

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Carolyn Bertram

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Speaker: Good afternoon, everyone.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

It's my pleasure to rise today to welcome a very large crowd to the gallery. I see we have students in the gallery that are here on an exchange with a class from Charlottetown Rural High School, and the class that's from away is St. Mark's Catholic High School in Ottawa. I'd like to welcome them very much to our public gallery. Ottawa, beautiful city, my second favourite spot. I lived there for about five years, lived out in the South Keys, and downtown and over in Manor Park for a while. I'm not exactly sure where St. Mark's is, but I can tell you this, that as a result of all the upsets in the first round of my hockey pool, I am definitely cheering for the Ottawa Senators to win the Stanley Cup.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier Ghiz: I would also like to welcome a friend of mine upstairs that I see from the west, and that would be Sonny Wedge. Good to see Sonny here from the beautiful District of Tignish-Palmer Road. I'm sure he knows the hon. member's family well from that area, our current member.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to welcome – I'm not sure if they're here, but there was a few people here with a little demonstration outside, or a large demonstration outside. I'd especially like to thank Chris Ortenburger who was the MC of the event. She was extremely polite, courteous, and I'd like to thank her for doing a great job emceeding the event.

I also had a couple of people who were very constructive and polite who came up and spoke to me, Doug and Mrs. Fraser, and I'd like to thank them for their great suggestions and for respecting our democracy here in the province, and being very polite and coming out and making some very worthwhile suggestions.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'd like to rise and welcome all of our students with us today, especially the students from St. Mark's. Welcome to PEI. And to your teacher Darryl O'Brien.

I'd also like to say a big welcome to Irene Larkin and the English as second language students who are back today. I also would like to say a great big hello to the 500 people who were outside trying to voice their democratic rights and share information with the government. My understanding is that we have some in the gallery and many more downstairs watching.

I'd also like to say hello to David Gordon, who is with us today from Alberton.

Finally, I'd like to say a great, big congratulations to Jessica and Steven Dorgan-Trail who had a baby girl this morning, and best wishes to grandparents on both sides as well.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I rise to welcome all of our special guests from St. Mark's high school in Ottawa.

I'd also like to take a moment to acknowledge an accomplishment last night by my former student athlete and hockey player Joel Ward, who eliminated the Boston Bruins in overtime. Joel has gone on and had a very successful career in the National Hockey League, and I want to acknowledge his success and wish him all the best in the playoff run.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Sherwood.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'd like to rise today and welcome everybody into the gallery. We have a great crowd in with us today.

I notice a good friend of mine, Frank Murphy, is with us. I saw him here the other day. It's great to have you back, Frank.

As well, I'd like to say hello to the students from St. Mark's school from Ottawa who are visiting here at the Charlottetown Rural. You may not know this, but Charlottetown Rural is my own riding, and I'm a former student of Charlottetown Rural. It's great to have their teacher, Darryl O'Brien, with us today. When you go back to Charlottetown Rural you can mention to Principal Susan Willis that I had mentioned today back in my Charlottetown Rural days as a student that we attended an exchange program in Summerland, BC, and Principal Susan Willis was one of the teachers who came to BC with us. So, tell her Robert Mitchell said hello.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Refraining from your names, hon. members, even your own.

The hon. Minister of Community Services and Seniors.

Ms. Docherty: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Welcome to the students that are here today, particularly those visiting from out of province. I, like the Member from Charlottetown-Sherwood, am a graduate of Charlottetown Rural, many years ago, probably before you were born. But I do hope you enjoy your time while here on Prince Edward Island, and we encourage you to maybe come back to university here.

I also want to recognize – I am sure there are constituents of mine in the gallery, as well, in regards to the demonstration outside that happened prior to the House opening. To

reiterate the Premier's remarks, Chris Ortenburger did a fantastic job in emceeding. Chris is a constituent of mine and she's always been very kind, very understanding, and I appreciate the fact that she handled everything so well.

I will be doing a ministerial statement later, but I do want to recognize – I know I do have up in the gallery, as well, some of the participants in the Discovering the Power in Me program, as well as possibly their instructors. But I can't see – oh, there they are. I appreciate the fact that they could come.

Also, I want to send out a note to my son Jordan's girlfriend, Brianna. Unfortunate she found herself in the hospital in Fredericton for an appendectomy last night. Very surprising thing for my son who is away on training. That's causing some disconcert for him, but all the best to Brianna on a healthy recovery.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure for me to rise as well today and greet any of the spectators in the gallery today. Of course, the large crowd that we had out front of our historic Province House expressing their democratic right over a very emotional issue.

At this time I'd also like to welcome the students from St. Mark's Catholic High School in Ottawa. I, as well as many members down here, am an alumnist of Charlottetown Rural High School. I had the extreme pleasure as well of playing rugby at Charlottetown Rural with your esteemed teacher and coach, Mr. Darryl O'Brien, of which you'll notice, Darryl, I didn't use your nickname in the House.

I'd also like to extend my condolences to the Frizzell family. Unfortunately, a very good friend of mine, Gary Frizzell, passed away just a day or two ago. It's unfortunate. He was diagnosed with cancer just a short time

ago. I would like to express my condolences to his wife Bernadette.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise in the House and welcome all our guests in the public gallery. Sonny Wedge there, sometimes referred to as "Sonny St. Louis." Of course, my opponent in the last provincial election, Mr. David Gordon. I'm certainly glad that he's my constituent, that I represent him, as the other arrangement. I'd also like to say hello to my mom who watches faithfully every day.

On a sadder note, I'd like to offer on behalf of the constituents of Alberton-Roseville and my family and myself my sincere condolences to the Campbell family on the passing of Georgie Campbell. Georgie was the wife of the late Bob Campbell and mother-in-law of Hector MacLeod, both of whom served in this House. I offer my sincere condolences.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors.

Mr. Greenan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I, too, would like to stand and acknowledge all our guests in the gallery, especially Eddie Lund who's here quite often, and Frank Murphy. Frank Murphy and I go back 50-some years, so it's nice to see Frank two days in a row up there. Also, I see a couple of former residents of Summerside, Paul and Helen Arsenault. Welcome to the gallery.

It's with some sadness in my heart that I stand to acknowledge and send condolences to the family of Mary Howatt. Mary Howatt is the mother-in-law of the mayor of the City of Summerside. Mary is a long-time friend of mine. On Monday she passed away, and on the same day her sister-in-law Dot Inman passed away. I wish to extend condolences on behalf of this House and the residents of

Summerside to their families, George and Gerald Inman and Gail Stewart.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'll welcome everybody back today and especially the people in the gallery and people watching on EastLink.

It's a very sad day for two of us here today. The minister of tourism and I, our hockey team got put out of the playoffs last night. I won't say who it was but they were Stanley Cup winners last year. You know you're dedicated in your job when your team is put out of the playoffs and you go to work the next morning.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Labour and Justice and Attorney General.

Ms. Sherry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I, too, would like to rise on the floor of the House today and welcome all of the guests in the gallery, especially all the students and our faithful partaker of the day. He's here every day. Also Paul and Helen Arsenault who are former residents of Summerside and old neighbours, and Summerside's loss is definitely Charlottetown's gain.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise today and say hi to all those who came out front today to voice their concerns.

I'd also like to say hello to all the students in the gallery, particularly to Sonny Wedge, from St. Louis, he's actually the chairperson for the municipality of St. Louis. Also to David Gordon, of Alberton, welcome.

I'd also like to welcome a former constituent of my area, which is Vincent Pitre, I guess it's Pitre now, in Charlottetown.

I'd just like to welcome all here today.

Statements by Members

Speaker:, The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Aviation Heritage Society

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

In 2009 a group of retired military and civilian personnel formed the Aviation Heritage Society to collect, preserve, and promote the military aviation heritage of Prince Edward Island from early days to the present and beyond.

As a result of a well organized fundraising drive, and support from the Island Community Fund, I had the privilege of attending the grand opening of the recently completed Air Force Heritage Park during the weekend of the 2011 Atlantic Canada Airshow. This newly designed park highlights the importance of aviation to our province as one drives into Slemon Park, where some of the province's most successful aerospace companies are located. Recently the Aviation Heritage Society was recognized for their cultural and heritage preserving achievements by the PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation. The awards ceremony, held at Eptek Centre in Summerside, was held in conjunction with Heritage Week and honours and commemorates achievements made in preserving Island heritage.

On behalf of myself and my colleagues in the Legislature I want to congratulate the Aviation Heritage Society of PEI for their efforts in preserving a piece of aviation history and winning a 2012 PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation award.

I encourage all Islanders and visitors alike to visit Summerside Aviation Park, perhaps

during August 25th and 26th at the 2012 Atlantic Canada Airshow.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Sherwood.

Relay for Life

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I will better comply with parliamentary rules on this statement.

As everyone in the Legislature is aware, April was Cancer Awareness Month, and is the month we wear daffodils to show support for those battling this disease. There are not many on PEI, or Canada, whose lives have not been touched by cancer. We all have family members, loved ones and friends who have battled this disease.

The cancer society of PEI raises awareness through many different events, but the most visible is the Daffodil Campaign. As I look around today, I see how successful the cancer society of PEI's Daffodil Campaign was. Many of us are still wearing our daffodils since receiving them on April 11th.

It is important that Islanders continue to raise money for research and new treatment options, and a possible cure. While wearing a daffodil shows our support, we need to continue the fight every day of the year. As April is now winding down, I would like to remind all Islanders that the Canadian Cancer Society Relay for Life events will be held in all three Island counties during the month of June. The Queens County Relay for Life will be held on June 8th at the Red Shores Driving Park from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. This 12-hour event not only raises money for research, but allows survivors to share their stories and encourage others to continue to hope and fight.

Registration forms for participants are available online at the Canadian Cancer Society's website, and anyone who would like to volunteer can apply online as well. I urge all Islanders to take part in the Relay for Life event at one of the five events across PEI.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Michael “Mick” Thomas

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the life of Michael “Mick” Thomas, one of the Island’s best long-distance runners. I would acknowledge that the town of Stratford is naming a street called Michael Thomas Way in honour of this outstanding athlete and former Stratford resident who lived near the Hillsborough Bridge for a large portion of his life.

Mick was born on Lennox Island in 1885. He was in his mid-twenties when he discovered his passion for running, and would soon become the winner of the Island’s top race, the Charlottetown Patriot 10 Mile Run in 1909, 1910, and 1911. Mick then went on to win the Halifax Herald-Mail 10 Mile Road Race, which was the most prestigious contest in eastern Canada. For three years, 1910, 1911 and 1912, he would be the winner.

Thomas became the first Islander to enter the Boston Marathon, finishing 26th in this race, with a time better than that of the winner from two previous years. Thomas was forced to quit running after he became afflicted with arthritis and passed away in 1958.

In 1971 Thomas received the greatest award that an Island athlete could receive, induction into the PEI Sports Hall of Fame. I’d like to ask the House to join me now in recognizing the life and especially the achievements of Mick Thomas.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Plan B protest

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We’re very pleased to see such a huge crowd out here this afternoon supporting the stop of Plan B. Not only are these people representing themselves, in many cases they are representing three and four people, and Islanders across PEI. They’ve been voicing their concerns about the Bonshaw-Churchill project for quite a while and it’s unfortunate that no one’s listening and they haven’t been able to get their voice heard.

The Premier scrapped Plan A when he heard that there was no public support for the project. My first question is to the Premier: Will you now support stopping Plan B because of the lack of support for this project?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

As Premier of the province I take my responsibility extremely seriously. When it comes to making decisions in this province, I realize that whenever a decision has to be made there are always going to be opposing views with regard to that position. We try to do the best we can every single time when making a decision.

This is an unsafe section of the Trans-Canada Highway. It was designed in the 1950s. It is unquestionably unsafe and because of it lives have been cost.

We looked at doing something through Strathgartney. There were public consultations. They asked us not to do that. They suggested that we move it up, I believe, to the north and look for a better route. That is exactly what we did. Now unfortunately, under these new circumstances there are still people opposed. There are always going to be people opposed. If I had my way it would be very simple, that anytime there was a protest, anytime I got an email, anytime I got any correspondence, I would just agree with people.

Unfortunately, that is not the role of a premier or a government that takes the responsibility very seriously. I take my responsibility extremely seriously. Doing this Plan B will save lives, will make that highway safer, will improve our trade in this province, and it's something that I believe will be good for this province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We will get this afternoon in our debate to the issues around supposed safety concerns.

But running government is about setting priorities. We know where this Premier's priorities are. Defeated MLA eight seconds later has a government job. An MLA, \$60,000 that was defeated went to give a make-believe job. This is a very serious issue. We know that government complains about getting their financial house in order.

Right now the Minister of Health and Wellness is going to start charging seniors \$75 for an ambulance bill. When you think of the amount of debt of the province, this government's going to put that debt even further. By the time the project's finished it's probably close to \$30 million that the province doesn't have. Islanders' priorities are not this government's priorities.

My question to the Premier: Do you realize you're fighting a losing battle and that's it's time you stepped up and listened to all Islanders and stop this project?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Again, I just want to point out that when it comes to the budget for this project, this is a project that has been identified many times. Many professionals across this province have lobbied to have this highway fixed for a long period of time. Right now we have approximately \$37 million in our capital budget with regard to highways. This is where we're putting our priority over the

next couple of years. Those dollars, if they're not spent on this highway project, are going to be spent somewhere else. So those dollars are already identified and they've already been reduced down from our stimulus dollars a number of years ago.

The second aspect is this is an opportunity for us to get \$8 million from the federal government to complete this project. It would be irresponsible not to accept those dollars from the federal government while at the same time improving a highway in this province and saving lives and accidents in the long run.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We know there are many roads in Prince Edward Island. One just needs to drive on the Seven Mile Road, go up to Cable Head East, if you want to see disastrous road conditions. In terms of –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Order, please!

Leader of the Opposition: – the number of deaths on highways, there are highways on PEI. There's one in particular that we've lost 13 lives, not one like this particular section.

The government's constantly pushing us towards the edge of a cliff around our budget and around the deficit. The government clearly has an addiction to spending and a quite clear disregard for taxpayer dollars.

We have no catastrophic drug coverage. If the Premier wants to spend \$16, \$18 million, he may want to start there.

But my question to the Premier: What is it going take for the Premier and this government to start realizing they work for the people of PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

We realize every single day that we work for the people of Prince Edward Island. But also, being an elected government official, you realize that you cannot keep everyone happy all the time.

The Leader of the Opposition still has trouble distinguishing between capital budgets and operational budgets. This is a capital budget expenditure.

But I do want to quote from a letter that was received and was published in the *Guardian*. It says:

“I have been involved with at least three fatalities on that stretch of highway in my capacity as a coroner for Queen’s County.

“I had lobbied the previous Conservative government about making changes to that highway but I was told it would remain the same.

“It is great to see the government is going to proceed to develop a safer highway for the travelling public on Prince Edward Island.”

Charles St. Clair Trainor, Chief Coroner of the Province of Prince Edward Island.

It’s about safety. I realize people will be upset with me, but at the end of the day, if I make a decision that’s going to save a life in this province, I’ll sleep much easier at night.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I’m sure there’s many people that think about how you sleep at night, but we won’t go there.

Right now, the election happened in October –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Order, please!

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. In October of this year, just prior to that, this government told us that our provincial deficit was \$40 million. We have an election. Two months later it’s magically up to \$80 million.

My question, again, to the Premier: He seems to worry about some people. It’s usually a select few. In order to comply with who he helped support, or they helped support him in the election, now he has to pay back some people.

My question to the Premier: Will the Premier admit that he’s wrong in forging ahead with this failed plan and a highway that nobody wants but a select few?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I don’t think the chief coroner would be considered a select few. I don’t think that families that have had fatalities on that road would be a select few. When the Leader of the Opposition makes outrageous remarks such as filling people’s pockets, she has to realize half this money comes from the federal government, and also, this project will be tendered like every other project.

Those are totally false accusations, and it’s a shame that the Leader of the Opposition would try to fuel the fire for her own personal, political gain rather than look out for what’s in the best interest of the people of Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Plan B cost

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Islanders remember very clearly 2008, but we won’t go there as to who’s pockets were filled.

But it’s been brought to our attention that the purchase of land by the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal’s department was anything but fair. In order to get people to move this government is

offering huge amounts of dollars. In order to return party favours to the faithful, this government tipped off a few people back in 2010 that there was going to be a project here and encouraged them to buy the land. Now they're going to flip it back. Another example of how this government treats a select few in a certain way.

Premier, can you confirm today for everyone: How much is this new highway that nobody wants going to cost taxpayers?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

It's very important to note that what we do as a government is we negotiate in good faith. We're trying to do that with every single landowner associated with this Plan B highway. There are no special favours being done. There's nothing like that. In fact, if things don't work out we'll just expropriate.

If you look at what happens in every other province across the country when there's major highway developments, they just automatically go to expropriation. Perhaps that's what we should do in this province. If the Leader of the Opposition thinks that's what we should do – because she's worried that someone may be treated than someone else. That is not the case. If someone comes to me with proof that someone's being treated better than someone else, I'll make sure we deal with that issue right off the bat.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Plan B and Plan A

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We'll go back to last fall when you were going to pave over the park. This is a question for the minister of transportation. You were going to pave over the park and we went out and there was public consultations, and I went out to the public consultations. One night I was sitting home – I have your pamphlet and I'm writing things down and thinking: This isn't right. They're not going to pave over a park. They're trying to trick us all into thinking.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Myers: Was Plan B devised before Plan A?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and –.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Speaker: One moment.

Order, members.

Mr. Vessey: No.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Myers: It certainly seems funny that there was all kinds of public consultation when you were going to pave the park and you wanted to hear what everybody had to say, and then all of a sudden, when you came around with your Plan B, which was your Plan A all along, you came out and you said: No, no, we had our public consultation already.

No, your public consultation was for Strathgartney.

Will the minister admit today that Strathgartney was nothing more than a diversion?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Vessey: No, Madam Speaker, it wasn't.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Plan B land purchase

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We know that this new road's going to come up through quite a new number of parcels of land, and the Leader of the Opposition has already alluded to the fact, and it's obviously going to cost the government a lot more money. So we're talking about we have 8 million that is coming from the feds and the number that you used in your capital

budget was \$16 million. That's not including the land purchase and you said that at the time. We're thinking that you could not quite make your budget figure there and we're probably thinking it's going to be 27 to \$30 million

Can you tell us how much the total land purchase will be in this deal?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, it was said in the House many times before, they have researchers over in the opposition office, but apparently they're working on another file.

This is a great opportunity we have here through the Atlantic Gateway Fund. I know back when the previous government built roads they maybe did it a different way than we do it now. I think the road into the dump in Brookfield comes to mind, but I stand to be corrected.

It's a great opportunity and we have federal funds available to fix an area of highway. I don't think anyone in this House will disagree it's not safe. As government we have a responsibility, and it's to make highways safe and that's one of our responsibilities and that's what we'll do, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Plan B and shale

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm going to move up to like a month ago now. A month ago there was a meeting and it was going to be – now, see, the government's moved away from actually having public meetings where people get to ask questions. They put up billboards and they make you go one on one with the person so nobody can hear what you're saying and they can't help build on the argument.

