutions, and any ideas you have, bring them forward; but rest assured these are problems that are well known, and they're being discussed and solutions are being pursued within the department as we speak.

Leader of the Opposition: I appreciate your answer, minister, and I realize that this is a complex and multilayered problem that you've inherited here.

I'm on top of all the things that you just said as being problems. The local access to furthering the education of early childhood educators is an issue as well, and that's something that we should be looking into providing locally here at Holland College or UPEI; but there are definitely issues there in terms of them being able to further their education.

Within the French school system there's a particular problem as well, and at the Carrefour, the problem there is, I guess what I said earlier, that there are lots of empty spaces and lots of people who want to send their kids to that school, but they are unable to do it. That has a real knock-on effect through the school system where children enter the French school system with really not functional French, and teachers in those early grades and later grades are having to sort of spend a lot of time dealing with problems that could have been avoided had those children been in full French education from an early time.

So there's a real particular problem in the French system. Are you dedicating anymore funds to that system consequently?

Mr. Trivers: The challenges in the French system are exacerbated because of the language requirement, obviously, and the fact that a lot of the kids going in there speak English at home. So the word is *francisation*, right? It needs to happen. It's like having French as a second language going in the early child –

So do we have any particular funds dedicated at this time? Chris?

Chris DesRoche: There's a \$60,000 program for *francisation*. I can't recall the group that is engaged to do that, but there is a contract to do that.

Chair: The Leader of the Third Party.

Sorry, the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: That's all right. I'm fine.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Just a quick question about the Chances' Best Start Program funded at 128 right now and you said they're going to get \$150,000 more from the (Indistinct), is that going to come out of your budget? Because I know it's not in here.

Is it going to be your budget or is it going to be on the contingency fund?

Chris DesRoche: We weren't sure exactly what that looked like. So a few lines down from the 1.281, the 13.289 million, I had put it in there for now.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay, so it's in there under operating grants?

Chris DesRoche: Yes.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Great. No, that's all.

Chair: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: I might have missed this, so the new program that you're looking at – is that going to be held – are you going to provide the education through the daycares, or are you going to do it in the school system?

Mr. Trivers: It's going to be through the daycares.

Mr. MacDonald: Through the daycares.

Chair: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: No, that's fine.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Autism Services

Total Autism Services: 1,435,700.

Leader of the Opposition: Question.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks.

In the fall last year, we passed legislation to establish the autism coordinating committee. I believe it was Morell-Donagh's bill, actually.

I'm wondering do they have any role in relation to the administration or the direction of setting of the autism services section here? What role are they playing, if any?

Mr. Trivers: Our first step is to actually get the committee formed and underway, and we've got – we're pursuing an order in council, because that's how it's going to happen through the Cabinet to get that committee formed.

And how they exactly will operate, I can get back to you on that if you like, but I would say their role would be more of – they would definitely be advising, I would say, on services that are required as well as helping coordinate entrance into the various services that are operated by government.

I should probably say I'll get back to you on that one.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks.

I see if we follow the budget lines from last year to this year is really essentially not much difference at all. We all know that the prevalence of children on the spectrum is increasing quite dramatically.

I'm wondering what plans you have to increase funding for autism services in order that we at least keep our heads above water in terms of providing the same level of services, the numbers of those children increase.

Mr. Trivers: You're absolutely correct to say that we haven't added any additional staff this year, although there were two added last year. When it comes to – I realize we're talking about autism funding specifically here. I know that our educational assistants play a role in that as well and so those 42 EAs are going to also provide a role and really help there.

That's a pretty significant number.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: To what age do the autism services that are funded in this budget line stop?

Mr. Trivers: Thank you for that.

We're just in the early year's budget line here.

Leader of the Opposition: So this is just up to –

Mr. Trivers: Kindergarten. You're right. My comment about the EAs would be misguided.

Leader of the Opposition: No, it wasn't that. I just wanted to confirm that because it's under the early childhood education, these autism services are just for children of that age group.

That's good. Thanks.

I'm fine. Thanks, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: I know this is important to all of us in the House, autism.

Do you have any numbers about at what rate it's increasing? For example, last year's numbers entered into people on the spectrum versus this year's numbers?