The people out at the Kingston Legion that night, they kind of hijacked the meeting on you and they set up the chairs and I sat at the back of the room and I watched. You got grilled pretty good. They took it right to you,

and well they should have because they deserved to have their questions answered, and I think it was right for them to actually take democracy back into their own hands.

At that meeting there was a question about how much shale it would take to build that highway. One of your own staff members turned and asked Lomer MacDonald how much shale it would take. Could you tell me why Lomer would know that?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Minister, one moment please.

Mr. Vessey: I'm sorry.

Speaker: Hon. members, respect each member in this House, please. You have the floor when you are called upon.

The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, I have no idea what the hon. member – he may have heard someone say something, but I definitely didn't hear that.

Why he would ask a staff member to ask a question – I'd like to go back and find that one out. But to me, I have no knowledge of anybody asking Lomer MacDonald anything.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Myers: So to clarify. That night at the meeting it was one of your staff members and they were standing on stage and they were asked about the shale, and they turned right like this and said: I don't know, Lomer, how many loads of shale?

You had to have seen it.

Plan B and Lomer MacDonald

Anyway, Lomer bought a piece of land out there. It's 150 acres. In 2010 he bought a piece of land out there for \$75,000. Land

that has shale on it and land that this highway goes right through.

Did Lomer know that this highway was going to go right through that land before he bought it?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I need to get to my feet because this is bordering on ridiculous. So here's what I did, just so everybody can get this crystal clear. I decided that – I went up, I negotiated with Stephen Harper to make sure that we could get Atlantic Gateway funding. He said specifically it had to be on the Trans-Canada Highway between Charlottetown and Borden. Then he said that you had to make sure that you have to use it within a certain timeframe.

Then we went out and we said: Why don't we say let's put it through Strathgarney because we think that there'll be a big protest against Strathgartney, so then we can move it up to another level where more people will be protesting? Also, Lomer MacDonald could get another contract.

I don't know where this opposition lives, but I'm flattered that if that was possible they're giving me a lot more credit for being a lot smarter than I actually am, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

People are getting pretty sick of your attitude. Actually, it's probably evident out there today if you didn't notice. You fired 474 highways employees, you fired social workers, you're attacking rural hospitals, all in the name of saving money. Yet there's no limit on how much money you can spend when it comes to your friend.

Question to the transportation minister: Can you tell us today how much money Lomer stands to make off his shale pit and the land that you're going to have to purchase back to drive a highway through it?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, the hon. member likes to put politics ahead of safety, and that's shameful.

They've done it for years and we're not about that. Every landowner in this process is treated identically. No one's special and they'll be treated all the same.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Hon. members, I would ask both sides of the House to watch your language. We're bordering on unparliamentary. The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Myers: Did I say something? Okay. Just wanted to clarify it because I wasn't sure if I said something wrong or not. I'd apologize if I did.

Lomer MacDonald and new highway

Now I'm hearing through the grapevine that that piece of land that Lomer has on it has a road built through it already. It's a brand new road, apparently. I don't know. Did Lomer already start the highway on his property?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Sheridan: You're just making a mockery (Indistinct).

Premier Ghiz: You turned a serious issue into lunacy.

Speaker: The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, the line of questioning is kind of shameful.

This is a very passionate issue for – sorry – the people outside and everyone involved, and the line of questioning to me is absurd.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Payoff to Liberal supporter

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I hear from the people out there in the district, and apparently I'm the only one that's listening to them, and they're the ones bringing the concerns. So if you think it's ridiculous, then you're telling the people out there that are bringing the concerns to me, and those are the ones that are bringing the concerns to me.

Will you admit today that your government is set to pay off one of your huge Liberal supporters?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, the answer's no.

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

Plan B and environmental impact assessment

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

You talk about passion. Let's get into something that is really passionate to people and that's the environment. My question is to the minister of environment.

Minister, environmentalists all across this province have voiced strong concerns that the environmental impact of the construction of Plan B highway and the effect that will have on the spectacular areas of the proposed project.

Minister, where is the environmental impact assessment for Plan B construction?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Labour and Justice and Attorney General.

Ms. Sherry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

That is a really good question. Right now the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal is actually working on the field work preparing to complete the environmental assessment report – or the statement – and then it will be coming to our department to proceed from then for the

environmental impact assessment that we'll be doing in our department.

So it is in the works and we are awaiting those documents, and then we will move forward from there. At that time, when the environmental impact assessment is done, there will be an opportunity once again for Islanders to bring forth their concerns and issues around it, and we will do all that is necessary to assess the impact on the environment around Plan B.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, I believe some of the property for this project has already been bought yet we do not have an environmental impact assessment done, which is required for such a project. Obviously, as the 4 million in land purchases are now underway, the environmental impact assessments must have been completed.

So minister, will you share for us today the findings of that assessment and table a copy of it to the House?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Labour and Justice and Attorney General.

Ms. Sherry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To answer the hon. member's question, we are following all the guidelines, and as we go through the process step by step the public will be well aware of what's happening.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Plan B environmental proposal

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Come on, minister. You plan on spending over \$30 million on this project and you don't have an environmental impact assessment done now, and you say this is a go-ahead deal? Unbelievable.

Minister, according to the *Environmental Protection Act* a written proposal on Plan B project would have to have been filed within your department. Will you table a copy of that proposal into this Legislature today?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Labour and Justice and Attorney General.

Ms. Sherry: Madam Speaker, the project on the Plan B highway is being conducted in the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

All the guidelines are being followed. They are doing the field work at the present time, and that information will come to the department of environment, and at that time the assessments will be completed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Contravention of *Environmental Protection Act*

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Minister, according to the *Environmental Protection Act* you are to notify the public of the proposal and provide an opportunity for comment. But, minister, I understand that no such opportunity has been made available to the public on the Plan B alternative.

Minister, why are you contravening the *Environmental Protection Act*?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Labour and Justice and Attorney General.

Ms. Sherry: Madam Speaker, I will answer the hon. member for the third time.

There is a process. The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal has the lead on this project. They are conducting the field work for the environmental assessment. When that work is done – they are absolutely following those guidelines. When it is completed it will come over to the department of environment, and the work will continue from there.

Part of the environmental impact assessment includes a public consultation. Individuals will be able to come forward and voice their concerns once again.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Plan B and hemlock stand

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, I don't understand how you can go ahead with Plan B and not have any environmental impact assessments done on it.

Minister, there is a 300- to 400-year-old hemlock stand that would be completely eliminated by Plan B. That's twice the age of Confederation. As minister of the environment, are you not concerned with the destruction of this ancient stand of trees?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Labour and Justice and Attorney General.

Ms. Sherry: Madam Speaker, I will reiterate to the hon. member for the fourth time on the floor of this Legislature.

Obviously, he needs to be listening to what I'm saying instead of reading.

An Hon. Member: You don't know. That's why, you don't know. You can't answer the question.

Ms. Sherry: There is a process –

Speaker: Order, please!

Ms. Sherry: – that is going to be followed. The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal is in the process of doing the field work at the present time.

All of those issues that the hon. member has mentioned will definitely be taken into consideration. There is a process to follow. We are doing that. The department of transportation has done that. When it comes to us we will carry out the environmental impact assessment and follow the guidelines, and there will be consultation

about all of the issues that are of importance to the people and also the concerns around the environment.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Protection of environment

Mr. Perry: Madam Speaker, this minister does not understand her department.

You are there to protect the environment. An environmental impact assessment must be done before any project can get the okay to go ahead. Your government said: Yes, we're going ahead with Plan B, and you don't have an environmental impact assessment yet on it? I cannot believe you'd allow that to happen or your government would go ahead with it.

So, again, you're having these secret deals behind closed doors and you're not being transparent, you're going ahead with whatever you want to do. You're just going to bulldoze it down someone's throat.

To the minister of environment, I understand that less than 1% of the land in this province has old-growth forest yet you want to bulldoze those down too. Is this how you protect the natural history and the environment of this province?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, I think he may have worked in the environment department.

He probably knows the protocol around what he's discussing here, or I would hope he would.

We are in the middle of an environmental assessment. It's strict guidelines set out by the federal government and with the provincial government. We'll follow all the guidelines to a T. As far as the old-growth forest the hon. member is talking about, our department is very well aware of the old-growth forest. I'm proud to say today that

there will be 99% of that forest untouched as we go forward with this (Indistinct).

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale.

Miltonvale Park fire school

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Environment, Labour and Justice and Attorney General.

Minister, this government has shown its appreciation to volunteer firefighters throughout the province with a \$500 tax rebate and the construction of a new fire school in the community of Miltonvale Park.

Mr. MacKinley: Through Island Community Fund.

Mr. Dumville: Exactly. Minister, would you update the Legislature on the process of this new facility?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Labour and Justice and Attorney General.

Ms. Sherry: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and that's a great question.

I'd probably like to start by commending our volunteer firefighters across the province. I don't think there is anyone on the floor of this Legislature that doesn't commend them and respect them for the work that they do for our communities from one tip of the province to the other.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Sherry: To answer the question of the Member from West Royalty-Springvale, it's a timely question. Actually, they're moving in on Tuesday. Tim Jenkins was in to pick up the key, and they're very excited about the new school. They're starting to move in the first of next week.

Speaker: Supplementary question, the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale.

Mr. Dumville: Yes, minister. Could you tell the House how much the government has provided for this new facility?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Labour and Justice and Attorney General.

Ms. Sherry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The other thing I'd like to mention, while I'm on the floor, is to commend the work of the former minister of justice, who's now the Minister of Health and Wellness. Put a tremendous amount of work into that.

I believe Madam Speaker also had a big part to play in that.

I believe the Island Community Fund in Prince Edward Island put \$150,000 into the project and the volunteer firefighters, themselves contributed \$150,000. I believe that the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal put about \$506,000 into this wonderful project, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Second supplementary, the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale.

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

You mentioned that Mr. Jenkins said that they're moving in on Tuesday. Now, they hold classes and everything. When would the school be fully operational for class work?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Labour and Justice and Attorney General.

Ms. Sherry: My understanding, Madam Speaker, is that they're hoping to be fully operational by the end of May, and I'm sure that the House will be informed, and, certainly, the general public. I believe they're looking at September of this year for a grand opening. I'm sure the Member from West Royalty-Springvale will be attending, and a lot of other members here in the Legislature.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors.

Festival of Small Halls

Mr. Greenan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Yesterday on the drive home I heard on the radio that on next week, on May 6, the first cruise ship arrives in our capital city, thus kicking off the summer season and tourist season. Many of us are having visitors come for the summer and planning our vacations.

A few years ago we started a festival of Small Halls.

My question is to the Minister of Tourism and Culture: Is the festival of small halls going for 2012?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

One of the greatest assets that we have in our province is our small halls and venues all across Prince Edward Island. As the hon. member knows from Summerside-St. Eleanors, the Small Halls Festival has been nominated for three ECMAs and it was also the winner as one of the best musical events on Prince Edward Island at the PEI Music Awards.

Yes, we are planning on hosting the Small Halls Festival again here on Prince Edward Island in June.

Speaker: Supplementary question, the hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors.

Mr. Greenan: Okay, it's happening in June.

Mr. Minister, do you have any idea, is it expanding, the locations and where can people get tickets?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Henderson: Madam Speaker, I don't want to pre-empt the organizers within the Small Halls Festival.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Henderson: But we do want to announce in early May all the performers that we're going to be showcasing here on Prince Edward Island. We do feel it is going to be a great attraction to all visitors that come to Prince Edward Island, as well as many Islanders alike.

But I can inform the House that two of the locations are going to be, one, in the riding of Summerside-St. Eleanors, and that's going to be at the St. Mary's Anglican Church, and also at St. Mark's Hall in Lot 7 in my riding, Madam Speaker.

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

Plan B and buffer zone trees

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the minister of the environment. Your job is to protect the environment, not to protect your government.

Minister, I understand that most of the trees in this particular grove exist within a 15-metre buffer zone from one of the several streams that will be impacted by the construction of this project.

Minister, under your very own buffer zone legislation it would be illegal for a landowner to cut down these trees. Why is it not illegal for the department of transportation to cut down these trees?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, I thought I was quite clear on my last answer that the hon. member there that works in environment – I believe he started full-time after May 28, 2007 – he knows very well there's an environmental assessment process, and we are following the guidelines of the federal guidelines as well as our provincial guidelines to a T.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Environment and secret deals

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I think they have to get name tags over there because I'm asking the minister of environment. Minister of environment, is this more of your government's secret deals and double standards?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, again, there's federal guidelines.

They're very stringent, and the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road knows that. So the answer there is we're following all guidelines.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Seven Mile Road

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

For today's segment of Island Voice I would like to ask my question on behalf of Louis from Cardigan. Louis, too, is concerned about the safety of our Island roads.

My question is to the minister of transportation on behalf of Louis. Why is this government spending 16 million for safety improvements in Bonshaw but ignoring the dangerous Seven Mile Road in his area?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, our government, we have a job at highways to make highways safe, and we've addressed a lot of areas through our capital budget every year.

The highway in question, as I've told the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, we'll be looking at it.

We have to invest in our infrastructure and they're telling us we can't afford it. I know when our government came into power what

happens with the lack of investing in infrastructure. I know one of the first challenges the hon. former minister of transportation had was a lack of infrastructure in our school buses. Imagine, we had to replace \$5 million of school buses to take our children to school. Our manors were falling down. Our seniors were living in manors that had been neglected. They were falling down around our seniors, our most loved seniors. Then, our children were going to school, schools full of mould, that that government did not address through investments.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Vessey: But yet they invested in-

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Vessey: They invested into –

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Vessey: They invested into plans such as Dunderave. I think Polar Foods comes to mind. There's one more, crab loans. That's how they choose, and that's their money. Our government won't do it, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the minister of transportation. Do you recognize that the Seven Mile Road is a dangerous stretch of highway and it needs improvement?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, again, our department, we have a capital budget that we spend on highways every year, and this year our budget is 37, around 37 million. Out of that budget we're very fortunate to be able to partner with the federal government with 3 million of that to go towards the alignment out in the Churchill area.

In our five-year window, as I've said to the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, we have allocated the dollars and will be

looking at the Seven Mile Road this summer through our capital budget.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Plan B and scenic beauty

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

A question to the minister of tourism. The area of this province which the proposed highway is slated for is renowned for its beautiful rolling hills, natural rolling hills, I might add, and scenic vistas. Many views of this area have appeared in our tourism brochures over the years, and in paintings in our various art stores and craft shops.

Minister, do you believe that putting another major highway through one of the most scenic areas of the province will enhance the beauty of this area?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, I had a press conference back, I believe, in December of 2011, and the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock I believe was at the press conference.

I believe he did an interview with the local newspaper. May I quote his quote in the paper?

“Opposition MLA [from Stratford-Kinlock], who attended the press conference, gave the updated plan thumbs up...”

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Vessey: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Order, please!

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Minister, I certainly do not recall that, but –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Aylward: – one thing that I –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Aylward: I'll take it up with that later, but –

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Aylward: – but one thing I would like to add is that I'm certainly hoping now as minister of transportation you don't follow the same accounting practices you did when you were in tourism, or the Auditor General will be looking at your department as well very seriously.

Plan B and tourism operations

This question is to the minister of tourism, if he's able to stand.

Minister, tourism numbers have declined every year since your government came to power. Tourists that do manage to get here do not want to see pavement. What discussions have you had with the minister of transportation regarding the impact of this unnecessary and costly construction project on the tourism operations that are found along this highway?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Yes, when visitors come to Prince Edward Island they expect to drive on safe, standardized roads that meet and comply with all the standards put in place, whether that's on Route 2 or whether that's with the Trans-Canada Highway. It's incumbent upon us as a government to make sure that we are providing that. When those people drive up through the Trans-Canada Highway from across the Strait that they're going to see all the scenic beauty that Prince Edward Island has to offer, and they're going to see it in a safe manner, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Minister, as you well know, as all Islanders know, the only reason this project is taking place is because the Trans-Canada is part of –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Aylward: – the federal government's Atlantic Gateway initiative, and since there is no more infrastructure funding available, the government is forced to spend those dollars somewhere.

Minister, will you stand up for the tourism industry of this province, take your concerns to the transportation minister, who seems to have a blind spot for beauty, and insist that other alternatives be found to address the safety issues on this highway? Will you do that, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, that's one of the reasons the alignment in Churchill is so important to change.

The increase in the tourism traffic over several years has increased substantially since the highway was built in 1952, and we want everybody that travels the highway, whether they're Islanders, whether they're tourists, whether they're trucks or school buses, we want to provide a safe highway.

What a great opportunity we have here. Again, I want to hats off to the former minister of transportation who lobbied long and hard to his federal counterparts to be able to get us – to be able to trigger the Atlantic Gateway fund for this province.

We're addressing the area of Churchill because of safety, and I just wonder if the opposition is against safety on our highways (Indistinct).

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I might ask the minister of transportation to go back and look. Since 1952 there has been major upgrades done on that stretch of highway over the years to accommodate the larger numbers of tourism. Unfortunately, over the last four years, our tourism numbers have decreased on your government's watch.

Plan B and CSS minister

This question is to the hon. Minister of Community Services and Seniors.

Minister, you were elected to represent the best interests of your constituents, and to be a voice for them in this government and the Legislative Assembly. Do you support the construction of this second highway through the scenic hills of Bonshaw and Churchill?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much.

Obviously the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock knows that members of Executive Council only answer questions in relation to their departments.

But obviously I know that the member that he just spoke of is extremely passionate about her riding, she's extremely passionate about safety in the province, and takes all these issues extremely seriously.

Speaker: Final question, the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The MLA for Kellys Cross-Cumberland and the Minister of Community Services and Seniors attended a public meeting this week with members of the South Shore Chamber of Commerce. This member received serious opposition to the proposed new highway from residents of her district, including the president of her own Liberal association. When asked if she was going to support the residents and voters of her district, she replied, and I quote: That she was already kicked out of Cabinet once and she was not going there again.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Aylward: Premier, this behaviour from your Cabinet minister is appalling. Is this the kind of government you are running?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: No, and the information that he has probably comes from the same grapevine that the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters gets from, and all that information is in fact incorrect.

Speaker: End of Question Period.

Statements by Ministers

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

The hon. Minister of Community Services and Seniors.

Discovering the Power in Me

Ms. Docherty: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It is a pleasure to rise today to update Islanders exactly on what's happening in a very successful program that my department has been very pleased to be part of. It's called Discovering the Power in Me.

The Discovering the Power in Me program, which is supported between our own province, the federal government, and in partnership with the Canadian Paraplegic Association of Prince Edward Island and the PEI Council of People with Disabilities, was launched in February of this year to assist Islanders with disabilities to gain skills that will help them obtain employment.

During the classroom component, participants learn how to enhance their resumé and cover-letter writing, they improve both their time and stress management, they develop self-assessment skills and, ultimately, how to find employment. While all of these tangible techniques are important in preparing for employment, it was our goal that participants would gain even more value from the program by building self-confidence and self-worth.