Mr. Trivers: I would like to bring that back for you just to make sure I have all the numbers correct. I don't have that in front of me in my budget book here. We'll get back to you with that.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: I know this is an important thing all through the education system, I think PEI does an incredible job and the people working in the education system do an incredible job with autism, but they might need some more resources in the future, with and if those numbers are rising, as well as programs like Stars for Life.

When those kids get out of the system, I think we're losing the battle there. So just to chat about that. I know that's not your area, but it's important.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you for bringing that up. I do have constituents where this is a major concern.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: I'm okay. Thanks.

Chair: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Chair.

You guys raise a lot of good points, and I know this is just early years, but this past year was one in 60 students in our education system on the spectrum.

It's funny, I did just a quick search to find out how prevalent students with red hair is, and there's a lot more students in our system on the spectrum than there is with red hair in our system. I don't mean to trivialize it, but that kind of makes it, you know, it's a very normal part of our system.

We need to start looking at the budget as not one-off funding or not – you know, autism funding is extra. We need to make it normalized into our budget where it's core funding where each school just deals with it automatically, because you know the trends and that kind of thing.

So minister, that's the kind of attitude that I think that you should take to this area. I think that that group that's meeting, the autism coordinating committee, is going to play an important role around that too.

But it's about building for the long-term where all schools, it isn't just a surprise when there's new students enter the school on the spectrum, it's automatically built into the system. This is how we roll through and, of course, we'll deal with the after education system later and we'll talk about that as well.

I want to push that as well, minister. As a new minister, you push for that within your department and right across the system.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, member.

I know this is an area you've spent a significant bit of time working. You brought it forward, for example, the *Autism Coordination Act*. So thank you for your work on that front, and we'll definitely take that into consideration.

Mr. MacEwen: I'm good, Chair. Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair.

The individuals who work with children on the spectrum, I mean, it's a very demanding job and requires a special skill set and a really special level of empathy. Yet when you look at the wage grid for teachers or instructors of children on the spectrum, there's no recognition whatsoever for the special training and skills that they've required to do that.

Very often children on the spectrum are being looked after by people who are being paid really little more than minimum wage and people without any special training in terms of how best to help people who live on the spectrum.

I'm wondering what plans you have – this is a real gap for me in the wage grid – what plans you have for recognizing the extra skills and training required for those who are trained specifically to deal with children on the spectrum?

Mr. Trivers: Thank you for raising that. It's definitely an issue.

It's when you're at the early years centre level, they're definitely probably not paid enough, like as you say.

Should mention that – maybe, Chris, you pointed this out at the department level – autism services in fact, their wages are much greater, but that's a discrepancy we need to address and are going to work with the department to see how we best do that.

It's great, everything comes down to budgeting and money and available funds. So it's about priorities. So we have to really look at that.

Chair: The Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair.

Again, I appreciate your candid answer, minister, but, I think in terms of priorities, we keep saying how important young children are and people with challenges,

special challenges, and gifts like people who are on the spectrum require special attention.

I really encourage you to follow through on those good words about making this a priority and make sure that that wage – we're not talking about a huge number of people here. But it would make a huge difference in the lives of some very important people in our communities.

I would encourage you to follow through on that, minister.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Early Childhood Development:
19,614,500.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Joint Consortium for School Health

Total Joint Consortium For School Health:
530,000.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Provincial Libraries

Public Library Services

Total Public Library Services: 2,931,100.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Does this include the library which is at Confederation Centre? The provincial library?

Mr. Trivers: Yes I believe so. Yeah.

Ms. Bell: Is there any update on what's happening with the proposed move of that library out of the centre into the Dominion Building as proposed by Downtown Charlottetown Inc. I think?

Mr. Trivers: I don't have an update for you.

Chris DesRoche: No, that wouldn't be in our department, we only supply the staff and the library books to libraries that would more of a community question, I think.

Ms. Bell: Well they're funded.

Mr. Trivers: You know what, let me get back to you on that one. I want to double check.

Ms. Bell: I would appreciate that minister because I remember this last time we had a lot of conversation about where does it belong and it was confusing then, so I understand that there's a number of libraries across the province but this is the premier one in the city and there's been a lot of conversation about that property and about the funding to it.

Mr. Trivers: And we've seen the great things that have happened in Summerside. The Rotary Club really took the lead there and it's an amazing – a great library. I know they're doing similar things in Charlottetown, there's a plan in place. Let me get an update for you. I don't know that answer.