I had the pleasure of meeting the Discovering the Power in Me participants in February of this year at the official launch, and I was fortunate enough last week to pay them a second visit. I want to express how extremely impressed I was when I was there to see the difference in these individuals. They were beaming with confidence, engaging in group discussion, projecting their voices throughout the room. That was incredible.

I want to acknowledge the coordinator Krista Torraville and the facilitator Ginette Roberge, as well as Paul Cudmore from the Canadian Paraplegic Association and, of course, Cathy Rose from the Council of People with Disabilities. Without these people they could not have made the difference in the lives of the participants. For me to be there, to watch how they have changed, to see the changes in these individuals, is incredible. I want you to know that all of these people have made a tremendous impact in the lives of these adults.

I am pleased to share as well with the House that these 10 participants now are in the process of a job search and interview process. Two of the participants have already confirmed employment and two are planning to attend Holland College this fall.

In closing, I want to congratulate all of the participants in the Discovering the Power in Me program. They are Ryan, Martin, Marcella, Mike, Kurtis, Nicholas, Allison, Dawn, James and Roger, who are joining us between here in the gallery and downstairs in our media room. Their dedication and hard work over the past three months has been fantastic and I wish all of them the best of luck, not only in furthering their education, but entering our Island workforces as independent adults.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

National Medical Laboratory Week

Mr. Currie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As Minister of Health and Wellness, I am pleased to recognize this week as National Medical Laboratory Week.

I would like to offer my support to the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science, CSMLS, and the Prince Edward Island Society of Medical Technologists.

Medical laboratory professionals are vital to the early detection and management of disease as 85% of a physician's diagnosis and treatment decisions are based on the laboratory test results performed by medical laboratory technologists and medical laboratory assistants across the country. Some of the various areas in which they work include microbiology, hematology, biochemistry, blood services, histology, cytology, immunology and genetics.

During National Medical Laboratory Week, on behalf of the provincial government, I would like to acknowledge all the medical laboratory professionals who serve on the front lines of our public health system: 105 medical laboratory technologists and five medical laboratory assistants.

Our health care system is fortunate to have skilled and dedicated lab professionals as key members of the patient care team. We thank you for your work in our health care system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Spring Weight Restrictions

Mr. Vessey: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Today I am pleased to announce that effective tomorrow, April 27, beginning at 12:01 a.m., weight restrictions will be removed from all Island roads. This is earlier than most years because of warmer spring weather conditions.

Spring weight restrictions play a critical role in preserving the significant investments that have been made in our highway infrastructure. They help provide a

safeguard against excessive damage to roads when they are at their most vulnerable.

The inconvenience of weight restrictions is more than offset by the savings in highway maintenance costs.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of the trucking industry and Island farmers for their cooperation and compliance since spring weight restrictions were imposed.

I also want to thank my department's engineering team and the safety enforcement team for all their hard work during this time period.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

Congratulations to Sanofi Biogenius Challenge Canada Competition Winners

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last week the PEI competition for the Sanofi Biogenius Challenge Canada took place and yesterday the winners attended the Atlantic regional competition. The program is run by Innovation PEI as an outreach to high school students to participate in a biotechnology-based project. Students submit proposals and staff from Innovation PEI pair them with professional mentors to execute the project.

This year there were seven competitive projects in the areas of neurological, agricultural, environmental and food-based research. I would like to extend my congratulations to the following students, mentors and teacher advisors who competed at the Atlantics:

Sherri Wood and Cassy Powers from Westisle Composite High School, with mentor Dr. Andy Tasker and Daphne Gill from the Atlantic Veterinary College and teacher advisor Marilyn Hudson.

Montague Regional High School students Ellen Holland and Lillian Klein, their mentor Dr. Tasker and Annabelle Perez-Gomez from the AVC, and teacher advisor Jonathan Hayes.

Brandon Neale and Emily Oftedal from Three Oaks Senior High School, their mentor Dr. Angela Riveroll from Solarvest Bioenergy, and teacher advisor Chris Higginbotham.

Also from Three Oaks Senior High School, Smrithi Santosh, Jenna MacKinnon, Amanda Rundle, and Janelle Bradley, along with advisors Dr. Jeff Chisholm, Dr. Junzeng Zhang, Dr. Xixhong Ji, all of National Research Council, and teacher advisor Chris Higginbotham.

Lastly, from Charlottetown Rural High School, Haylea Whelan and Simon Trivett with mentors Dr. Jim Johnston, Julie Dauphine from the National Research Council, along with teacher advisor Donna Gill.

Prince Edward Island was extremely competitive with her Atlantic counterparts. Of the 18 projects presented, PEI's five scored impressively well. It was noted by the coordinators that the skill level and quality of the projects was of the highest quality. The winning project for PEI by Ellen Holland and Lillian Klein from Montague examined the effects of bioactives in natural products on neurodegenerative diseases.

I applaud the staff from Innovation PEI, members of our biotech community, and teachers for working with our Island students, encouraging our future innovators in this expansive field of study.

Congratulations.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Presenting and Receiving Petitions

Tabling of Documents

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, by leave of the House, I beg leave to table the document with 3,087 signed names to stop Plan B and I move,

seconded by the Honourable Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, that the said document be now received and do lie on the Table.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Reports by Committees

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As Chair of the Standing Committee on Privileges, Rules and Private Bills, I beg leave to present a report of the said committee on Private Bill No. 200, *An Act to Amend An Act to Incorporate the Trustees of the Nine Mile Creek Presbyterian Church in Connection With the Church of Scotland*, and Private Bill No. 201, *An Act to Amend the Prince Edward Island Mutual Insurance Company Act* and proposed changes to the Rules of the Legislative Assembly.

Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Environment, Labour and Justice and Attorney General, that the same be now received and read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Ms. Casey: Madam Speaker, on April 12th, 2012, Private Bill No. 200, *An Act to Amend An Act to Incorporate the Trustees of the Nine Mile Creek Presbyterian Church in Connection With the Church of Scotland* and Private Bill No. 201, *An Act to Amend the Prince Edward Island Mutual Insurance Company Act*, were referred to your committee for its consideration.

Having considered the matter, your committee finds both bills to be private in nature and recommends that pursuant to Rule 75 the following fees be charged:

An Act to Amend An Act to Incorporate the Trustees of the Nine Mile Creek Presbyterian Church in Connection With the Church of Scotland, the fee is waived.

An Act to Amend the Prince Edward Island Mutual Insurance Company Act, the fee is \$60.

Your committee is also making several recommendations concerning the Rules of the Legislative Assembly:

One: Having reviewed Rule 108 subsection (1) which states: "The committee, by majority, decides which witnesses should be called, if any" your committee recommends no change be made.

Two: Your committee recommends that the daily prayers continue in their current format.

Three: Your committee recommends the following changes to the Rules of the Legislative Assembly:

(A) that Rule 19 (1) be amended by the substitution of the word "amendment" for the word "motion."

(B) that Rule 48(b) be amended by the substitution of the word "referral" for the word "committal," by the substitution of the words "any matter" for the words "a bill or question" and the addition of the words "to Committee of the Whole House, or any standing or special committee."

(C) that Rule 49 be amended by the addition of the words ", which shall be debatable," following the word "motion."

(D) that Rule 58 be amended by the substitution of the words "any matter" for the words "a bill, resolution or any question" and the addition of the words "and shall be decided without debate."

(E) that Rule 90(3) be amended by the substitution of the word "eight" for "10" and the deletion of the words "To take effect with the commencement of the Third Session of the Sixty-third General Assembly, membership on a standing committee shall not exceed eight members."

Your committee notes that adoption of these amendments will standardize wording within the Rules and add clarity where required. There will be no change to the current interpretation or practice.

Your committee also reports that it will be studying the matter of time limits on debate, and will inform all members of the results of its research and discussion in its next report.

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Environment, Labour and Justice and Attorney General, that the report of the committee be adopted and that consideration of Private Bill No. 200 and Private Bill No. 201 be added to the Orders Other Than Government of this House.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Before it's carried, hon. members, the hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Myers: Just want to briefly speak to this report, particularly in the last part of the report where we talked about the time limits and stuff.

I'm not sure if all of the House is aware, but the Government House Leader and myself work very hard to make sure that we are on the same page, that we know what's going on as the day operates. I always tell the Government House Leader that (Indistinct) prepared, you can respond to our motions. We had motions already this week that we did that for, we'll have one here this afternoon in a few minutes that we're going to have the floor open to.

We've also negotiated that the members that aren't ministers will have some time made available to them so that they can bring forward their own motions to the House. I think that the work that we're doing together is a stride forward and there's great cooperation to make sure that the House operates well. I just want to note that in the report.

I mean, it's not necessarily a bad thing that a study is done, but there's a lot of work that goes into it every day to make sure that there's cooperation that the House proceeds and there are no major hiccoughs along the way.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Any further speakers?

Shall it carry? Carried.

Introduction of Government Bills

Motions Other Than Government

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The opposition would like to call Motion 29.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Mr. Clerk.

Clerk: Motion No. 29.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters moves, seconded by the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock, the following motion:

WHEREAS this government intends to realign a section of the Trans-Canada Highway through an environmentally sensitive area of this province;

AND WHEREAS this government has ignored the concerns of Prince Edward Islanders and residents in the area who have concerns for the protection of the scenic vistas and ecological treasures along the proposed route of this new highway;

AND WHEREAS there are private forest lots which are an integral component of this province's natural history;

AND WHEREAS the concerns for the safety of motor vehicles travelling on this highway can be addressed with a much smaller scaled construction project which would not require the destruction of one of the most scenic areas of our province;

AND WHEREAS the 16 million of taxpayers' dollars that will be utilized for this destruction is an unnecessary expenditure;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly call upon this government to halt immediately its plans for the construction of this new highway and to pursue other options to address its safety concerns;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the government utilize remaining dollars to address other highway projects deemed as priority.

Speaker: Thanks, Mr. Clerk.

To open debate, the mover of the resolution, the hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Today I rise on a motion of great concern to the taxpayers of this province, to the environment of our province, to tourism and to the residents of Bonshaw and Churchill areas. I'm talking of course about this government's Plan B to the Trans-Canada highway.

Frankly, I don't understand why this motion should even have to be on the floor of the Legislature. The truth is there is no need for the opposition to be calling this motion because there is absolutely no need for the government to be spending 27 to \$30 million of taxpayers' money on this project in the first place.

We are here today debating this issue and Islanders are wondering why. That's the \$30 million question on the minds of Islanders today. Why is the government doing this? Why is the government spending \$30 million for highway work that is not necessary? Why is the government putting 800 Islanders out of work? At the same time, wasting taxpayers' dollars on a project that will destroy one of the most picturesque areas in the province. It just makes no sense to anyone.

Everyone knows this government spent this province into a financial hole that will be very difficult to get out of. Everyone knows that this government is raising fees and taxes by \$7.2 million this year to pay for their \$2.4 billion debt.

Everyone knows that the extravagant spending ways of this government have to stop and yet no one knows why government is insisting. They are insisting on mowing down old growth forests to build a highway that no one wants. No one knows why this government wants to destroy the natural heritage of this province and replace it with pavement. At this rate we'll soon be advertised as the pavement paradise of Canada.

We suspect that the price tag of this project will likely be in the \$30 million range before

the work is all said and done. Islanders want to know why this government has fired 20 social workers to pay for a highway that is environmentally damaging to our province.

Why is this government spending this money when they're putting 237 highway workers out of a job? Why are they spending this money when they are going to put another 60 workers out of a job through changes to sanding and salting operations? Why are they worried about safety on this highway yet planning to reduce the amount of sanding and salting on our highways, reducing the safety to our Island travelers on our roads?

Prince Edward Islanders are baffled. They simply cannot understand where the urgency and importance of the work of these changes to the Trans-Canada Highway came from. The announcements of this project caught everyone off guard. This government for the past five years has never mentioned any concerns about this stretch of road to Borden. Now, suddenly, it's a matter of great urgency.

I believe that this project is nothing more than a glorified make-work project. I believe that this government, because it has failed miserably creating jobs for Islanders, has to concoct something for our highway workers even though they still don't have enough work for them all.

A few years ago when the Premier was off to Ottawa looking for money he was calling the Cornwall a priority of government. He was looking for a cool 40 to \$50 million. Once again, however, this government's grandiose plans went downstream after two years of talk. That was reminiscent of the billion-dollar wind farm that never materialized. The talk suddenly talked about the Cornwall bypass and soon reverted to the need of a third electricity cable, which they had apparently forgotten about, and if we soon don't get will see us all in the dark.

I find it hard to understand why the Cornwall bypass was the Premier's major priority for funding under the Atlantic Gateway Initiative just a few years ago. If there's such a great concern about the safety of this stretch of highway, why wasn't this project on the table then? It is baffling, and

makes Islanders question the motives of this government.

I believe the real motive for the construction of this magnitude and this highway is this government is caught short. They make all kinds of promises to Liberal friends for road construction projects and went on major spending sprees during the election, and now they have no money. Now the road builders are asking: Where is the work going to come from that is going to sustain them for the next three years? Everyone knows this government spent seven years of federal infrastructure money in three years, primarily to buy votes for the 2011 election.

Prior to the election this government seemed to have tons of money to spend. There was no talk of cutbacks. There was no talk of cutting programs and services to Islanders. There was definitely no talk of HST. Were they just fooling Islanders? Yes, of course they were.

They didn't want to tell Islanders the truth. They didn't want to tell Islanders that they were going to implement the HST. They didn't tell Islanders that they had run up another \$100 million deficit. It's laughable that they could suggest that they didn't know that the province was in such bad financial straits. They knew, they just didn't want Islanders to know.

Islanders know that you can't have a \$100 million deficit and not know that you're going to have to make cuts. But this government didn't want Islanders to know the truth. They hid the truth about the financial situation away from voters. Now Islanders know the truth and it is not a pretty picture. Now Islanders know that their government is in an even larger deficit position than what they were told and that the HST has got to be brought in on their backs so they can pay their bills. Which makes us question, again: Why is this project going ahead if the province is really trying to save money?

It's pretty clear that there is no other money available for road work in this province. This government has to come up with \$8 million under the Atlantic Gateway Initiative and the federal government will provide the rest. The Atlantic Gateway Initiative covers only the Trans-Canada

Highway. So, you guessed it, the government concocted a way to get that extra \$8 million in funding.

I also find it disturbing that the minister of environment seems to have no regard or concern at all about the destruction of this environmentally sensitive area. The old-growth forest is estimated to be about 350 years old yet the minister of environment doesn't care that they'll be ploughed under.

I understand, as well, there are several streams that will be negatively impacted by this construction project. It's somewhat ironic that this province has no regard for its own environmental laws yet has no problem fining farmers \$10,000 for violating buffer zone laws. But, no, they'll violate these laws, damage streams, cut down trees and show total disregard for buffer zone regulations.

The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal is pretty crafty. He put out a press release saying that government had abandoned the original plan to cut this highway through PEI's first provincial park. He told Islanders in that release that government had listened to the concerns and voices of the residents. He talked about their great consultation, but he failed to indicate that there was no public consultation about their second choice.

I'm not going to get into the safety issues on this highway because I know that people have been killed and injured. But I do believe that these issues can be addressed without having to build another major highway through this area. I believe the concerns can be addressed without spending \$30 million. I believe that if the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal was really interested in saving taxpayers' dollars, he would ask his engineers to find a way to make this road safer without destroying half of the country.

The minister isn't interested in listening to that suggestion, because if he does, then it might only cost \$2 million. Then that \$8 million in federal money would disappear. That would be a loss, yes, but in my opinion, it would be worth the price in terms of preserving the ecologically sensitive area of our province. I think it'd be worth the price of ensuring that this area remains an area of natural beauty and soft rolling hills.

The province would also end up saving dollars that could go towards paying down some of their debt or to hire a few more doctors or towards improving wait times.

What disturbs me greatly is that I have great fears that this project was concocted to line the pockets of some Liberal bagmen who were given a heads up on this project might go through, and who scurried out and bought property at a cheap price and will now sell it back at exorbitant profits.

Islanders are not stupid. They know what's going on and they know it's (Indistinct).

Speaker: Hon. member, just watch your language there.

Mr. Myers: What did I say? I'll retract it. Sorry.

Speaker: Yes, you don't have to repeat it, but (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: Yeah, yeah.

They also know that this government services friends and exercises patronage on a very grand scale. This government is more interested in lining the pockets of its supporters than about protecting the environment and beauty of our province that is so valued by our residents and charms those who visit. It says it's exercising restraint but has no problems about spending what little money taxpayers have left on a project that is not needed.

I think this is an outrage, a tragedy and an example of a self-serving and corrupt government. There are no other words to say. I would simply ask that this government truly listen to the residents of the area and put a halt to this project.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: I'll move to the seconder of the motion, the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to this motion this afternoon. I stand here to second the motion which has been brought before this House. The proposed

Plan B highway through Bonshaw and New Haven is a plan that many saw as a negative since it was announced in December. Indeed, since Plan B was announced, it seems as though nobody is entirely on board with this project, especially those who live around this area.

When this project was announced the first glaring problem was the massive price tag associated with it, at the staggering price of approximately \$30 million. This project, since it was first announced, has sounded like an unnecessary waste of taxpayer dollars. With that in mind, this government has defended this price tag on numerous occasions. They have told this House that they feel comfortable spending this amount of money because the province is only scheduled to pay for \$8 million of this project. Indeed, the Premier and the transportation minister are on record, in this House, saying that the highway will be the result of what they called 50 cent dollars.

Even if the province is only scheduled to foot half of the intended bill, \$8 million, which, of course, remains to be seen, the project is still costing Island taxpayers an astonishing amount of money, 22 million, plus 8 million from the feds. This is an unfortunate amount of money to be spending when the government has clearly not taken into account the majority of citizens in this province.

The interesting part about the entire Plan B proposal is that the scheduled budget for the project, thus far, is well over 22 million. But this is only the scheduled budget. As this government's quite aware, I am sure, these types of projects have a tendency to always run way over budget.

This government is no stranger to coming in over budget. After all, if running a \$100 million deficit in a province of just over 140,000 people does not speak volumes about the government's ability to spend appropriately, I'm not sure what does.

This government has spent itself into a deep black hole over the past five years. It has done so in a way which is most reckless. They have sunk money into buildings that nobody uses, they have sunk money into programs that do not work, they have sunk money into protecting their friends, and they

have sunk money into job creation initiatives which clearly have not worked.

Best of all, when this government realized it was time to rein in their spending a little bit, what did they do? They passed the buck off onto Islanders is what they did. This has been seen through the cuts to the health care services in the province, which the good minister himself over there said would not happen. We saw this when the government started cutting positions all across the province, putting hard-working individuals, with families to feed and provide for out of work. Finally, we saw this when the government told Islanders that they could expect to give this government an extra \$25 million in taxes each and every year, a plan which involves this government pulling the wool over the eyes of Island taxpayers.

This government has attempted to justify the Plan B highway through New Haven and Bonshaw by telling Islanders it was unsafe, by telling Islanders that this was a project that was in dire need of completion. I think I can speak for absolutely everyone in this House when I say we are always looking out for the safety of Islanders. At no point would any member of this House attempt to jeopardize the safety of Island motorists in any way, shape or form.

That being said, the stretch of highway which is being considered for lack of safety arguably possesses the same amount of safety concerns as various other Island roads. For the Premier and the transportation minister to stand up in this House and tell us and the rest of this province that the only possible solution is to totally reroute the highway and burn through millions of dollars this province cannot afford to spend in the process is quite interesting.

We in opposition agree that the current stretch of highway along the Trans-Canada poses its fair share of safety concerns. However, we all agree that what is being proposed is not the only option. To spend the amount of money that is being suggested for this project just does not seem appropriate given the situation this province is currently in, even if we are receiving these famous 50 cent dollars.

We in the opposition believe this highway can be improved without this massive price

tag. We believe that this current stretch of highway can be improved without spending such an enormous amount of taxpayer money. The transportation minister, whenever we ask him questions on this project, likes to get defensive and question whether or not we care about the safety of this road, which is a shame.

We in the opposition just believe that a project with a price tag this large is not called for. Whether it be improving an existing stretch of highway through road repairs, through a different plan altogether, whatever it takes, there must be a way to widen the road in certain dangerous sections, or reduce the grade on some of those turns, without costing Islanders taxpayers such a large price.

The transportation minister likes to inform everyone that these experts he likes to consult have said that the only real option is to totally redo the section. We think there's a better way, and we are not alone. It isn't as though this concept is new. People all across the Island have voiced their opinion to this government that the current road can be improved without making a completely new road. We have seen this throughout various letters to the editor in the *Guardian*. We have also heard this from Islanders who travel this stretch of road quite often.

In fact, I recently spoke to the manager of one of the largest transportation firms here on PEI, and I asked him about the safety of this stretch of road. He said they do have some safety concerns, and they said that they would like to see it corrected. I said: Okay, can you tell me, for example, in the last 10 years, or 20 years, for that matter, how many times you have had an accident with one of your rigs on that road? He admitted that they have had none. This is one of the largest trucking firms on PEI.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock has the floor.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you.

Madam Speaker, it isn't as though this concept is new.

Again, I reiterate that we have heard from people from every end of the Island, and especially within that community. The government has this supposed expert on highway safety running around telling people that Plan B absolutely must take place in the name of safety. This expert, who by the way is a paid consultant by this government, has been appearing on the news and the front page of the papers recently telling Islanders how vital to safety this new highway project was. What concerns me is this government had to go off-Island to find a so-called traffic expert and then pay them to tell Islanders that Plan B needed to happen at all costs. Now I'm not trying to discredit this gentleman's work, however, his opinion is just one opinion.

Another point on this topic is the fact that this particular expert was consulted before by this province for his advice. I mean, call me skeptical, but it sounds as though this expert will speak on this government's behalf as long as it means a pay cheque for his consulting firm at the end of the day. To that end, his suggestion that the existing road cannot be improved at all costs is simply one opinion of many. At the end of the day we want this road to be safe for Islanders. However, we feel what is being suggested is just a waste of money.

The safety of this road aside, the Plan B highway ignites many more concerns which the government should seriously be considering. Indeed, Plan B is (Indistinct) built on top of some of the more beautiful land in this entire province. If the Plan B project is not stopped from proceeding forward it will destroy lands which do not develop on a daily basis. Again, we are talking about some of the most arable, scenic and beautiful land this province has to offer. On the land where this road is scheduled to be built you will find steep ravines, old hemlock grove which has been formulating for hundreds of years, wetlands, as well as many other brooks and streams. A 350-year-old hemlock stand would be completely and totally eliminated if this project is allowed to proceed. This old hemlock stand is often referred to as a grove of legacy trees. These old trees provide the seed source from old, strong trees to regenerate new forests.

Across this province there is less than 1% of land with old growth forest remaining. That is 1%, and I think it's fair to say that no more is going to be created overnight. Most of these trees in this particular grove exist within the 15-metre buffer zone from one of the streams that would be affected by this project. This being the case, under normal circumstances these trees would be protected and nobody would be able to remove them. I guess this government does not think they need to follow these rules.

The sad thing about this project, besides the outrageous cost to Island taxpayers, of course, is the fact that this land, once it is destroyed by this government, is never coming back. Again, this is some of the most sacred and beautiful land in the entire province, and this government wants to go out of their way –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Aylward: – to slap pavement down on top of it and destroy it all.

One of the interesting things that we need to consider here is this House is the fact that the original intention for this highway that is being – the so-called Plan A through Strathgartney came to a crashing halt because the land that it would have destroyed would have been a massive loss to this province. Indeed, the public outrage resulting from the Plan A project was enough to deter this government from going forward with it. However, it found a way to get around public outrage with Plan B because they have decided to plan in secret.

This government has said it held extensive public consultations on this Plan B project. That is simply incorrect. This government held public consultations on Plan A project, and when they held these consultations the people who were going to be affected by this project stood up and told this government they could not get away with such a thing. This government did not like what the people of this province had to say, so what did they do? They created Plan B project, but this time they did not consult the public. Since this government has attempted to ram this unwanted, overpriced Plan B highway project down the throats of Islanders, those

who have something to say about it are doing so in any way they know how. It seems like every day I hear from people who think this project is simply a waste of money, a waste of time. But does this government listen? Of course they do not.

Plan B was created so hastily and quick that I can vouch for everyone who is against this project that there was in fact very little consultation done by this government. Why there was no consultation done by this government is simple. They did not want another Plan A on their hands. None of this should come as a surprise.

It is shameful, but it should not come as a surprise. After all, the transportation minister knows a thing or two about not consulting with Islanders. He did not consult with people before he ran the Plan B highway project down the throats of Islanders, he didn't even consult with people in his own district when he helped his government bring in the HST. In fact, he did the exact opposite. He told his constituents that HST would not be coming to the province.

Hopefully his constituents are starting to see a pattern. The only consultation the transportation minister offered to those who were going to be affected by Plan B was in the form of a public meeting where he told those who were concerned that the decision had already been made. He told them the decision was being made for them and that they had no say in the matter. The point which needs to be emphasized here is the fact that this government has no intentions on hearing the taxpayers in this province.

There is no accountability with this government. They have proven this time and time again. It's interesting that this government recognized the environmental problems that the initial Plan A was going to cause. They realized that if they went ahead with this Plan A serious environmental consequences would be felt. They realized this when outraged citizens of this province told the government that they would not let the government do this. They weren't going to let them get away with it.

It is interesting that this government thinks the section of land that they will be destroying for the Plan B highway that

nobody wants is any different from the land they wanted to destroy for Plan B. I mean, the land they will be destroying for this project will without a doubt have a substantial negative ecological impact on this province. It appears as though this government only cares about the environment when they are forced to do so because of things like *Natural Areas Protection Act*.

Indeed, this project will be destroying brooks, streams, trees and all sorts of other things. It would have done the exact same thing if it went through Plan A. I'm not sure whether or not the government understands the environmental impact this project will have on the province, but what we do know is that this government has no problems destroying irreplaceable pieces of land as long as they are not breaking any laws in the process. With this plan the government is certainly setting a great environmental precedent for the future.

The last thing I would like to talk about as it pertains to this motion is the effect the proposed Plan B highway will have on the tourism in this province. As everyone in this House knows, tourism is an absolutely critical component of our Island economy. As was seen last year, if the tourism numbers dip at any time the Prince Edward Island economy feels the pinch from it. That said, this new highway will do nothing for this province as far as tourism goes unless you consider a motorist saving a couple of minutes in driving time.

I would pose this question: Why do tourists come to Prince Edward Island? Sure, tourists come to our province for a variety of reasons and they should, because we have a variety of wonderful things to offer them. However, what I hear from tourists time and time again is this province each and every year – and trust me, I have my fair share of experience in the industry – is the fact that we live in one of the most beautiful places in the entire world. Indeed, it is our unspoiled beauty which sets us apart from other places.

This province has long been associated with sweeping, rolling hills – again, the natural type – expansive and majestic scenery, and some of the most beautiful land in the entire world. If Plan B takes place, all of what I just said will be compromised to a degree.

Indeed, the construction of this highway will be eliminating beautiful walking trails, lovely irreplaceable scenery, the sacred lands which this province will no longer have the pleasure of enjoying. If this project happens instead of unspoiled lands, people will only have concrete and pavement to look forward to. We are talking about land this province will never be able to recover again, land that future generations and those who live in the area will never be able to afford again.

Personally, from a tourism perspective, it is a real shame that the province is even thinking about wasting money they do not have to destroy something that will never have the chance to be regained. As the critic for tourism portfolio, I sincerely hope the Minister of Tourism and Culture raised some concerns about this in caucus, but it wouldn't surprise me a whole lot if he did not. In fact, on that note, the Minister of Tourism and Culture, and Minister of Environment, Labour and Justice and Attorney General, should seriously considering supporting this motion this afternoon. For the environment minister to just nod her head over the destruction of this sacred land is just an absolute shame. As for the minister who resides in the district where Plan B is scheduled to take place, hopefully her constituents will realize the mistake and, again, plead that she votes for this motion.

This afternoon we were standing here and asking this government to withdraw their plan to construct the so-called Plan B highway. This highway is not needed and, to be frank, it is a gross waste of taxpayers' dollars. My colleagues in this opposition all agree that the safety of the current road should be considered as the safety of Islanders is important. However, we believe there is an option which will be lighter on the pocketbook of Island taxpayers. It seems fairly clear that the majority of Islanders do not want this project to happen, though the government is choosing to ignore the rule and the will of the people who put them in that position they are in thus far. They still have time to make good by the public and put the plans for this highway that the province does not need and cannot afford on the shelf.

I would strongly urge everyone in this House who does not support wasting

taxpayer money to stand up and support the motion we have tabled this afternoon. This motion is in the best interest of everyone who believes the public should be consulted before the government makes such rash decisions on their behalf. This motion is in the best interest of everyone in the province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Mr. Vessey: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'd like to speak to this today. I can't support this motion, but I'd like to speak to it.

Speaker: Do you require the podium, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Vessey: No, I'm good.

Madam Speaker, we have a tremendous opportunity here in the province through the Atlantic Gateway fund to address an area of highway that, and I say again, everyone in this House knows it's not a good area of highway.

I think the Premier had alluded to a note today from our chief coroner who had mentioned it's time that government took on this dangerous section of highway. I'm glad to see that he came out and supported this project.

The project has been ongoing for quite some time and again, as I said before, the hon. former minister who had lobbied hard to get the dollars needed to address this issue. The opposition apparently is against safety and there are a lot of reasons mentioned over there by the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock, who apparently gave the alignment a thumbs-up. I think he's changed his mind on that now, but he originally gave it a thumbs-up.

The Trans-Canada Highway in question is one of our busiest routes in the province. As government, we invest in infrastructure and safe traveling networks in our highways. We spent, along with the previous government over the past 10 years, \$100 million in safety. I believe we had some in front of the

hon. Leader of the Opposition's district, right through her area, through the Highway 2 and –

Mr. MacKinley: (Indistinct).

Mr. Vessey: Government, the former minister went out there and fixed some of that highway up.

Mr. MacKinley: Yes.

Mr. Vessey: It's very important. I know the opposition say we can't afford it, but we saw what happened when we came into government if you don't invest in your infrastructure.

I've already went on Hansard saying what happened when we came in, and I'll not get into that today. But we all know we have to instruct or invest. Our highway network is very important to this province. We are an exporting province, as we all know. The road, it was built in 1952. That we've said in this House many times. At that time there was a rail line. There were potato boats that take our products to market. Now, times have changed. The road is extremely busy. There's 600 to 700 trucks at peak times coming across that highway. We have school buses out in those corners that are carrying our children. I'm sure that none of us in this room would want to see something happen in those areas now that are identified. They have to be addressed.

It's not only Churchill that we're looking at. We have three areas identified as we go forward to address on the Trans-Canada. As I said, 10 years was spent on Highway 2. Now we're focusing our capital budget on the Trans-Canada over the next several years. It's a great opportunity to address that.

We have a couple other areas that we had out to public consultation, and those areas are still out there. I've been to the federal minister and I've lobbied him for more infrastructure money to go out and fix those areas. Those are still on our sites as we go forward. I want to be on record to say that we understand there's more areas in the Trans-Canada than just Churchill alone.

As I said earlier, the Trans-Canada is our busiest route and our main trade corridor.

That's why the Atlantic Gateway is there. It's under design today to today's standards. It's easy to say in here – and I'm not an engineer, I don't know how many people across the Chamber are engineers, but I know I'm not. They're saying tweak it here, bend here, bend there. The fact of the matter is once you get into the subsoil of a road, you have to bring it up to today's standards. The area in concern in Churchill is around the CBC tower. It's \$10 million to move the tower.

We listen to the people. I think they were saying here earlier today that we don't listen to the people. We had seven public consultation meetings on this alignment and we listened to the people. We went out with the alignments, what we were proposing, we had to start with the three that we go to the public meetings, and we did. The people told us that: Yes, this is a dangerous section of highway and it needs to be addressed, but we love our park. We listened to the people. Some of the members over there said Plan B was always in the works. It never was. We heard from the people. We had a lot of submissions, 300, 400 submissions, and our staff had talked to the people in these meetings.

Another comment across the hall was: You didn't have the right public meetings. We had public consultation meeting on both sides with open mikes and information sessions. People have to understand and see where the department is going as opposed to grandstanding on issues that do not even go towards what we're doing, addressing.

We realize it's a passionate issue for anyone to move out of their home, we all understand that, but we also have to understand that government has a responsibility and our responsibility is to invest in safety on our highways, and that's what our department is doing.

There are five curves that are well below the minimum standards. The hills are steep in that area. After six public meetings and hundreds of submissions the province decided. We made a decision, we're going to align that section of highway.

There was some talk today in the House regarding environmental assessments. The hon. member that made those statements, he

knows there is a process in place and he knows the department's professionalism, both in the environment department and the transportation department. They'll be followed. The statements that were made today to me, it's unfortunate, to say the least, to fearmonger about cutting an old growth forest. I said in the House just before he got up on his feet that 99% of that old growth forest will be saved. But yet he says it's going to be cut down. I have the facts.

Sometimes people make decisions when they don't have all the facts and sometimes – another fact. John Robinson, I believe, hired a consultant – for the House and for the hon. member, this is one of the leading traffic engineers, not in Canada but in North America. We were asked to go and get an independent review done by an independent engineer and we did that. Not just by anyone, one of the most looked-to traffic engineers in North America.

We did our homework on this. As I said earlier, it's not only the hills in that area, but we're also making new turning lanes. It's a two-lane highway out there in that area and it's very dangerous. There are school buses out there carrying our children and we know that. This is part of our plan. We're making new turning lanes into the Green Road, the St. Catherine's Road, the Bonshaw Road, the Riverdale Road, the Peters Road and the Colville Road. That has been lost. This is going to make the whole area much safer. We're also expanding the bridge in Bonshaw. I wonder if the opposition is against all that.

Mr. MacKinley: Yes they are.

Mr. Vessey: During our public consultation meetings –

Mr. MacKinley: (Indistinct).

Mr. Vessey: Well no. I know our government is about safety. I alluded to a piece of highway that their government, when they were in power, did. I think it cost a million dollars to put a kilometer into a dump in Brookfield.

Mr. MacKinley: (Indistinct).

Mr. Vessey: We're not going to do that, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The minister has the floor.

Mr. MacKinley: Highway going nowhere.

Mr. Vessey: Whereas it's \$16 million, a waste of taxpayers' dollars. I don't know how they say that when we're addressing a highway for not only the travelling public, but the school buses that carry our children, or mothers or parents that drive that highway. To say that that highway is a waste of taxpayers' dollars, to me, I don't know where they're coming from on that.

It's easy to say, as I said earlier, you can just take a little tweak or a little tink. You can't do that. Once you get into the subsoil – and I'm sure the hon. member knows that – you have to build it up to today's standards.

Mr. MacKinley: No, they wouldn't know anything.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, we are going forward with this alignment.

We were elected as government and government has made a decision that this highway is a great opportunity with the federal dollars. We have other areas in the province that need work and we're well aware of that through our capital budget. You say that we waste money. Every year transportation has a capital budget, and out of that budget this year is \$37 million. Out of that \$37 million there is 3 million going in to Churchill, along with our federal counterparts, \$3 million.

Mr. MacKinley: They don't want anything the feds (Indistinct).

Mr. Vessey: Thirty-eight million dollar budget, we're to get 3 million. To me that's a pretty good deal, Madam Speaker.

I was in business all my life, and to me, if I turn my back on that, I wouldn't be doing the right thing to the taxpayers of this province.

We have a budget next year or the year after at 40 million, or thereabouts, and we're using 5 million of that to address it. But we're not losing focus on our Seven Mile Road. I told the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters we'll address that through our capital budget, and all the other

areas across the province. We have a big budget to look after the highways and that's what our department does. The opposition may say: Put it in to health care or education. That's our priorities of our government, health care and education.

But the department of transportation's budget is used for maintenance on our highways. It's very important that we invest in our infrastructure and our highways. During (Indistinct) you can't play catch up. As I said when we came into government, infrastructure investment was a mess. We've caught up to it. Again, the former minister did a great job.

Mr. MacKinley: (Indistinct).

Speaker (Biggar): Order, please!

Mr. Vessey: As elected people we have to keep on top of it. Our network that carries our goods to market, it's a very important piece of the infrastructure here in our province.

I would just like to say to this House I cannot support this motion today.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Would you like the podium?

Mr. Perry: Please.

Speaker: Could we get the podium, please?

Hon. members, we'll just take a moment for the member to get set up.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Order, please!

Okay, we can start now.

The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Today I stand in opposition to this government's plan to realign the Trans-Canada Highway. Despite the massive opposition of the people of the community affected, this government plans to uproot them unnecessarily. Plain and simple, this government has not listened to these Islanders.

It's interesting, this government initially said they would run the highway through Strathgartney, then the people of the community stood up and said: No. This government backed off and quickly said: Wait, wait, we have another plan.

Now, even more massive opposition to this new plan, this government is not reconsidering. They're actually pushing it through. The Premier and his minister are forcing many from their homes and destroying some of the most important forests on the Island. It is no surprise, though. This government has never cared about the concerns of Islanders. The Premier has been on record calling Islanders whiners. The minister of transportation himself, when pushed by a group of people opposed to HST, promised that his government wouldn't bring it in. Well, it's coming in next April so that shows how much his word is.

Clearly, neither of them care about the concerns of Islanders. Many members of this community don't want to move. They are attached to their homes. They're comfortable there. It's the place where they lived their lives and there are lots of memories there and it's a real shame that they have to be moved.

The area which the government plans to place this highway through is one of the most environmentally vital in this province. This project will destroy a number of deep ravines and streams in Bonshaw and the Riverdale area that support a lot of fish and wildlife. What will this do to the West River? Because they all feed into the West River. Siltation is a problem that has to be addressed and it's a huge concern for those people in those areas. We've already had rivers on the Island that are closed due to siltation up west and there are no longer fish in them. People can't fish at them this year. In advance, this is something that has to be looked into.