Ms. Bell: I would really appreciate that minister. I understand from your expert – that it's more, just if it belongs somewhere else that's fine but if you could just find out that would be great.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Are there any plans to expand library services in any other spaces or is that something we would also, our current complement of libraries obviously is a network, but are there any plans to expand or even add new libraries?

Mr. Trivers: No not at this time there aren't, we haven't discussed that.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Okay, is the management of libraries or the administration of the libraries autonomous? Is it, once they get the funding do they decide what services they deliver or is that managed centrally?

Mr. Trivers: I don't know. In my limited – I haven't really worked a lot with this group –

Ms. Bell: Sure.

Mr. Trivers: – but the interactions I've had, they're a very – how would I put this – they're experts. They're professionals, and they do great things.

Chris DesRoche: We would provide the staff that run the program.

Mr. Trivers: I would say that describing them as autonomous is probably a good description.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you.

To your point earlier, to your expert, is the primary expenditure in this is salaries, which is fantastic. They're government staff delivering services to the public. There's a relatively small budget for materials, supplies and services and admin considering that this is 26 libraries and all the books and things – the confederation library has musical instruments and a whole range of stuff.

Is this the entire budget for new – wow. That's really small. Considering you're talking about 26 libraries and they have \$295,000 in total for buying new things. I'm shocked. Minister, we need to talk about that.

Mr. Trivers: All right. Point received.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: I'm good for now thank you.

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Provincial Libraries: 2,931,100.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Public Archives and Records Office

Total Public Archives and Records Office: 1,095,000.

Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total Public Archives and Records Office: 1,095,000.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Chair: SkillsPEI.

Mr. Trivers: Chair, can I bring another stranger onto the floor?

Chair: Sure.

Request has been made to bring a stranger onto the floor?

Some Hon. Members: Granted.

Chair: Please state your name and title for Hansard?

Karen Stanley: Karen Stanley, Chief Financial Officer of lifelong learning.

Chair: Thank you very much, Karen.

Hon. member we are on page 51, SkillsPEI.

Mr. Trivers: Chair, I just received a text and the library is still under review as a major piece of infrastructure.

Ms. Bell: Yeah, okay.

Mr. Trivers: So that's my status update. I know that's not much of an update, I could probably try to get more details for you.

Ms. Bell: We can take that offline and have a conversation perhaps.

Chair: Okay hon. members we are on page 52, SkillsPEI.

Total SkillsPEI: 30,435,700.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I see there is a rise in salaries here; can you explain what that is?

Mr. Trivers: So these are additional costs related to an IT consultant and 15% of the salary of a chief financial officer.

Karen Stanley: That's me.

Mr. Trivers: That's her.

And a seam star resource. I have here in my notes offset by vacancy management. I don't know, Karen would you like to add to that?

Karen Stanley: That's pretty much it.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: The big ticket here is the grant section. I'm wondering if you could just go through each of those programs and just give a very brief overview of what they relate to. The LMDA, for example, and the provincial programs (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: You would like us to go through each one of the allocated programs?

Leader of the Opposition: Just to give us sort of overview of what workforce development agreement –

Mr. Trivers: So that's – the complete briefing is about four hours. I know because I've been through it recently.

Karen Stanley: Do you want me to read it or?

Mr. Trivers: Yeah you go ahead. (Indistinct)

Karen Stanley: The Canada PEI Labour Market Development Agreement is the largest of them. The LMDA programs are aimed at helping employment insurance clients and unemployed individuals prepare for and obtain sustainable employment and they include such programs as Training PEI, Employment Assistance Services, Employ PEI, Self Employ PEI, Labour Market Partnerships, Work Experience PEI, Research and Innovation, the Seasonal Worker Initiative, Lumber Industry Initiative and Steel and Aluminum Industry Initiatives, the Canada PEI Workforce Development Agreement. The WDA programs are similar to the LMDA program but do not require EI attachment.

In addition to the programs, the WDA also provides supports to persons experienced disabilities. This funding is in the Department of Social Development and Housing. These include Workplace Skills Training Programs, Targeted Wage

Subsidies, Workforce Development Projects, and administration.