It's interesting that the minister of transportation announced that this project will go through before an environmental assessment even occurred. It doesn't make any sense. The government has already started buying up land and they don't even know if the project will pass the environmental assessment. This is ridiculous.

With some of the land bought and the contracts likely promised to Liberal firms, I dare say this government will put as much pressure as they need to ensure that the environmental assessments pass. It's a real shame. The Island has very little wildlife as it is and this government is clearly not doing anything to protect it, especially when it comes to this particular project.

As my colleague said, the construction of this road will destroy a 350-year old hemlock stand. As a grove legacy trees, these trees provide the seed source for other trees to regenerate new forests. Some of these trees, as I mentioned earlier, are over two times as old as Confederation. They are two times older than the Charlottetown Conference.

In addition, putting the road through this area would destroy the habitat of many endangered species, further causing them serious harm. It is very clear that this project will ruin the ecosystems that go through it. But this government doesn't care. They have no problem destroying our environment or selling out our future to fill the pockets of their friends. They'll even force people from their homes to do this. It's a real shame and Islanders deserve much better.

Within this province less than 1% of land has old-growth forest remaining, and to destroy more is to make it even harder for new healthy trees to be regenerated. Even cutting one tree that has a history of over 300 years is very important to our heritage, and we need to protect this. We need to protect our environment.

As the environment critic, I'm appalled at this government's lack of concern over the environment and the execution of this project. This government is even violating the *Environmental Protection Act* and buffer zone legislation to get this road built. It's ridiculous. They're breaking their own laws.

That said, they were never above doing so in the past, and it should be no surprise now. This government says it is realigning this highway to address safety concerns. They try to paint this highway as the most dangerous on the Island. But frankly, there are others which are more dangerous and they are doing nothing to address those issues.

The Minister of Community Services and Seniors should be ashamed of herself. This minister would rather stay in caucus and not represent her people than do the job she was elected for. Congratulations, minister. After pulling this stunt you are not likely to be elected again.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. Perry: The price of this project is another issue. At a time when the province is going through cuts and firings, this government is committed to spending millions of dollars on unnecessary realignment. They'd be better off spending a fraction of that to fix this project in some other way and use the remaining millions to keep as many of the people that they fired working.

Mr. MacKinley: Bring your horse and buggies back.

Speaker: Order, please!

Hon. members.

Mr. Perry: I have no idea how they can claim to have a job creation strategy when they keep laying people off and keep throwing money at unnecessary projects.

In addition, this government hasn't announced any plans to remove the old road, meaning it will still be there as a secondary highway, doing nothing to fix the safety concerns. With numerous houses still residing along that road, and many people taking it as a matter of convenience, it is likely that the safety problems will remain. Adding another highway may reduce the amount of people travelling down it, but the safety concerns will still remain the same.

If this government is looking out for safety, they will achieve nothing if they don't fix

the concerns of the Church Road, even if they add another highway.

If this government looked outside the Legislative Assembly here today they would have seen that people truly don't want this project. These are people who will work to ensure that the Minister of Community Services and Seniors is replaced with someone who actually represents her riding.

I ask this government to listen to Islanders. I ask that they immediately halt their plans for the construction of this highway and that they pursue other options to address the safety concerns. In addition, I ask that this government use their remaining dollars to address other highway projects that are deemed a priority.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Continue, hon. member.

Mr. Perry: I just didn't know if I still had the floor.

Speaker: Yes, certainly.

Mr. Perry: I ask that all members who agree with me to show their support for this motion.

Thank you.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition, would you like the podium?

Leader of the Opposition: Yes, please.

Speaker: I would ask the members to please refrain from overexerting their voices.

Thank you.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Hon. members.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition to speak to the motion.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Today's rally was really about democracy. I know some members in this House are finding it rather funny. We in this side of the House do not find it funny at all. This government –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: Sorry, do I have the floor, or not?

Speaker: Hon. members, if you would like to speak to the motion I can certainly put you on the list.

Mr. Myers: Why don't you? You want to talk?

Speaker: Hon. members on both sides of the House.

Order, please!

Please, respect that each other has something to say.

Thank you.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, in 2007 I distinctly remember when the election was on, and this government was going to do some things different. They were going to have an open, transparent government, and a government that was accountable to the people.

This afternoon what we witnessed was probably close to 500 people, and when you look at the people who weren't there, the people they are connected to right across the province, this is one of the biggest issues impacting PEI right now.

Being in a democracy, it's important for peoples' voices to be heard. The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal talked about public consultations. Yes, there were public consultations for Plan A, however, there have been no public consultations for Plan B.

Government talks about 2007. What they forget to tell the people in 2007 is they inherited a \$23.9 million surplus. What they forget to tell the people, the former premier Pat Binns, before he had left, had negotiated

\$175 million for infrastructure, no strings attached. This government spent seven years of funding in three and a half years. So, it's so ironic. If it's an issue of safety, why did they not start to address it during their first mandate?

This is the government that talks about open and transparent government and listening to the people. But we need not look too far and remember how the government operates when it comes to public accounts. Recently, with government's decision to bring in HST – and I'll remind the House, just like this Plan B, it was not an election issue, there was no talk about it. Prior to the election this government told Islanders that the deficit was moving towards \$42 million. Yet when the election happened, right after, the deficit's over 80, and in addition to that HST is coming in with no public consultation. The people that I've been speaking with and listening to – and it's interesting, back, probably a good six weeks ago, I was at a bantam hockey game up in North Rustico. The people in the rink in North Rustico had concerns about their tax dollars and this highway. They didn't live along this highway, but they were very concerned about it.

The big part, too, is some of the individuals, who had told me that they had supported this government in the last election were surprised that the people who elected them were being forgotten about.

The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal talked about the expert from Nova Scotia. Yes, that man is probably an expert, but the sad part, the part that we need to remind the House, he is working for government, but we as elected people are working for the people.

When it comes to spending, I need not remind people this government decided we needed artificial hills in Borden. They spent 3 million to develop artificial hills, and now they're going to spend between 25 to 30 million ruining the natural hills and one of the most beautiful parts of our province.

When you look at what the Member from Tignish-Palmer Road mentioned about the hemlock rows, these trees are well over 300 years of age. Think of what this province has in those trees and in that natural history.

Once they're gone they are never coming back. Prince Edward Island is a unique place. But what this government is trying to do is to bulldoze them down and make a highway, perhaps a highway that would be equal to one in the mainland. Well, PEI's not about Nova Scotia, New Brunswick or the other places.

Yes, if we need to reduce the highway, in terms of safety issues, and change speed zones, help educate people on drinking and driving, because it's my understanding that many of the issues of the traffic violations on this section of the highway are directly related to drinking and driving.

There's actually a lady that's with us in the gallery, a very passionate person that I spoke with last week, about 7:00 in the morning, and she described for me what it was like when she attended a meeting where the minister of transportation and public works attended. She had good questions around public safety, and safety in particular of her own children that have to cross the road right now to get on a bus. She asked in earnest a really important question: When this highway's done, if the speed zone is going to move to 90, most people then will start going around 100. She has a child that's going to be entering school in the fall. What are they going to be doing to protect? It's so sad to hear that the transportation and public works minister again, or infrastructure, laughed and made the comment: No child has to cross the road, which is really not true.

There's a whole number of issues that ordinary Islanders, the people that live in that community, the people from across the province, need to have the opportunity to be able to discuss, ask questions, and make good decisions in the best interests of all Islanders. But, again, I go back, it's another principle of democracy.

On April 15th many people stood in this House and talked about the great opportunities around recreational fishing. When I think about recreational fishing I think about Bonshaw area, I think about my own area of Morell. For every one dollar that's spent in recreational fisheries there's been many studies proving that those dollars will circulate another nine times. People cannot understand why the great recreational

fishing areas in this section are going to be destroyed.

When it comes to the ravines, and we heard a figure of I believe it was 100,000 loads of shale that's going to be moved into this area, it's utterly ridiculous. There is a road here, a heritage road, it's called the Peters Road, and yet it is a clay road. I'm lucky enough to live at the end of a clay road as well as where the pavement connects, and these are beautiful areas of the province. The Peters Road is a heritage road. Unless people realize heritage roads are meant not only for the protection and the celebration of the past, but also for the protection and celebration in the future.

There was a young woman that spoke today at the rally, I believe her first name was (Indistinct). I believe that she also mentioned that she's around 21 years of age, and she pointed out so many good reasons why this highway has to be stopped. She talked about the fact that this highway's being constructed on borrowed dollars, and how the province can't afford that, how in the future – hopefully she'll continue to live and work here – it'll be in her lifetime, she will still be paying back the debt of the province on this highway.

I'm sure if people were watching Ontario today as one of the bond rating agencies actually have started the process of downgrading Ontario's budget. They have suggested that there's a warning there, and in the near future if things do not improve they will be changing the rating. That's certainly going to be impacting on all the residents of Ontario because it does impact on borrowed money, how much it costs. We have to look realistically at the deficit that this government's carrying. Right now \$75 million. If you truly take the 25 million out for HST transitional funds, our deficit is \$100 million. We cannot afford this highway, and again, when we hear from Islanders they tell us what their priorities are.

I've mentioned in this House before one of my own constituents, who has pancreatic cancer, and the province reimburses or covers the drug Sutent for people with kidney cancer, but not pancreatic cancer. When you think of the number of people across PEI, that their tax dollars are going

towards a megaproject like this, they have the right to be able to voice their opinion and say: Look, we would rather see \$3 million go toward a catastrophic drug coverage rather than up to \$30 million on a highway that no one wants.

I believe it was the Premier that mentioned today about the Atlantic Gateway. The Atlantic Gateway certainly had the opportunity to negotiate with the federal government what should be or should not be considered here. The minister of fisheries and aquaculture I believe was the minister that had been responsible for the original negotiation. I am sure that if he and perhaps the present minister and the Premier went off to Ottawa and sat down with the federal government they could come up with something that's more reasonable.

There's a variety of areas, when you look at the intersection on the bypass, especially where it's close to the intersection towards the Sears shopping store.

An Hon. Member: That's one (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: That's the one that two people from my district were killed in.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker (Bertram): Order, please!

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, it's an absolute shame when we're speaking about the seriousness, and people find it so funny.

A mother and daughter were killed from my district in that intersection, and if we're talking about the safety, there are lots of places that would be acceptable under Atlantic Gateway.

Again, the big issue that people continue to have with this government is the fact that the government wants to tell Islanders what's good for them rather than listening. The government, if they don't back down on their decision on this project, is making a terrible mistake. I guarantee that. I know we in opposition are just getting started, the group of people that are continuing to fight against this, they, too, are just getting started. Again, being elected, our job is to

serve Islanders and you have to listen to Islanders and make decisions based on sound information and on the priorities of the province.

With that, I really hope that people will in this House support this particular motion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. MacKinley: Could I have the podium, please?

It's great to be able to get up here and to be able to speak in a democracy, when you hear so many probably misleading statements have been made in places. Let's start with Atlantic Gateway.

Speaker: Hon. member, watch the language. Retract that statement, please.

Mr. MacKinley: Yeah, but if the opposition would listen for a change, Atlantic Gateway was started back when we started going to India on trade missions with Peter MacKay, and also ministers from the Maritime provinces. It was an idea of the federal government to help out trade in Atlantic Canada, and I applaud them for doing it. They put politics aside.

The trade area was Halifax container port. We looked at: How do we get into Halifax container port because it's boxed up? Do we go down the railroad and widen that out? I remember looking at it and said: No, it doesn't. They have a lovely container port, but to get to it it's time consuming, it's hard to get there for efficiency.

Nova Scotia could get money, and also New Brunswick, because you have to go through New Brunswick to get to Ontario or the New England states. So, I was arguing at the time: What about PEI? Look, you don't have to go through PEI to get to the New England states (Indistinct) trade is or where we're targeting.

Through the goodness of their heart, and I'll give them full credit for it, and I talked to it here to the media and everything that we're

going to get money under infrastructure and everybody said: No, no, no. We finally got \$8 million. Under the \$8 million the project has to be approved by the federal government in order to qualify for the 8 million, and we were lucky to get the 8 million because they could have said no to us, because there's a fine line there of getting it.

I know New Brunswick got 180 million, Nova Scotia 220 million, twinning highways and everything.

The criteria came down, we had to fix the Trans-Canada from, say, Cornwall through to Borden, or the bridge. That was the area that we had to fix. We couldn't go in Number 2 highway, we couldn't go down anywhere else, we had to use that area. It's all to do with the economics of moving goods.

If you look at today's society, and the way goods are marketed, if somebody just goes down to Irving Oil – I went in there a couple of days ago, I was filling up with gas, and I noticed a tractor-trailer there and I took a picture. It was a tractor-trailer with about a 40-foot trailer, 45-foot trailer, 48. I mean, that was awful big in my day. I remember going to town with a half ton truck, figuring it was a big load of potatoes. Then all of a sudden we went to town with a ton truck, then a three ton, and then the 10-wheelers came. Then the tractor-trailers came.

You've got to remember that I loaded cars with potatoes in here at the wharf. I'd say 50% of all our potatoes were loaded in Charlottetown at the wharf by rail. Then the rest, 25 or 30% would be loaded by boat. Very few were trucked off the Island at that time by trucks. But that's the way it is. It has changed.

If people are against this highway, we looked against the highway. Also the same day at Irving Oil there was a truck down there that had a – they call it trains. That's where you get a 40- or 45-foot trailer and another 45-foot trailer behind it. That's where we're at today, whether we like it or not.

People don't want oil to go up. They don't want gas to go up. They don't want anything else to go up, but you've got to be able to be

efficient in order to move goods and it's got to be done safely or these people won't come in. If you look at what's going on at Cavendish Farms, they're hauling natural gas in there. Who'd ever think, 20 years ago, we'd be hauling natural gas into Cavendish Farms? Look at the upgrade we did there. But before they could do that we had to replace that bridge in your area in order to make it safe. It's just a whole picture.

Now when I was there – I hear a lot of people saying this whole Plan B was there all along. When I was there under transportation we had singled out, and we hired experts to come in and look too. Churchill was dangerous, Crapaud and Tryon. We decided: What do we do? We knew we'd have trouble with Churchill because some of our own caucus was even complaining about Churchill because of Strathgartney. We never looked across the road or anything. We were going straight through Strathgartney down by the water. The cost was less money because we own most of the land there anyway.

If you want to really go back to look when the Leader of the Opposition was here in government, she closed down Strathgartney. It used to be a park. But no, they closed it down and put the keys on her. That's what they did. They closed Strathgartney down. But all of a sudden she wanted to save Strathgartney. If you're traveling over in Banff or most places in the States or anywhere, there are roads all through national parks and people see the beauty of it.

But all of a sudden the new minister decides: There was too much flack on Strathgartney because the people were complaining. So he moved across the road. I remember you people coming out saying: Great ideas, listening. I remember that. So you know, you can't have your cake and eat it too. You can't be supporting him once and not. Like the Member from Stratford-Kinlock was in here going on about money. We spent \$4.5 million from Sobeys to the Hillsborough Bridge in your riding. You didn't say anything, did you? No. No, we put in new lights and intersections to make it safe. Never heard a word from you, did you? No. Four and a half million dollars for that little stretch of road that's already done.

Now they want a new intersection over there to go on to the road over by Jack Reddin's. We have land there. It's dollars. Where do we get the dollars to do it? But that's looking at \$4 or \$5 million just to put a little road in there for you, I mean, to make the highway safe.

Then you go down to Pooles Corner. The Tories were in power – I'm not blaming you guys. You guys probably didn't know where you were at that time. But the Leader of the Opposition was with the Tories. The former member from down there fixed Pooles Corner three to four times. That was Mike Currie, when he was minister. He fixed the turn, couldn't get it right, so they fixed it again. The only reason he fixed it was because his wife drove his Mercedes-Benz through there and got hit. That's exactly what happened. I brought that up in the House.

Then all of a sudden, to make that road safe, we had to go to roundabout. We had the roundabout around Charlottetown and widened it out in the roundabouts. To get the money, and we have a plan. You just don't do this. You have, like, a four-year plan trying to figure out where you're at and plan ahead because if you're planning ahead, you always get better deals. Get the contracts out early in January, February, and you'll get a better deal if you put them all out at once, like the previous government used to do. That's called managing your books. So that's what we did and I said: The Pooles Corner should've been a roundabout to begin with.

The only roundabout you guys put into PEI was the one up in Summerside that is too close together. Everybody complains about it. You made a mess of it. But I just said leave it there so they remember what the previous government was like. That there Seven Mile Road you're talking about, we paved so much down there, I think I put in – that's Mike Currie's old riding – I think I put seven or eight kilometres down there, maybe more than that last year alone.

Mr. Myers: Not on the Seven Mile Road.

Mr. MacKinley: It was a mess. No, not on the road, but in the district. It was a mess. I decided to leave a few bumps for you to show you just what it was like when the

Tories were in power. The new bridge down there we put in, that's because of safety. We don't go build that bridge in St. Peters because we wanted to, we built it because it fell down, some of it. We had to build it. We had to move ahead and do it.

I mean, the bridges were in an awful mess under the previous government. They spent nothing. Dunedin bridge, people were killed over there. You don't hear you talking to that. You never built it. They had 10 years to do something. They never did it. They promised it but never did it. The West River Causeway, it had a problem with the old section, not the new section that was built 25 years ago, but the old section. Then all of a sudden we tipped the road to give (Indistinct) elevation and the poor Tories thought the bridge was falling in because it was higher on one side than the other.

But you see, nobody's an expert. In your Vernon River you built down there for safety, I'll tell you one thing, we told them it needed to be done. We made a mess of the previous government of that bridge. We got a nice cheque back from the people that built the bridge, because wasn't one of the first things I did was went after them and they had to cut a cheque, because I was threatening to take them to court. We do things, we try to do it right.

Let's get back up to the realignment of the Trans-Canada Highway. Number one is under my term, we never looked at that other side. The first thing we did look at, though, was coming down the hill, going behind Crawford's, the wood contractor's house, going in there and coming out before you get to Kelsie's and taking that particular turnoff. Then experts came in. They said: No, that won't pass national standards because we're starting to fix that highway so we've got to make it good. Up where the big tower and everything was, we had to do something there. That's why we decided then to come through Strathgartney.

Anyway, they get all these big trucks coming down the road. It's funny. I was somewhere over the weekend and I was sitting down and there was this woman talking pretty well about the highway and you didn't need it and everything. There were three or four truck drivers there. They were sitting at the coffee shop listening. She

was going on and you don't need that. It's a waste of money and all that, and that road's perfectly safe and everything. One guy said to him: It's quite obvious, where do you live? She lived somewhere down in Fort Augustus or something. He said: It's great to see you don't travel that much, too much of that road. He said: We drive that every day. So we know what it's like coming around that with the tractor-trailer.