The clear focus agreement, those programs are aimed at providing students in post-secondary with work experience. Programs include career prep and graduate mentorship, adult learning, literacy, and essential skills program. The essential skills programs are designed to better assist workers most affected by fluctuations in seasonal work impacting EI benefits through essential skills training and four weeks of early work for affected workers.

A new program in 2020 is the Digital Skills for Youth internship. These programs funding for youth internships with a focus on developing digital literacy and soft skills in recent post-secondary graduates aged 30 and under.

In addition, there is provincial funding which provincially-funded labour market programs such as summer jobs for post-secondary students, Graduate Mentorship Programs, international students, labour market programs for adults and youth with barriers to employment and literacy employment programs.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much for that.

That's interesting. I'm wondering whether the province targets any specific fields. Do we just carry on doing the same sorts of ratios for each program each year, or do we target specific fields?

Karen Stanley: A lot of it depends on the needs of the community, but the programs are essentially set by the federal agreement that we have with the Government of Canada.

Mr. Trivers: Most of them are renewed year-over-year but there are special programs as well.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Chair.

There is one, and it's the trades. Part of the housing problem here, I mean, it's multifaceted of course, but part of it is restriction and labour, just to get stuff done. The huge waiting list. I'm wondering whether there's any funding specifically earmarked to the trades.

Mr. Trivers: There definitely is. The one that comes to mind is team construction.

Karen Stanley: Yes.

Mr. Trivers: Basically that is targeted for people who want to get in the construction industry and get their Red Seal and it really kickstarts them and provides them with a bunch of the standard training they need, like First Aid and WHIMIS and that sort of thing, as well as on-the-job training to get them kick started into their various trade areas.

It covers everything from welding to plumbing to carpentry. That's a good example of one for construction specifically, it's called team construction.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: So given that we know, we recognize that that's an area where we need more workers here on PEI, how much has that fund been increased since last year?

Mr. Trivers: I bet you if I look at my phone long enough, an answer will appear.

Let me get back to you with that. That is an answer we should be able to provide.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I'm good.

Thank you, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: So a couple of things, first of all, just a comment on Skills. I think it's one of the best programs and best sections ever. It's really helping people find employment and just making our Island more vibrant.

I find that people in that program, their confidence and their skills improve so congratulations on that.

Look, research and innovation, I noticed in the big book here, it's got forecasted last year for zero, and now it's \$100,000. Do you see where I'm talking about?

Karen Stanley: The \$100,000 is a standard amount that we normally put in our budget for planning purposes. We tend to spend the money throughout the other programs, but we like to keep the \$100,000 there every year just in case there's something specific that shows up.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay, perfect.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: And then on the same area, two lines down, lumber industry initiatives.

Karen Stanley: Those were two additions to the LMDA made by the federal government for this year. So it was for 2018-19.

It was for 2018-19 only whereas the seasonal worker initiative and the steel and aluminum industries were for 2018-19 and 2019-20. The aluminum industry was only for 2018-19.

Mr. McNeilly: Gotcha.

Chair: The Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay and then over in the other section, the federal programming, that seems like it's down one million. Was that just – it's gone somewhere else, where it says federal programs? It's only at \$800,000 now?

Karen Stanley: That was federal programs which are ending in – either ended on March 31st of 2019 or ending in 2019-20.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay, perfect.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay, that's about it for that section.

The program – questions about the Reach program would come in other sections. I didn't –

Karen Stanley: No, the Reach program was actually also covered in here.

Mr. McNeilly: Oh is it?

Karen Stanley: Yes.

Mr. McNeilly: So the reach program, can you give us a quick update about how that worked last year and if you guys find that the program's been successful?

Mr. Trivers: We'll have to get back to you on that one specifically as to – the way it works, as you're well aware, is we provide funding through a third party nonprofit, in this case Reach, to do the program, right?

So we would have to reach out to them to get those updates. We do collect metrics, and so we should be able to get that for you fairly readily.

I did want to echo your comments about the SkillsPEI and the programs that it provides, and really thank the federal government, who are partners in this; because I don't know if members are aware, but it's pretty close to 100% of the funding is offset by federal money.

So it is incredible and it provides us huge opportunities. The Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty was at the team construction announcement we had, and it is pretty incredible, the value it gives to the people who participate, both the hard skills and the soft skills.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: And just keeping with the Reach program, could I get a commitment from the minister that he's going to look at that, some consistent operational funding, and funding into the future for that program because it is so good, and I do believe in it, and what's your initial sense of moving forward, minister?

Mr. Trivers: Well I should get back to you on that, really.

My sense, and maybe you can verify this, is that really funding is provided year over year. It is on an annual basis and that's because of the federal-provincial agreement.

Thank you for that input. We'll look to see if we can do it more than one year out to provide a little more stability. I understand what you're saying because they do provide great work.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Perfect. Thanks for your comments. I look forward to hearing that.

Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Just a quick question: I'm just wondering if there's a reason why SkillsPEI was brought under the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning rather than economic growth.

Mr. Trivers: Well, that is an excellent question.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you.

Mr. Trivers: Really it's a matter of whether you consider it economic growth or part of lifelong learning. The decision was we decided that we wanted to, for example, looking at people going into the trades earlier.

For example, maybe even starting as early as Grade 10 to start on apprenticeships, we'd be able to dovetail by having K to 12 and the postsecondary and SkillsPEI in the same basket.

Ms. Bernard: That makes sense.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Total SkillsPEI: 30,435,700.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Post-secondary and Continuing Education.

General.

Total General: 720,600.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Apprenticeship and Training.

Total Apprenticeship and Training: 1,719,600.

Mr. Mitchell: Question.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: As part of that increase, is that work of the Construction Association, some of the work that they're doing with apprentices and trades training?

Mr. Trivers: Did you catch that?

Karen Stanley: Can you please repeat the question.

Mr. Mitchell: Like I see an increase of about \$1 million to the bottom line. Is part of that work with Construction Association and their work with trades training and apprenticeship work that they're doing on the province?

Mr. Trivers: Bear with us here. Bear with us.

Yes, in the grants line, there's blended learning for apprentices, and workplace central skills training.

Mr. Mitchell: So is that through the Construction Association then?

Mr. Trivers: You're on Construction Association specifically.

Mr. Mitchell: Yes.

Ms. Karen Stanley: There are two federally funded projects that we've started this year. One is it blended learning, and it's not necessarily through the Construction

Association, but what it does is it allows apprentices to take modules.

Some of that is through Holland College; they develop online modules that the apprentices can take so they don't have to take time off before when they're going for their Red Seal.

Mr. Mitchell: Okay, so it's Holland College (Indistinct).

Mr. Trivers: I would say no, this is not Construction Association, that's more under the SkillsPEI partnership. This is –

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: No, that's good. I just wanted (Indistinct) –

Chair: The Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks.

So going back to a few minutes ago about the lack of tradesmen, trades people rather, on the Island here, how did you arrive at those numbers? Like, the 394,000 is brand new and the 531,000 is 300,000-odd increase from last year. Where did those numbers come from?

Karen Stanley: Those are the federal programs, and so it's based on the number that the federal government has allotted us.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: How do they determine those numbers?

Karen Stanley: We submitted a project proposal, and it's based on what we estimated the expenditures to be for those items. So it could be contracts for certain items and salaries and just – and then allocated over various years because they're multiyear projects.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: That was going to be my next question. So this is not just a one-off thing. This is the beginning of a long-term project.

Karen Stanley: Right, one project is three years, I believe, and the other is five.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Is it stable funding throughout these three and five-year projects or is it stepped up or what?

Karen Stanley: I'd have to get back to you on that.

Leader of the Opposition: Okay.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I'm good. Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall this section carry? Carried.

Mr. Trivers: Your question about lifelong learning versus economic growth, it's about people, right, so it makes sense lifelong learning would be more focused on the person.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Chair: Okay, Post-secondary –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Trivers: I know, I know – I had to come back to that, could you imagine?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

[Laughter]

Chair: Order!

Post-Secondary Grants.

Total Post-Secondary Grants: 98,075,500.

Mr. McNeilly: Question.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West
Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Is this post-secondary grants, this is – can you just tell me a little bit more about it? We're going through it pretty quick.

Mr. Trivers: So the post-secondary grants provides appropriations for the post-

secondary educational institutions, student assistance, adult basic education, literacy training, and the community service bursary program.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay, so that's where the George Coles would be?

Karen Stanley: Yes, it's within the student aid.