Anyone who has any experience on a tractor-trailer knows when you come into turn one way and go the other in slippery conditions, you can look in your back mirror and that trailer truck's coming around to meet you too, the back end of it. That's why you need roads.

If we went with some of this logic we'd open up every driveway from here to the Trans-Canada and let everybody build anything they want. Building on brows of hills, build anywhere you want, just open her wide open. That's what you'll do.

But I can't believe – I can see the people from New Haven, Churchill, Bonshaw being concerned because there are people there that have real concerns. They're concerned with the environment. They have concerns with the road. They're concerned about this.

But I can't believe the Leader of the Opposition having concerns like saying she lives on a clay road during elections. She doesn't live on a clay road. She lives on a paved road last time I was there, unless somebody ripped it up. Then she goes on to talk about the intersection over at Sears. I agree. That is not a safe intersection. But if it's her government that put it in when they should have put a nice roundabout in there – because what happens is if you're coming out this way and there's a vehicle coming here, and you happen to be behind a high big truck, your sight's blocked if you turn.

That's why we put the roundabout up in O'Leary. But you know what? We can't fix the mess you guys made in four-and-a-half years. We do things right. If you look at the highways, I mean if you want to go by that. Some people say about putting in speed bumps or something. Why would we even bother paving roads if we don't want them smooth? There has got to be logic to this.

It's very interesting to see this type of work. The Leader of the Opposition goes on with the hills in Borden and she goes on about the \$3 million on the hills in Borden. Either she doesn't listen or she just doesn't understand. I don't know which it is. But those hills in Borden, I think it was 600,000, the federal government was 300. But the weigh-in motion scales, the widening the highway and putting the proper turning lanes into the service station –

An Hon. Member: They forgot about all that.

Mr. MacKinley: They forgot about all that. No, no, they don't want that, they'd have nothing to complain about. Put it into Jamie Fox's service station up there and Jamie complained about losing business. Half the time the cars are all parked on the highway waiting to get in there. I just can't believe – it's great to be in the House here to be able to – see I knew – I can't say that somebody is not here so I won't say it. But anyway, I knew that some people wouldn't be here because they don't like hearing the truth. This is the truth of the matter. This is where you hear it.

These forest lands they're talking about, maybe they should buy all the land there and protect the forests if that's what they want to do. See, this is private landowners. I guess they want to take the private landowners' rights away, that government over there, because people own those trees and farms, whatever it is.

I was talking to a guy today at Maggie's. You guys were in the paper saying he didn't want to leave. He's been trying to sell that farm for two years and get out of there. Move down to Cornwall, he and his wife. Moving down to the Liberal riding, get out of up there. You guys closed everything down. Because once you closed down Strathgartney and Encounter Creek went out of business too, you pretty well shut the whole area down up there. But just think now, this is what you guys are hearing. You're talking about the member from Stratford knowing something about tourism? I mean, he comes out and supports the highway and then all of a sudden he makes a complete summersault. It's unbelievable. Completely twisted around, because all of a sudden people start going on about it.

I know where I was going to go and the new minister, I knew where he is going now and I know why he went there. He went there because there was too much opposition to Strathgartney and they listened. The department listened to them and that's why they moved it. What they're going to do is solve a lot of problems. Going to solve the problems at Encounter Creek, if anybody ever buys it. Nobody has been buying it for years. But if somebody had have bought it it would solve that problem.

If you go down by Wayne Crosby's, the construction outfit, 20 to 30 trucks coming in there a day on a three-lane highway. Going to solve that problem because he's not going to have the traffic coming through there. Then you're going to go down to the Cameron Road or something, I forget the name of it. I remember Charlie Frizzell, and them lived down there. On the left-hand side there is another subdivision in there. Three-lane highway, many accidents there. They're going to be taken right off the map. Those roads are going to stay there. Those people are still going to live there, they're not going to disturb them. That road will become like a street and it will open up the area because people could build out there too, because you wouldn't have the highway regulations. You got to look at that. All that land through there will all of a sudden open up along that highway because it's going to be like a residential street.

You're going to get up and criticize. You got to have constructive criticism and we'll listen to it. But when you get up here and as I said, the member from down east, the leader and the Member from Stratford-Kinlock, he'll probably be going after the minister next year for that turning lane or something in over on the other road wanting more money (Indistinct). But that's fine. Once you get out there and – nobody wants to go fix these highways. But you got to fix the highways is what you got to do. You got to bring them in to today's standards.

When you start a highway – like I remember one time we went out to – Gordon MacInnis and I were paving out to New Glasgow, Cavendish, and there was a person couldn't get a permit for a driveway. I said: Cut the hill down, which we could have, and bring it in to safe site distance to get this permit. The

engineer said: No, you can't, because if you do that you got to straighten the whole road all the way out and we just didn't have the money. So you got to recap. But once you disturb the dirt you're in a whole new section.

But I'll tell you how the Tories fixed that. Right after they got elected Beth MacKenzie went out and put a culvert in there. You guys weren't concerned with safety or anything. No, you just put the culvert in and covered it over. Exactly what you did. I can go across – this is one thing about being here these years. You can say whatever you want, but I know the facts and I can stand here and I can go across them and come back. The road to nowhere that Gail Shea built. Put it in an unsafe location going into the – she wasn't looking after the highway safety regulations either. She just put a road into the dump, only it wasn't a dump, it's a good site. Put the road into it out there in – not Wiltshire, but Brookfield. But they put it in an unsafe site. We told them it was unsafe, they didn't listen. Million bucks, had to go put another road in. Million bucks (Indistinct).

Then the member from Stratford, or the guy from up west talking about saving land. Look at Stratford, the best agriculture land we have in the province. You can pile two feet deep over there and it's still soil. What do you do with it? You put houses there. What about Brookfield? One of the best agriculture fields we have, you put a waste management place there. That's land you'll never get back and that's beautiful agriculture land. I mean, most of the places that you look is all beautiful agriculture land because people want to build where it's flat. You don't see many people wanting to build on the hills and the mountains that we got.

You can't have your cake and eat it too. You get up here, you say one thing, then you got to go do something else. You got to get reality and bring some sanity back into this Legislative Assembly and try and stick to the facts. I've no problem with those people out there today. I talked to them and they have legitimate concerns. But I'll tell you this. Opposition, they're just playing politics here, trying to work on their emotions, that's what they're doing. Flip-flopping all over the place. It is totally ridiculous.

You talk about the federal money. I think the way they're going on and all this fuss, the next time – I think what they want is to make sure there is now more (Indistinct) deals coming from the federal government. That's what I think they're after. They want to cause enough – if I was a federal minister and all those rumpus was going on, by not the people that are concerned, but the way the opposition, their own party, is, I (Indistinct) concerned, I think you guys are hoping we don't cut any more deals with the federal government.

Then the member from up west going on about the environment. Maybe he should talk with the DFO and his federal minister of environment who is all of a sudden under the Harper government, are going and starting looking at the – right today, a rule, a waterway in a farmers' field or ditch, fish that are in a pond and aren't valuable, they're going to exempt all that stuff. Going to be exempt from environment impacts and everything. I think that maybe you don't - you will find out where Ottawa is after awhile. If you need Gail Shea's number, if she's not talking to you, I'll get it to you. I'll give you the federal minister's number so you can phone him. You can even drive a pony up there if you want to. You might get some attention out of that.

That's what the federal government is doing right now. They're looking at taking agriculture, farmer's fields, drainage ditches, streams with little pinfish and that. What they're looking at is exempting all that (Indistinct) environmental regulations because it's not important. Anything with no value, don't worry about it. That's what your side is (Indistinct) and that's what you guys represent. The people that were complaining here were getting credibility. They are picking up credibility, I'll say that. But the way you people went on here and the people start seeing that, any credibility they have is going right out the door. So with that, I'll be voting against this resolution.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I, too, want to rise to speak on this particular motion because I feel like I cannot support this particular motion. I find it's very short-sighted, ill-conceived, and doesn't look out for the best interests of the tourism industry and Islanders alike.

For a lot of people that may not know, I'm actually quite familiar with that particular stretch of highway. In fact, I worked on that stretch of highway with a company called Ramsay Washed Gravel. It had the contract to do that part of that highway through the Borden hills in 1979. I operated a backhoe and I operated a vibratory roller, and in fact, I did cut a few trees down there in widening out that particular highway. A lot of those reasons were for the safety, visibility, and to change some of the curves on that particular highway.

In fact, there's a scenic lookout that's just where people can get off the highway to park and get a good view of the river and the park and all that part of it there. In fact, I was running some of the equipment that did that. At that time people were pulling over on the side of the road before there was the scenic parking lot and it was causing a traffic hazard. There were lots of times where the people of that area would stop, at break time and whatnot, and say how pleased they were with some of the changes that were occurring on that highway, making it safer, making it better. With that, that's just to give a little more background. We've always been upgrading and improving our highway system right since the road was (Indistinct) constructed, probably in 1952.

I also had the opportunity, when I became minister of tourism, to go out to Strathgartney Park and take a look at that park, and took a chance to walk around it. It's very hypocritical in some ways for the opposition to talk about –

Speaker: Hon. member, can you retract that statement, please?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. Henderson: I retract that term, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you.

An Hon. Member: It's very confusing.

Mr. Henderson: Oh, very confusing that, you know, that was the same party –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) close (Indistinct).

Mr. Henderson: – that happened to close that particular park.

Speaker: You have the floor, minister.

The minister has the floor.

Mr. Henderson: So, anyhow, all of a sudden it was a very important park, and previously it was not.

Anyway, changes occur in our society. Changes occur in our province, our highway structure. I recall some of the debate when it was around Strait Crossing. A lot of people thought that was going to be a disaster for the tourism industry. People wouldn't have the same impact and feeling when they came to Prince Edward Island. But I think today I think we all would agree, Strait Crossing, it's a beautiful bridge and it does attract tourists.

Many visitors have come to Prince Edward Island just to see the bridge, and it provides a standard and convenience for people to come to our province and visit and enjoy all that we have to offer here in Prince Edward Island.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. Henderson: Maybe they were, I'm not sure if they were against the fixed link or not, but I took part in that debate. One of the things that I was – I'm not a – I didn't travel a lot back at that time –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture has the floor.

Mr. Henderson: – and at that time the debate around the fixed link was – I didn't travel a lot at the time, but I felt for the truckers. The trucking industry, these people had to stop, park their vehicles, wait for the ferry to come, inclement weather, all those types of things. With that rationale I thought it made a lot of sense to support construction of the fixed link.

That's sort of the way we have to look at this. Our trucking industry, which is working very hard getting our goods on and off the Island, we have to make things convenient and easy for them. Time is money for those people. Our trucks and the way we move goods has changed dramatically. We used to have trains, we don't have them anymore. We used to operate with single axle trucks –

An Hon. Member: Yeah.

Mr. Henderson: I grew potatoes and I had single axle trucks. Today there's nobody that drives a single axle truck. So, you know, times change.

Now we're dealing with tractor-trailers, as the hon. member had mentioned previously. Now we're up to B-trains. You see big trucks come, and who knows where the transportation industry is going to go in the future, so we have to adapt to that and we have to plan for when we do this construction that we're going to be providing a highway that's going to be good there for another 40, 50 years.

The other factor I want to bring into account here, and I experienced this a little bit in my own riding when we talked about safety and stuff, was the intersection at the O'Leary corner. There was a number of cases that people had severe accidents there. It was causing our volunteers, our firemen, all those types of people, had to go out and rescue people, try to get them in ambulances, and it was a situation, it was a burden on our health care system.

When the public were crying for some changes to that particular intersection, the Member from Alberton-Roseville and I, we went and had a meeting with then the minister of transportation and we talked about some possible solutions to that. We talked about the possibilities of lights, we talked about other ways to try to make traffic safer, because every time an accident and a death occurred at that particular intersection something was done, whether it was flashing lights, whether it was rumble strips, all those things. But none of those things actually worked. It was a case of actually trying to look at some possible solutions that would really solve it.

One of the solutions we came up with was a roundabout. The previous minister of transportation we talked about: Let's do it right this time, let's not do some stopgap measure that's not going to solve the problem. Otherwise we're going to be back into having to do another thing, and eventually we might wind up doing a roundabout and then it would be a waste of money. I think it's very important that if the engineers and the minister of transportation currently feel that this is the most appropriate way for the long-term future and viability of the transportation industry and the safety of our Islanders and our visitors alike, I think it's something that we should be really looking at supporting.

I have an appreciation for what the Member from Kellys Cross-Cumberland is going through when it comes to trying to do the right thing, and when I was dealing with the O'Leary corner people they had different opinions. They felt: Don't waste money on a roundabout, go with the lights, that will solve the problem. Well, it didn't. When we went with the roundabout it was a good investment of our money, and in the end I think we're saving money in the long term and we're saving lives and making our (Indistinct).

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Henderson: So that's some of the rationale, reason, we have to, even though there were people thought that was a silly idea, a roundabout. Right today I don't think you'd find anybody in the riding of O'Leary-Inverness that would disagree that the roundabout was a good idea. Sometimes the general public, they don't have the comprehension and understanding to understand traffic patterns and how engineers design things for standards today.

That's why I think it's important that we make sure in this debate here we're having the opportunity to explain to the general public some of the rationale and thinking behind how governments, engineers, make decisions.

The Member from Stratford-Kinlock talked a little bit about our visitors, what do they expect when they come to Prince Edward Island? One of the things that they do expect is they do expect that minimum standards

are adhered to from across the country when they come here. This isn't some foreign country here that roads are different, that you drive on the opposite side of the road. In North America we have standards. Can you imagine going to a big urban city and where you have four, five, six lanes of highway, and then having that down to a two-lane highway based on the volume of traffic that can occur? We have to understand what the volumes of traffic might be in future.

When people come to Prince Edward Island they're visitors, they may not be familiar with the highway. They may not be familiar where the intersections are, where the (Indistinct) hills and curves and things like that. So they have to have minimum standards. That's why the Trans-Canada Highway is designated the Trans-Canada Highway. If you don't comply with those standards, there's risks that are associated should something ever occur. We want our visitors that come to Prince Edward Island and spend money in our cultural activities and our culinary facilities, that they can expect that standard and that safety that comes with that. If you're travelling at night that has an impact with where the lights are coming on you, shining on you. Those are things that are very important.

I'm going to give a little analogy on how I would sort of describe the situation that we are faced with today. It's sort of like you have a nice house at home, and you have a step. You designed that step, that step was built a number of years ago and it doesn't have the proper treads, heights, it doesn't have the proper step sizes, and it might have a few creaky board or whatever. There's a risk associated with that if people come to visit your home and something ever happened to them. Number one, it would be embarrassing. Number two, you never know what could happen as far as you don't want to harm a visitor or a neighbour. If somebody came along and said to me: I'll pay for half of that step if you make a new step, but you have to make it to the proper tread sizes, you have to have the heights and risers to that, and the proper standards and we're going to upgrade it and make it better, I think most people would say: Gee, what a great opportunity, I can get a brand new step and I'm going to respect anybody that comes to visit me by them feeling safe in entering my home.

That's the way I look at the analogy when it comes to this road. The federal government has stepped up to the plate and has said the Atlantic Gateway program will help pay for half of this road that isn't quite to the standards that people expect from Canada. I think that's an opportunity to take advantage of that.

The other comment I want to make – and the Member from Stratford-Kinlock mentioned about the scenery and the degradation of trees. We've changed highways. Back in 1979 we changed highways and we had to cut some trees down to make it safer and add more visibility. I don't think anybody (Indistinct) right today we say it looks wonderful, it's beautiful.

I think, Madam Speaker, in your own riding, the Fredericton area, there were some major changes to the Fredericton area. There was a lot of construction going on there. Yes, it looked a little rough for a while, but today, you drive through there, it's a beautiful scenic drive. You feel safer about it. You feel it's a worthwhile drive through. You quickly forget the fact that some of these things had to change.

With that, when people come to Prince Edward Island, they do drive on the Trans-Canada highway, but it's not the only scenic highway that you have. You can go on heritage roads. You can go on secondary roads, roads to beaches, they're all different. That's what makes PEI a rather unique experience for visitors. But our arterial highways have to be safe. They have to meet the standards that the public expects when they come here, and they do want to view the beautiful vistas and highways, they have that opportunity to do that. At least they know that there's a highway wide enough, and that the curves, the gradients, the steepness, all of those things are going to comply with standards.

With that, I just cannot support this particular motion. I just think it's ill-conceived and short-sighted.

With that, I thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Services and Seniors.

Ms. Docherty: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As the MLA for the area that is representing the Plan B, it is a difficult position I find myself in. When I decided to get into politics I didn't go in with airy-fairy ideas. I knew that there would be some good days and some not-so-good days. I also knew that I could never ensure that everybody in my constituency would be happy with whatever decisions were being made, whether made directly by me or by my government. Unfortunately, this is the case in this situation.

We live in a wonderful country, a country that allows us free speech to express our opinions to talk about what it is that concerns us. I have freely made that quite clear to my constituents in any fashion whatsoever. To take a stand, whether you're for or against this project, if you feel passionate enough about it that you need to make sure you're heard, I've been encouraging that.

Any place I go – and I have not backed down just because some of my constituents believe I'm not supporting them. When I say I haven't backed down, whether it's a fisherman's breakfast in Bonshaw, a play at Bluefield High School, I'm going to the events in my district. I'm not hiding from them. The fact of the matter is I'm there because I'm interested in what they have to hear and what they have to say.

Can I agree with everything? No, I can't. What do I say even to that one family that lost that family member? I'm sorry, that life really isn't important? We can't consider that one life that was lost in making changes to the road? I can't do that. Nor can I say the same thing to all of the families that had accidents on that road or any other road. I can't overlook that.

When I think about all of the things that have been going on in my district, whether it was Sunday shopping, whether it was something more specific to a community, I've tried to be there to listen to them. My role is to listen to them. It doesn't matter whether I'm in Cabinet or I'm out of Cabinet. I will always, and I've done that

with my colleagues, I've made them aware. Actually, nobody has probably been more vocal around the Cabinet table or the caucus table than I have been about this.

The thing is this is a decision that we as a government are making. This isn't my decision alone. This isn't the Premier's decision alone. This is not the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. It's our decision. We are trying our best to make the best decision that we can.

When I think about all of the things in regards to the highways, I've been lobbying, since the day I was elected and met with the constituents in the areas impacted right now, for changes to the highway. I've been asking for safer turning lanes. Whether it's into the Cameron Road, the Colville Road, whether it's into the Green Road, Bonshaw Road, St. Catherines Road, I have been lobbying hard for that. I have gotten that now. Am I getting more than they were asking for? Maybe, that's quite possible. But the fact of the matter is I'm doing what I can do, as best as I can do, as their MLA. I think they voted me in with the fact that they trusted me, and I hope that they realize that they still can trust me even if this is not what they want.

I wish, and to my two constituents above, that I could make a decision that would make them happy. I know I can't. But I value them, I value their opinion, and I hope that they understand the position I'm in.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and Deputy Premier.

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, I feel it important as the minister of agriculture and forestry, which is near and dear to my heart.