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, that's correct, under student aid.

Mr. McNeilly: Okay. Now, by keeping it where it was last year, you realize that the price of enrolment or what the students are paying, it went up quite a bit. That must have been hard. Was that a hard decision for you not to increase funding to that?

Mr. Trivers: In fact, we did increase funding. With Collège de l'Île, there was a 2% increase. Holland College was 2%, UPEI 2%, and even AVC, the Atlantic Vet College, had a 1.25 increase.

Now, I know what you're getting at. It's a 2% increase, but did inflation go up by more than 2%? The answer is yes; but that's an agreement that we work out with the postsecondary institutions. In a couple of cases – and you could maybe comment on this – it's a multi-year commitment.

Karen Stanley: Yes, with UPEI it's a multi-year commitment for 18-19, 19-20 and 20-21 for a 2% increase in their operating funding in exchange for a maximum 2% increase in tuition.

Mr. McNeilly: Yeah, perfect.

Okay, no further questions.

Thanks.

Chair: The hon. Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Under the section University of Prince Edward Island, I just want to talk about the nursing program there. We have heard a lot about shortage of nurses.

Has there been any consideration in contacting the UPEI to see if there's the ability to increase the number of students

that have been taken to that program per year?

Mr. Trivers: We've had conversations with UPEI on that front, and UPEI's doing some really innovative things and offering new programs. Let me get back to you on that, because I'm pretty darn sure there was some initiatives to address specifically nursing, and I'll get back to you with either there were no initiatives or there are, and with the details of them, if you don't mind.

Ms. Beaton: Okay, because it would seem to me if we have a shortage in that area, that if we have postsecondary institution that actually graduates students from that program, that we could look at increasing it so that we could actually maybe close that gap that we have for nurses on the Island, would seem logical to me. I don't know if it's possible, but it would just seem –

Mr. Trivers: Oh, yeah, no, it's – definitely this would be the spot to do it. So let me find out what discussions we've had. I believe there were programs in the past and that other ones were considered, but like I said. I can't remember. Let me get back to you on that.

Ms. Beaton: Great, thank you.

Chair: Mermaid-Stratford?

Ms. Beaton: I'm good.

Thanks, Chair.

Chair: The hon. Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: Have you had a discussion with UPEI student union or Holland College student union in regards to the George Coles Bursary?

Mr. Trivers: We met with the UPEI student union. I haven't met with the Holland College student union yet. We didn't discuss the George Coles Bursary much. They didn't really raise it with us. It was one of the – student debt was really what their issue was, which of course the bursary helps address; but yeah, that's –

Mr. MacDonald: So it's not an issue for student union?

Mr. Trivers: Student debt is the issue, and the George Coles Bursary would be one way, one solution for that. We more talked about the issue as opposed to the George Coles Bursary specifically.

Mr. MacDonald: How much would it cost government to have all PEI students go to UPEI and Holland College absolutely free?

Mr. Trivers: That is a good question.

Have you ever calculated that number before?

Mr. MacDonald: We're awfully close.

Mr. Trivers: Yeah.

Mr. MacDonald: If, if –

Mr. Trivers: Do you know that number?

Unidentified Voice: Not off the top of my (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: If you went to \$3,000 like you said you were going to you're very, very close to making – you know, you could, I think you really should take a look at that.

You have two young children. You should take a look at that.

Mr. Trivers: All right, well, thank you for raising that.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. Trivers: We'll take a look and find out what those numbers are. Is that something we can do relatively easily?

Mr. MacDonald: Sure you can.

Karen Stanley: He seems to think it might be (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: Good answer.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) slush fund.

Chair: The hon. Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: No, but I did meet with the student union too and it is a concern for them, and it's in relationship to housing, finding accommodations –

Mr. Trivers: There's that, too.

Mr. MacDonald: – there's a whole element that's built into that, not just George Coles. We use that as a term, but the funding for university students in post-secondary and I really think you should – if you can find money to help them, you should find money to help them.

But, your ultimate goal should be to ensure that students of Prince Edward Island could go to UPEI or Holland College absolutely free. We're funding the institutions at 2%, approximately, but we're really not doing anymore for the students this year, so I think that's something that we really should continue to look at.

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, it's about money, as you well know, and that's –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) about the people.

Mr. MacDonald: I don't think that number (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: In order to fund for university, it's about money.

Mr. MacDonald: I don't think that number is out of reach, I'll tell you that.

Mr. Trivers: I think there are other things we can do to help with student debt.

I know I went through the co-op program and it really helped me a lot by being able to go to school four months, work four months, go to school four months and work four months. It really lessened my debt quite a bit and the co-op programs are expanding at UPEI and there are internship programs at Holland College, on-the-job training.

Those are two areas, I think I would like to explore as well to see if we can help – instead of accumulating a lot of debt and having a short amount of time to try and pay that off, intersperse the work with

the schooling, especially in the area of study to help with that student debt as well.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Just to get on the record, one of the things that we really need to be thinking about is student housing because that's quickly becoming – it's part of our crisis, right? When we look at residences and making meal plans something they need to purchase, is very problematic.

I'm just wondering why Holland College received less funding this year.

Karen Stanley: The less funding is through the restricted funding and that was because there was a federal strategic infrastructure fund that ended in 18/19.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Is Holland College under any funding agreements with the province?

Karen Stanley: There's no formal written agreement. There's no multi-year agreement (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Yeah, it's a year-to-year funding.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: What tuition increase can Holland College students expect this year?

Mr. Trivers: We believe it was a 2% increase they announced. I probably should know, I just don't know that one off the top of my head, apologies.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: In 2018, Holland College released a report and it notes that Holland College is the second-highest college tuition in the country and it's more expensive than its peers in Atlantic Canada. Are you familiar with this report?

Mr. Trivers: Sorry, I couldn't catch the – familiar with?

Ms. Bernard: The report talking about Holland College having the second-highest tuition in the country, are you familiar with that report?

Mr. Trivers: That report? I have not read that report.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Mr. Trivers: Have you read that report?

Karen Stanley: I haven't read it, but I have (Indistinct)

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: I've got two more questions here.

If we want to address pressing issues on PEI, shortages in trades being what I'm talking about, we need to invest in Holland College. So I'm wondering how government is going to invest in Holland College to ensure that it does remain fiscally sustainable, that we can sustain this programming.

Mr. Trivers: There's two sides to it. We've got to have the people that are going into the program and then we got to make sure we fund the program so they can take it.

We have met with Holland College already and we're in constant discussions with them and with the department, and yeah, you're right. That's probably one of the key ways we're going to be able to have the skilled trades people, is through Holland College. So, yeah that's where we're going.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: I'm just wondering in your meetings with Holland College if you've discussed a multi-year funding agreement that would meet its needs, if that came up in conversation.

Mr. Trivers: I believe the topic was broached, but again, I've had one meeting with them and we haven't gotten into any details like that, at least I haven't yet.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Chair.

Chair: Shall this section carry?

Leader of the Opposition: Chair? Question.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Just going back to the early childhood educators, French speaking early childhood educators, are there – I see that the funding for Collège de l'Île has actually decreased so I'm wondering – oh well, it's almost virtually the same. Sorry, it hasn't decreased but it's essentially no increase.

Are there any additional supports for educating the French speaking early childhood educators?

Mr. Trivers: The good news is that there is that early childhood education program at Collège de l'Île.

I think it's not a matter of increasing the core operating grant to the college, it's more about finding the people that want to take the program and then making sure they can afford to take it, and definitely that is something we're doing, both through the student tuition subsidies, as well as through, I believe, I think SkillsPEI possibly has programs they can tap into on that front as well. Yes, there are programs at SkillsPEI that allow to fund them so they can go to school through Collège de l'Île.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Do you know whether that program there is fully subscribed or whether there are spaces available?

Mr. Trivers: Let me get back to you on that one.

Leader of the Opposition: Okay, fine.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I would like to talk a little bit about open education resources, free textbooks, essentially, for university students. Is your government

intending to invest in that program? Or in a program to provide open educational resources?

Mr. Trivers: Oh, yes. Yes and in fact, we did have a lengthy discussion. In this case, it was with the UPEI Student Union about that and it's \$25,000 is what we're putting in this year. It will be managed through their library at UPEI and I can provide a price breakdown for you.

Really, the university professors have to choose to participate and there are three different levels of participation with different costs associated. One is where you take a course that already has an open textbook and you use it and it's relatively low cost for that – I think it's like \$1,500. Don't quote me on that.