I came from a place on Prince Edward Island, this great land, that I grew things. I want to talk about the forests and the trees and the respect we need to have for trees, too. Today, in the demonstration outside, we did see people carrying pieces of trees, and there was actually living trees in a pot. I do have a great amount of respect for that.

I want to remind everyone of the importance of wood in our lives. Every single one of us in this room lives in a wood-framed house.

We harvest, we grow trees, we let trees mature, and then we harvest trees. We turn those trees into wood products that we sustain our lives with. I think we need to keep that vision and that focus. Even every desk in this room has got wood in it. So it's pretty important.

Thirty years ago I probably went out and planted more trees than anyone in this room. I'm not saying that from a boastful perspective at all, but I planted about 10,000 trees on land that I had that I harvested some trees that were mature. Trees grow up, trees mature and trees die and fall over. On top of all of that, I had what we call a plush tree. Forestry folks walked through the forest and they found this perfect tree. It was a black spruce tree, it's still standing today. Every year the F.J. Gaudet tree farm, tree nursery, would come out and they would shimmy up the tree, and they would take the, I think, scones or something, they'd take off the tree. That was the breeding stock for next year. They did that for many years to multiply their stocks and produce trees for other woodlots.

As minister of forestry, we planted about 650,000 trees last year, and I believe we're planting about that this year again. It's a good thing.

I think, if we do have some super good high quality hemlock stock out there where this road may interfere with some of them, I think we should go out and harvest the material.

Ms. Sherry: Call the hour.

Mr. MacKinley: The hour's been called.

Speaker: The hour has been called.

Shall it carry? Carried.

We'll declare recess till 7:00 p.m.

The Legislature recessed until 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Good evening, members.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, do you mind if I have recognition of guests?

Speaker: You sure can.

Matters of Privilege and Recognition of
Guests (II)

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. We have –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Hon. members, the Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'd like to welcome our guests to the gallery tonight, especially Mike LeClair and his beautiful daughter Sarah. Mike used to be our phys ed teacher out in Morell. He actually taught all three of my kids, I guess it was. But I don't know how he did that because he's still pretty young. But they still miss him in Morell. Welcome.

Speaker: I, too, would like to welcome Mike to the gallery and Sarah, but it's to our community's gain that Mike LeClair now teaches at Central Queens. Yeah, it's great.

Anyway, getting on with the orders.

Government Motions

Orders of the Day (Government)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance, Energy and Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and Deputy Premier, that the 4th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 4, *An Act to Amend the Medical Act*, Bill No. 4, ordered for third reading.

Speaker: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and Deputy Premier, that the said bill be now read a third time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Medical Act*, Bill No. 4, read a third time.

Speaker: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and Deputy Premier, that the said bill do now pass.

Speaker: This is a bill introduced by leave of the House, read a first time, read a second time, committed to a Committee of the Whole House, reported agreed to without amendment, read a third time and it is now moved that the bill do pass.

All those in favour, say “yea.”

Some Hon. Members: Yea!

Speaker: Contrary minded, “nay.”

Carried.

Mr. Sheridan: Well done.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance, Energy and Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture, that the 5th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 5, *An Act to Amend the Legislative Assembly Act*, Bill No. 3, ordered for third reading.

Speaker: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Tourism and Culture, that the said bill be now read a third time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the Legislative Assembly Act*, Bill No. 3, read a third time.

Speaker: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Tourism and Culture, that the said bill do now pass.

I'm going to take Charlie's job.

Speaker: This is a bill introduced by leave of the House, read a first time, read a second time, committed to a Committee of the Whole House, reported agreed to with amendment, read a third time and it is now moved that the bill do pass.

All those in favour, signify by saying “yea.”

Some Hon. Members: Yea!

Speaker: Contrary minded, “nay.”

Carried.

The hon. Minister of Finance, Energy and Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, that the 20th order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 20, *An Act to Amend the School Act*, Bill No. 19, ordered for third reading.

Speaker: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, that the said bill be now read a third time.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Leader of the Opposition: No.

Clerk: An Act to Amend –

Speaker: Oh. Just, sorry?

Leader of the Opposition: Are you asking whether we support the bill or not? We don't.

Speaker: All those in favour, signify by saying "yea."

Some Hon. Members: Yea!

Speaker: Contrary minded, "nay."

Some Hon. Members: Nay!

Speaker: Motion carried.

Clerk: *An Act to Amend the School Act*, Bill No. 19, read a third time.

Speaker: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, that the said bill do now pass.

Speaker: This is a bill introduced by leave of the House, read a first time, read a second time, committed to a Committee of the Whole House, reported agreed to without amendment, read a third time and it is now moved that the bill do pass.

All those in favour, signify by saying "yea."

Some Hon. Members: Yea!

Speaker: Contrary minded, "nay."

Some Hon. Members: Nay!

Speaker: Carried.

The hon. Minister of Finance, Energy and Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and Deputy Premier, that the 2nd order of the day be now read.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Clerk: Order No. 2, Consideration of the Estimates, in Committee.

Speaker: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and Deputy Premier, that this House do now resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the grant of supply to Her Majesty.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

I'll now call upon the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Sherwood.

Chair (Mitchell): The House is now in a Committee of the Whole House to take into consideration the grant of supply to Her Majesty.

We left off on page 25. Sustainable Agriculture Resources has been read but not passed.

Mr. Webster: Mr. Chair, could I ask the privilege of the House to bring on Jerry Gavin, my corporate lead?

Chair: Permission from the House to bring on Jerry Gavin?

Some Hon. Members: Granted.

Mr. Webster: Mr. Chair, we have some documents that were asked for and we have them here, and want to table them now.

Chair: Okay.

As stated, we are on page 25, Sustainable Agriculture Resources. The figures have been read. 2,630,300 is the line.

Question, the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Just when we left off here yesterday we were talking about the program, and I'm trying to find it in my notes here now. It was the one about bringing back in the hedgerows and the hour was called when we were talking about the hedgerows there.

So this program will help reestablish the hedgerows?

Mr. Webster: Hon. member, when we get a request, we do support hedgerows as wind control measures and as water run-off protection. Under the ALUS program which has – I think we spend about 700,000 on that – producers are eligible for funding through that to actually plant trees along rivers and streams, and where applicable in open parts of the field to manage for soil conservation aspects.

Mr. Myers: So do you think there's a point coming up where maybe not through your own department solely, but maybe between your department and the department of environment, that might be something that's pushed for just because of the stream issues that may or may not be related to that? I'm not saying that they are, but the perceived relation and also the wind erosion that we see is quite prevalent now with the dry springs.

Mr. Webster: Hon. member, environment tends to be more of the enforcement aspect of regulations that are in place. We tend to work with the farming community to promote good land husbandry. Through agriculture, we want to leave the decision-making process as much as we can to the farming community. It's really great when they come to us and say: Minister, we want to do this, we want to protect our land and preserve our land. If it's driven from that end it's better, and that's why we fund landowners, not farmers exclusively, but we do fund landowners under the ALUS program plus all the wetland watershed groups. There's about 28 or 30 of them now that represent certain areas and they as well

are supported, and they do good work in streams and rivers. The way to win this battle is society as a whole, not somebody trying to drive an initiative that doesn't succeed.

Mr. Myers: No, no. I agree.

Mr. Webster: We've got great progress in the last few years, for sure.

Mr. Myers: Okay, you bring up an interesting point then, the watershed groups. The watershed group could apply for money maybe in this hedgerow project. What if they didn't own the land? If it was government land, how would they go about establishing those hedgerows? Obviously they don't have a lot of money. They don't own anything. If they're owned, land-wise?

Mr. Webster: We would help them design, I'm sure. Our engineers would make recommendations. The funding aspect, I'm not sure exactly who pays for the trees or what the cost is on the actual trees for that, but I'll let Jerry explain that.

Jerry Gavin Director: (Indistinct) can be done. Normally the watershed groups would coordinate, but you would still do it through the individual landowners (Indistinct) own land. When we get a little further through the budget, there is also a private land program that offers planting as well and sometimes you can do the planting through that program.

Mr. Myers: Okay. So if there was a watershed that was looking for ways to reduce runoffs into their stream they could approach your department and maybe landowner together and maybe work something out?

Jerry Gavin Director: Could, yeah.

Mr. Webster: Absolutely.

Mr. Myers: The native tree planting program that you have there under the ALUS Program, could you just explain that? I know it's only 20,000, but could you explain how that operates, the native tree planting program?

Jerry Gavin Director: For example, if the landowner or a farmer had a buffer zone that

they wanted planted, we encourage that and the key there is native species. We don't plant exotics. So we're basically planting trees from seed that is from Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Myers: Is that out of your own nursery?

Jerry Gavin Director: Out of our own nursery. They're grown at the J. Frank Gaudet Tree Nursery. They're a bigger seedling too, because often survival can be an issue in these areas, so will grow a bigger, more heartier tree seedling for those areas.

Mr. Myers: I just have a question about the PST rebate down at the bottom of my grants page here.

Jerry Gavin Director: Want to ask it under that section or –

Mr. Myers: It's under grants, it's just on the bottom of the next page.

Pretty sure that's under your Sustainable Agriculture Resources (Indistinct). There is a provincial PST rebate program and there is a PST rebate program. One of them says 53.8 and one of them says 22.9. Could you just explain maybe that to us?

Mr. Webster: The program provides PST rebate on building supplies for farm structures with environmental benefits. So that could be energy efficient burners or pesticide storage or anything to do with energy conservation.

Mr. Myers: So, it's only for – that has environmental benefits?

Mr. Webster: That's correct.

Chair: Total Sustainable Agriculture Resources: 2,630,300.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Top of page 26.

Agriculture Innovation.

“Appropriations provided to assist agriculture producers and agri-processors by focusing on innovative and value-added

opportunities, supporting agricultural organizations and providing agricultural advice. Appropriations are also provided to deliver programs in support of agriculture innovation, research, organic industry and beef industry development.” Administration: 20,400. Equipment: 3,100. Materials, Supplies and Services: 7,700. Professional and Contract Services: 504,300. Salaries: 610,400. Travel and Training: 25,100. Grants: 1,295,000. Total Agriculture Innovation: 2,466,000.

Question, the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: I notice here where you have a bee disease inspection.

Mr. Webster: Pardon?

Mr. LaVie: A bee disease inspection under special contracts and services.

Mr. Webster: We do import hives from Nova Scotia and we do a random inspection on those hives to make sure that there isn't the mite that's present. We don't want to risk our native bees that we have here, but yet we need about 1,000 or 1,200 hives at least extra here for the summer months to carry out pollination for us.

Mr. LaVie: Excuse me, how many hives did you say?

Mr. Webster: I think we import about 1,100 or 1,200, I think. We have about 1,000 or 1,100 of our own. So I think we have 2,200 in that range.

Mr. LaVie: There is only 1,000 to 1,100 of our own on the Island, bees?

Mr. Webster: I believe that's correct.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah.

Mr. Webster: We're not positive on that number, hon. member, we'll get that for you.

Mr. LaVie: What about Prince Edward Island, do they have diseases?

Mr. Webster: We're considered disease free for this mite. Apparently the mite does exist in Nova Scotia and that's why they do

random checks. We prefer obviously to stay away from that particular pest.

Mr. LaVie: So how long does it take to get rid of this mite? Is it there forever?

Mr. Webster: I can't answer that, if it's actually something that can be totally eliminated once it's here. But I know it does exist in some of the Nova Scotia stocks and that's why they do an inspection on the hives that are imported here on a random basis for use for pollination.

Mr. LaVie: So there is not enough hives on PEI, so we got to import from Nova Scotia?

Mr. Webster: That's correct.

Mr. LaVie: And Nova Scotia has the mite?

Mr. Webster: Pardon?

Mr. LaVie: Does Nova Scotia have the mite?

Mr. Webster: Yes.

Mr. LaVie: It does.

Mr. Webster: Yes.

Mr. LaVie: So they're inspected when they come to PEI?

Mr. Webster: That's correct.

Mr. LaVie: Randomly, yes.

Mr. Webster: It's not every hive. We can't do every hive that comes in here, but they will – I don't know if they check 10 and 40 or 20 and 40. I don't know where it is, the exact number. But we go through that process just to make sure that we can stay as disease-free as possible.

Mr. LaVie: How many bee farmers do we have?

Mr. Webster: I don't know exactly how many individuals are involved. There is quite a number. We have one large one –

Mr. LaVie: Pardon?

Mr. Webster: We have one large producer that has a lot of hives and, of course, they generate honey as well.

Mr. LaVie: One producer, a lot of hives.

Mr. Webster: We've invested in the honey bee expansion program for one year of 228,500.

Mr. LaVie: Okay, you say there is one big producer.

Mr. Webster: There is one large producer. There are several smaller ones. That individual works with the blueberry producers. They obviously need the pollination. He also needs the ability for the bees to forage and build up his stocks. Of course, he generated revenue from renting the hives and generates whatever value he can arrive from in his honey production.

Mr. LaVie: So how large would he be?

Mr. Webster: I don't know if he has 1,000 hives or not in total. I'm not sure of the individual either.

Chair: Can I move over to the other member?

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters has a question.

Mr. Myers: Just on your salaries here, Agriculture Innovation. Are all those people that you have there – there are two that are 40%, lab technicians. Obviously they just work during the agricultural months. Are all the rest of the people in that – those salaries, the 610 – full-time or 100% time?

Mr. Webster: Looks like there's seven full-time and we have three part-times.

An Hon. Member: Twenty-six.

Mr. Myers: Can we get – I guess the breakdown of professional services and contracts I do have. The travel and training, the 25,100, can we get a breakdown of that?

Mr. Webster: You want the total budget?

Mr. Myers: You have 25,100.

Mr. Webster: Okay. 12,600 for in-province travel, with eight staff and two part-time staff; 11,000 for out-of-province travel for eight staff to attend industry-related meetings, conferences, and training events. Then there's 1,500 for staff training, so it's 25,100.

Mr. Myers: I'm going to go roll through a couple of things that you have under professional services here, then. The dead stock disposal service, is that 100% or is that a co-share?

Mr. Webster: Dead stock disposal services is 459,500.

Mr. Myers: Yeah, I know, I have that. I'm just wondering are you paying 100% of that or is that a co-share?

Mr. Webster: We're paying 100% of that.

Mr. Myers: Okay.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: I know. It's a great thing, because it's a great cost saving for them.

The beef quality improvement program, you could explain that just a little bit? Is that the herd health one or is that a different program?

Mr. Webster: There's 100,000 in the beef quality improvement program, and the program is to encourage strategic industry development through innovation, innovative projects, and to improve the sustainability of the beef industry through implementation of development projects identified within the industry.

Mr. Myers: What would that entail, I guess?

Mr. Webster: We also have 140,000 in the beef industry initiative, and that one is incentives to improve genetics and enhance herd health.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira with a question.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah. Minister, getting back to the bees again, do they have a new farmers'

program or a young farmers' program in that, too?

Mr. Webster: Are you asking, hon. member, if a bee producer, a young bee producer, could take advantage of the young farmers' program?

Mr. LaVie: Yeah.

Mr. Webster: Yes.

Mr. LaVie: Yes, he can? How's he go about – can he get his bees off-Island? Or on-Island? How's he get started?

Jerry Gavin Director: You could import – you can bring bees in. We had that program the minister mentioned, the 228,000 where we knew we didn't have enough colonies of bees on Prince Edward Island to pollinate the blueberry crop, and that was one of the reasons why we developed this program one time only. It was very successful. We have about 12 different bee producers involved in that program.

Mr. LaVie: So it was only one year?

Jerry Gavin Director: One year, because now we feel that we're getting the population up.

Mr. LaVie: When's that year up?

Jerry Gavin Director: Pardon?

Mr. LaVie: When's that year up?

Jerry Gavin Director: It was this past year. That was built in, and that's actually referenced in our budget in the notes that we passed out to you folks.

Mr. LaVie: Oh. So there's no way a new farmer could get in anymore?

Mr. Webster: A new farmer can get (Indistinct). The young farmer program offers assistance, for example, financial assistance. There's a 1% interest discount. It can go as high as 3% under certain conditions, so there's funding relief, interest relief for that. The biggest part of the Future Farmer Program is the ability for farmers to partner with mentors, people that are very successful in a particular commodity or crop, and that's a very important part of that

program. If you talk to young farmers that are involved in that program, they'll often tell you that's one of the most important aspects.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah, because I'm hearing from the blueberries there's not enough bees to pollinate on PEI, so we've got to be more -

An Hon. Member: That's a world-wide problem.

Mr. Webster: Yeah. Our yields are not, hon. member, where they should be here in PEI because our stands, they're not mature enough yet, of course, and of course, pollination's the other aspect.

Mr. LaVie: So should we try to get more new farmers into it?

An Hon. Member: Bees?

Mr. LaVie: Yeah.

Mr. Webster: Sure. We obviously need, if we can do it locally, and reduce risks, then why would we not go down that road? I think we should.

Mr. LaVie: But you say that newcomers, there's a freeze on it right now, right? It was only one year?

Mr. Webster: Yes. That fund.

Jerry Gavin Director: Yes, and that's one of the programs.

Mr. LaVie: Yes.

Jerry Gavin Director: That was really to speed up the need for additional colonies.

Mr. LaVie: And it worked.

Jerry Gavin Director: We also have a honeybee program, right? Where an individual can, like, purchase a capped queen bee. For example, there's assistance for that, it's 50% of the total cost, and also it's \$12.00 per honeybee queen. You can buy the queen or you can actually buy a capped queen cell. Those programs have been ongoing. The idea of the honeybee expansion, the key word there was expansion. One time only, let's get as many colonies in as we can. There were 12

different producers took advantage of that program.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: The premium sires and seed stock program, is that part of your herd health program? Or I guess I'm looking for -

Mr. MacKinley: Bring in (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: Okay.

Mr. Webster: Yes.

Mr. Myers: What's the herd health program?

Jerry Gavin Director: The herd health program is really under the Beef Industry Initiative.

Mr. Myers: Okay. So that's -

Jerry Gavin Director: That's really improving genetics, (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: That's in another area of the budget, you mean?

Jerry Gavin Director: That's actually under - it's called the Beef Industry Initiative. That would have been note No. 34 that you would have.

Mr. Myers: Okay. I'm going through 34, I just haven't found it yet. Could you explain, then, that program for me while I look for it?

Jerry Gavin Director: Okay. Basically that program provides incentives to improve genetics and herd health. The whole idea is to improve the quality of the herds, right? Through genetics.

That's something, by the way, that program we're looking at now (Indistinct) producers, seeing if we can - we'd like to tag the Beef Industry Initiative program, sit down with them, and also talk about the Beef Quality Improvement Program and see if we can combine those two programs and be more strategic.

Mr. Myers: Yes. Okay. I see the answer.

Now I hear concerns about the herd health, particularly last summer, from beef farmers, and what they said is that – I'm going to paraphrase it because I don't recall it 100%, but that they went out and they had to bring in the vets and they had to do their inoculations and their needles and that type of thing to get an animal certified under the herd health, and then they got like \$150 back. But at the other end it's supposed to help them get a higher return on the end product. Is that –

Mr. Webster: That's correct, hon. member. There was a heifer retention program which allowed people to build up their stocks –

Mr. Myers: Okay.