Then there's a second level where you can take the course and you can modify it as a professor. That's a little more expensive, looking at \$2,500-\$3,000 range, I believe. Then there's a third level where if you're a university professor you can actually develop your own course and that's where \$7,500 is provided. That \$1,500-\$3,000 or \$7,500 is provided out of that \$25,000 to the professor to administer the open textbook.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I appreciate the detailed response, minister.

Then, those textbooks become free to the students at UPEI, do they?

Mr. Trivers: What happens is, yeah, the people who are taking the course are able to access those textbooks for free.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Have you entered into any discussions regionally with other universities here to – because most first-year courses are very similar from one university to another. It seems to me there's a real opportunity there for PEI to leverage the region.

Mr. Trivers: Well, exactly.

I think if UPEI – UPEI will be the first university in the region to start using open textbooks, believe it or not.

Leader of the Opposition: Great.

Mr. Trivers: So we want to work with the other universities to help them take that up as well. We haven't started those discussions yet. I think it would probably be more prudent for us to actually have a couple of programs actually using it and then we can go to, say, Dalhousie or go to the University of Moncton and say this is what we're doing.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: How many open educational resource textbooks are currently available to university students here on PEI?

Mr. Trivers: Right now? I think, as far as I know, there aren't any. I'm trying to remember back to the meeting we had, but this would be – this is a groundbreaking sort of initiative.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Given that many Island students – a lot of them stay at UPEI, but some of them will head off to Acadia or St. Thomas or whatever, other universities in the region, are you planning to make those open educational resources available to Islanders, whether they're at UPEI or perhaps in another regional university?

Mr. Trivers: I think the way the open textbook model works is, it's the professor who's teaching the course decides to use an open textbook.

If there was a professor at University of New Brunswick that decided to use an open textbook, it's really the people who are enrolled in that class that would use it as opposed to – I think the concept of making (Indistinct) doesn't quite match the way it's set up.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: With tuition going up in our institutions, I'm wondering why we don't

provide a comparable increase to student financial aid.

Mr. Trivers: That's a very similar question to what we heard about increasing the Coles bursary, they're there. It's a good question. It's expensive to go to school.

One thing, there is a debt reduction program as well that we have. If you choose to come back to PEI and say to do your post-grad studies you can choose to have some of your debt reduced. But yeah, it's something to take into consideration for sure.

Chair: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Maybe we could hop on what the Leader of the Third Party said and make it free for everyone.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Chair: Shall the section carry? Carried.

Total Post-Secondary Continuing Education
100,515,700.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Department of Education and Lifelong Learning: 418,826, 600.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Are we doing IRAC?

Mr. Trivers: Do you want to do IRAC?

All right. I think I'm on my own for that one.

Chair: Okay ladies and gentlemen, we are on page 53, Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission.

General: "Appropriations provided primarily to cover costs related to the Land and Property Division of the Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission. Operating Grant: 1,400,300"

Total General 1,400,300.

Leader of the Opposition: Question.

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

In the budget line it says: Appropriations provided primarily to cover costs related to Land and Property division blah blah blah.

Approximately how much is going to the land and property and how much is being shared with all of the other areas that the commission is involved in?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Do you have an intervention minister, is that what you said?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: I was looking up there hoping for that. You know what?

Chair, I'm not sure. I don't have any briefing notes or anything for IRAC and that's not a question I can answer. I don't have a breakdown more than what you see in front of you. I would have to say, I'll have to get back to you with that. Maybe we should revisit this when I get the proper support on the floor.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Total Island Regulatory and Appeals Commission: 1,400,300.

Mr. Aylward: That was easy do you want to do health now the same way?

[Laughter]

Mr. Aylward: I'll bring it back.

Chair: Next we have Health and Wellness.

Mr. Myers: Call the hour.

Chair: The hour has been called.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Chair, I move that the Speaker take the chair, and the Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Speaker, as Chair of a Committee of the Whole House having under consideration the grant of supply to Her Majesty, I beg

leave to report that the committee has made some progress and begs leave to sit again. I move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Honourable Leader of the Third Party, that this House adjourn until July 11th, at 2:00 p.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Have a great evening, everyone.

The Legislature adjourned until Thursday, July 11th, at 2:00 p.m.