Mr. Webster: – and have a better quality cow-calf piece. That incentive was out there, and people did improve the quality, and primarily because beef is worth more money today and there're starting to be profits in it again. Those two things kind of came together, and all of a sudden the total health, if you look at the big picture in PEI, of the herd is of higher quality, therefore it should bring the higher money in the marketplace.

Mr. Myers: The complaint I guess I heard was that farmers had gone through this and then when the time came the money wasn't there.

Mr. Webster: You're exactly right, hon. member. We allot so many dollars per program, and normally because beef prices were soft, these programs, some of them weren't fully utilized. But this year because the price is up people are getting back into the business more so, trying to improve the quality that they do have.

We had seven programs that were fully utilized somewhere around Christmas. When the program is expired we don't have any more money for it. You have to go three months before the new program kicks in, which is April 1.

Mr. Myers: Yeah. That was, I guess, the complaint I heard.

Mr. Webster: Yes, that's –

Mr. Myers: Will those programs receive higher funding this year because of the cull?

Mr. Webster: No. This has the same amount of money.

Mr. Myers: Could you explain to me how that worked that these farmers thought they were getting the money and then found that they weren't? Because they were out – I guess I don't really understand how it worked. Did they think they were getting the money because they had made the steps? Or they made contact and they –

Mr. Webster: Historically, the programs were not fully utilized.

Mr. Myers: No, I understand that part.

Mr. Webster: So we'd have a couple of hundred thousand left over maybe.

Mr. Myers: If I had an animal I want to put through that program, what would the steps be that I'd have to take to do that?

Mr. Webster: We would have to itemize – the Enhanced Herd Health Program, this subprogram is designed to encourage cow-calf producers to communicate and work with our veterinarians to develop whole herd health protocols, which will result in premium quality weaned calves and create a value-added marketing opportunity. Applicants would have \$40 per cow-calf pair.

It's bad that the programs are fully utilized. Well, it's good that they're fully utilized, because people are enhancing their herd. It's bad that the money's expired. When the budget's expired, I can't do anything about it.

Mr. Myers: No, and I understand that. I guess, the part that I'm stuck on is they obviously felt like they were let down, is the way I'll put it. It's not really the way they said it, but I won't repeat the way it was said to me.

They felt like they were let down because they thought: I'm getting in on a good program, and I'm doing things. It's a good program, right? There are no arguments with the program. Then, when it came time to get their money, they kind of felt like they were shafted because it wasn't there. It's not a great deal of money, but to the people who were trying to follow through with the

program, they kind of felt like the rug was pulled out right when it was time to get back what we had invested.

Mr. Webster: I'm aware of a couple of individuals that sort of expected the remuneration to be there. We have never known it to be fully expired, as it was this year. As a result, they weren't aware. In most cases the producers knew, or some of them were told, that the money is getting used up, so if you have something, get your application in.

Mr. Myers: Okay. They would have already gone through the steps to do the vet thing and they would have taken their steps. Then they would have put the application in afterwards to get their money back. Would it be based on a vet bill or letter to prove that you did it?

Mr. Webster: Hon. member, I would have to check to see the process they actually follow. I know in some cases they were advised that money was getting close to being used up. You never know for sure how many applicants are coming through the door. It's very unfortunate, but a couple of individuals didn't qualify because the program was gone. It was fully utilized.

Mr. Myers: You don't see any changes coming to that program that may tighten that up for them, so that they –

Mr. Webster: No, the programs are all there in place on a go-forward basis on April 1. We're good with that.

We had to eliminate some programs just to make sure we fit within the budget. We looked at everything to decide what was going to be least amount of impact, and where were the needs and how strong is that industry, those kinds of things. We went through that assessment and those programs are fully continued.

Chair: We'll flip over to the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira. He has a question there.

Mr. LaVie: Your expansion program is just to expand their operations? Can you tell us more about it?

Mr. Webster: I'm not sure what number you're on, hon. member.

Mr. LaVie: It's on grants. Is it in grants? Under the expansion program?

Mr. Webster: Hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, as it's been said, we had a one-time only of 228,000, which was last year.

We're carrying 30,000 for a Queen Cell and Mated Queen Importation Program. This program provided incentives to enhance the genetic diversity of PEI honey bees to better manage increased pest and honey bee disorders, with a goal of increasing pollination services to blueberry growers.

Mr. LaVie: Yes, it's a one-year program, but the blueberries are fast growing, right? It's growing rapidly, blueberries across PEI. There are not enough bees to take care of them. How do we get more bees for pollination?

Mr. Webster: It could be part of the initiative is to be driven by government. We try to do that when and where we can. The industry would have to, as well, be a driver in this approach to ramp up enough bee production so that we increase our yields.

I know last year we talked about our blueberry production could be doubled in five years. That's through more acres coming on that are in the process stage, that's number 1. Number 2 is increase the yields enough to double that supply line. Now that was a projection that we – or discussions we had that might be a potential.

Obviously, low-bush blueberries only really are local to Atlantic Canada and Maine, predominantly. If you look at the supply/demand thing, there's a great potential to generate economic wealth from the land that we have.

Mr. LaVie: So, if a person wanted to get into the honey bee, are there any restrictions stopping them?

Mr. Webster: There are no restrictions from the aspect of getting into production. There are no permits required, other than we would have to make sure that we are not importing a disease that we don't want, like the mite. I don't believe it's been identified here and that's a good thing. It gives us a little isolation. PEI is unique in that sense that we have two entrances to our highway

system, rather, and there's only one of them operating twelve months of the year. It gives us some level of isolation here on the Island, which is a great thing.

Mr. LaVie: It can be imported from Nova Scotia. What about New Brunswick?

Mr. Webster: I don't believe we import anything from New Brunswick.

Mr. LaVie: Can they?

Mr. Webster: I don't believe we can. I'd have to check that out for sure.

Mr. LaVie: Is there a reason?

Mr. Webster: I think it might be – I'm not sure what pest is over there that would lead us to that conclusion.

Mr. LaVie: Because this seems to be a big problem everywhere.

Mr. Webster: Oh, it is.

Mr. LaVie: If they are to import them, say, from Nova Scotia, are there regulations over there?

Mr. Webster: I'm not aware of what the regulations say, but I know we have agreements with Nova Scotia. They carry out certain production activities over there that we feel comfortable with. We have our resource people that make a judgment call on that particular area and say: That's okay. I don't believe we need – like Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick, I don't believe is qualified.

Mr. LaVie: How does the mite affect the bee? What is a mite?

Mr. Webster: Hon. member, I don't know what it actually does. I'll have to get back to you on that.

Mr. LaVie: Because there are farms in Nova Scotia and they do have the mite. Is there a clause over there where you can't buy hives within so many kilometers of this hive that's got the mite?

Mr. Webster: I do know they have the mite over there and I do know they inspect the hives as they come in to say they're disease-

free. You very well may be right. But I would have to go and research that piece.

Mr. LaVie: Can you do that for me?

Mr. Webster: Sure.

Mr. LaVie: Good.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: The agricultural research fund, could you just explain that? It says here there are 33 projects that were funded last year. Could you explain that fund and explain how you would get funding and who would be eligible for funding?

Mr. Webster: The agriculture research fund last year had 448,000 in it. The program supports the undertaking of short-term applied research that will yield economic benefits to the PEI agriculture industry.

I have a list of – I'm not sure if you have a list of the projects or not.

Mr. Myers: Yeah, I have a list of some of the projects that were on there last year. There is wireworm that was on there and there are different ones. What is a project? I guess is probably the highest level question I can ask. I don't really understand who comes to you and says: Hey I need money to do this.

Mr. Webster: I have a list of the projects. I guess you as well, do. We usually support programs that are in enough need to different sectors of industry. Some of them are short-term, some of them are long-term as well. We respond to topics of the day and issues of the day. That organization, whether it be the potato disease testing or variety evaluations or other crops like buckwheat, or strip-tilling, those kinds of things, that would go to a committee and that committee would make a decision whether that should be funded or not.

Mr. Myers: Okay. So it'd be the industry would come to you and say (Indistinct).

Mr. Webster: The industry would come, yes.

Mr. Myers: Okay, that's the part I was confused. I thought it was (Indistinct) somewhere out there. I have more questions on grants. If somebody is waiting, go ahead. I'm ahead a couple of pages. The organic is where I wanted to move to. It's a couple of pages ahead there.

Jerry Gavin Director: Under grants?

Mr. Myers: Yeah, it's under grants. So the organic industry development program, is that an increase in funding for them this year?

Mr. Webster: There is a decrease and I think that's demand driven in organics for 2012-2013.

Mr. Myers: It's a decrease?

Mr. Webster: That's correct.

Mr. Myers: Was there less drawn down from these programs or what would cause a decrease there?

Mr. Webster: Last year on programs we spent 330,000, actually. Sorry, I was in error. This year we have 375,000.

Mr. Myers: So it is an increase?

Mr. Webster: Yeah.

Mr. Myers: Just on the organic thing. How do you view this, the organic farm industry, as far as one of our future farming staples?

Mr. Webster: Organics have been out there for quite a number of years and some people are super high on organics. It's probably 8%, I think, or 9%, of sales in a grocery store. There is a number of folks that want to buy organic, they feel it's better. We're strong on the fact that our whole Canadian system is good and our food is safe. That's paramount to us. There are people that walk in the grocery stores and say: Look, I trust the food system here completely, I'm not paying more for organics. I believe it's about straight lined in production. I don't think it's going up and I don't believe it's really going down.

Mr. Myers: Do you think there is more of a worldwide demand for organics? The export possibilities, have they increased?

Mr. Webster: That's hard to tell. We shouldn't be making policy to push people to organic if they don't want to go. I think it's market-driven. The market should ride that. The customer and the producer, that relationship that gets developed, should drive the initiative of whether organics garner more of a support out there. They could, but I do think our system is solid all over. If people didn't trust our system, they'd all move to organic. Sometimes the shelf life don't last quite as long in organic. I know the stores will tell you that.

Mr. Myers: We're seeing a big shift, actually, in Kings County in organics.

Mr. Webster: Okay, that's good.

Mr. Myers: The Member from Belfast-Murray River, in his area and in through Montague-Kilmuir and up through my area, it's growing really rapidly. In some of the cases it's old farms that are being bought up and they're being turned into organic operations. It's almost growing exponentially. Do you see this as having an impact on the industry as a whole as time goes on?

Mr. Webster: It will definitely be a piece of the business. Whether the business grows in percentage of volume I wouldn't want to predict any way, shape or form. We support and approve, if you like, all production, high quality healthy products. We will continue to do that. We're not going to judge, go up, go down. We'll let the market decide on where that is.

Some crops are easier to produce organically, others are more difficult. It's just you can't say yes, everybody can go do this, because there could be issues. There could be disease build up that does come back to haunt you after awhile. It's a matter of protecting the crop against all pests and all insects.

We tend to grow tomatoes in our garden, which are organic really. Most of them are. Last year was a wet year and they pretty much all blighted out across Prince Edward Island. That puts blight pressure on everybody else and they all blighted out. We don't want a famine because of enormous amounts of organic either on certain crops.

Now grains and cereals, we get along good, or better.

Mr. Myers: I guess the other aspect I'm wondering about, the organics and the large growth of it that I'm seeing – I don't have numbers, I just see farms getting bought up, like, all the time. They're just gone. There's a farm for sale in Kings County and I know who's going to buy it. I'm wondering if it's going to have an impact. We don't have a limited lists – amount of land. If we're going to be able to strike a balance or how you perceive our future shaping out with organics and the obvious growth that it's taken.

Mr. Webster: I think I know the topic, hon. member, that you speak of. That is a very unique situation with what appears to be enormous amounts of foreign investment, and in some cases that land is not even cropped, which presents another challenge, and there is no input put into that crop and there is no return, there is no labour on it, there is no energy on it either. Where is that topic going to go? I don't know.

Mr. Myers: It's competitiveness for the price of the land, too.

Mr. Webster: Very much so, yes.

Mr. Myers: It's probably slowly putting pressure on people – and some of the farms maybe were cropped by somebody who rented land from them and obviously used that land because they needed it as part of their (Indistinct).

Will that add additional stresses or will that force – I mean, if you go back to the map we did here on one of the first days, will that become more and more important, some of that land that's earmarked as agricultural land, that it gets pushed back into production if it's not?

Mr. Webster: The whole issue of land and land ownership and land governance and the *Lands Protection Act, PEI*, all those things I believe we need to review. That process has slowly been started. Is the landscape going to change over the next 10 years? Yes it is, over the next 20. So we need to look at everything about what we do and our land because that's our oil or our energy or our

value, and decide what we want PEI to look like 20 years from now.

I think that discussion needs to be held and had and we go from there. But it's an issue or could be an issue.

Mr. Myers: Something to think about, anyway.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira has another question.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah. This is going to be probably the last I'll touch on this for you, is the blueberries.

We all admit to how fast the blueberry is growing. We know that there's a shortage of bees for pollination and we know we need more, so when somebody wants to buy hives in Nova Scotia, and they got mites, he can't buy within 25 kilometres of that hive that's got mites, right?

Mr. Webster: I've been told that that is correct.

Mr. LaVie: Yes. So what happens if it's only five kilometres short? Can he get that hive?

Mr. Webster: I would have to say no. I would have to say either you follow the regulations or you don't. If you don't follow the regulations and keep bending the rules, then we could be in trouble with an issue.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah, because this individual, he's got so much tied up into it and he's got to be on the go by the 19th of May.

Mr. Webster: Okay. You're speaking of an individual case and I generally speak of the whole industry. We don't want to jeopardize what we have now either. But yet we want people to be able to do business.

Mr. LaVie: But if it's inspected, if those hives are inspected coming in?

Mr. Webster: You make a valid argument. We can discuss with our experts.

Mr. LaVie: Because we are short of hives.

Mr. Webster: Oh yes, I believe we are. Yes.

Mr. LaVie: We're definitely short. The way the industry is growing, it's growing fast, which is good. Perfect.

Mr. Webster: Oh, perfect. Lovely. Great industry. Fantastic industry.

Mr. LaVie: So if we can get more young people into it with these hives

Mr. Webster: Well, that's what we need. We need youth in agriculture in general.

Mr. LaVie: If his hives are inspected coming in –

Mr. Webster: Okay. Point well taken.

Chair: May I call to carry the section, gentlemen?

Mr. Myers: Could I just ask one bee question before we move on?

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: The queen cell program. I don't actually understand the bee industry and I know that there's a major operation just up the road from me and I visited and got stung there a couple times. You apparently don't swing at them. He told me that after I got stung.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: They were Liberal bees. It was during the campaign, too.

In order to expand that, my understanding is that it's hard to split the hive without having another queen bee, and I'm not really sure I understand how that operates. I see you have 40,000 for the queen cell importation, so can you just bring queen bees in? Is that the way that works? And split a hive off with the new queen?

Mr. Webster: The program provides incentives to enhance the genetic diversity of the PEI honey bees to better manage increased pest and honey bee disorders with the goal of increasing pollination services to blueberry producers. The projects involve six beekeepers who were funded under the program from 2012-2013, mated queens processing disease resistant genetic

characteristics to improve overall winter survival.

Mr. Myers: Okay.

Chair: Okay.

Ms. Biggar: Carried.

Chair: Total Agriculture Innovation: 2,466,000.

Shall it carry? Carried.

Agriculture Information.

“Appropriations provided for the effective delivery of information to agriculture producers and the delivery of the Future Farmer Program and Buy PEI initiative.” Administration: 24,700. Equipment: 2,200. Materials, Supplies and Services: 77,000. Professional and Contract Services: 9,000. Salaries: 671,700. Travel and Training: 23,200. Grants: 750,000. Total Agriculture Information: 1,557,800.

Shall it carry?

Mr. Myers: Question.

Chair: Question, the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Can you explain to me just in the salaries here the breakdown when you have information officer and information officer, and then you have an information technologist and an information technologist? Can you explain what those two positions are?

Mr. Webster: We've got six people on the administration side. We have 671,700 in that, and there's an increase from last year of 67,400, and that's due to the collective agreement.

Mr. Myers: Yeah, no. I'm just wondering, what does an information officer do?

Jerry Gavin Director: The information officer basically provides up-to-date information to the farming community. That's the main purpose of that particular position.

Mr. Myers: And that's through events or some directive?

Jerry Gavin Director: Through events. There's also a call-in, there's information that also goes out. There's emails. There's a myriad of different communication techniques that we use.

Mr. Myers: Okay, and what's an information technologist do?

Jerry Gavin Director: An information technologist sometimes gets into more specific type information (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: Okay, so they'd be more keyed in on delivering a certain type of –

Jerry Gavin Director: Yeah.

Mr. Myers: Just on your grants or your professional service contracts – no, your grants. The Future Farmer Program, could you just explain that to me once, what that Future Farmer Program entails?

Mr. Webster: Yeah. We have 320,000 in that and that program is to promote the entry of new farmers into the industry and improve the profitability of the new entrants establishing profitable and sustainable farm business. This is assistance for training, business planning, interest support and risk management.

Mr. Myers: What does interest support mean?

Mr. Webster: We have a program that supports a young farmer if they end up with a share of some business. Could be their parents' business or some other business. We give them 3,500 a year, is it? We give them a maximum of 7,500 per annum up to 22,500 over three years of interest subsidy, I guess you might say.

Mr. Myers: Okay. So how many new people would you have had into this program last year?

Mr. Webster: We'd have to bring back the number, but it's 30 or 40.

Mr. Myers: Really?

Mr. Webster: Oh yes.

Mr. Myers: So some of them would be through they took over the family farm?

Mr. Webster: That's correct, but they have to have ownership.

Mr. Myers: Yes. So how many people would be investing in buying out an operation these days as a new farmer? Does that happen very often anymore?

Mr. Webster: No. It's very difficult to buy the whole farm out, hon. member. But somebody can end up with 10% or 20% of a business, then that qualifies them for this interest support thing and it gives them more hands-on. It gives them part-ownership in the business and it's a way that we can try to entice young farmers into the business.

Mr. Myers: Yeah, no. It's a good idea because I think it's important for our future.

Mr. Webster: Oh it is, yeah.

Mr. Myers: On the Buy PEI initiative, can you give me just some insight into your thoughts on how that's working for us here?

Mr. Webster: The Buy PEI program, we invest 180,000 in it and the objective is to increase public awareness, support and demand for Prince Edward Island food products and processing products. So we do that, yes. It's a good thing and it creates ownership among society here in Prince Edward Island.

We have to be somewhat careful because Ontario could say: We're going to develop a buy local program, and you guys keep your crops and your hogs and your beef down there. So, we do it–

Mr. Myers: They do.

Mr. Webster: – and people buy into it and support us, and they buy local and it helps us locally here, but we can't go out and do a mass campaign on that because we are an exporting province.

Mr. Myers: No, I agree. But Ontario does have a major one. You see it on t.v.

Mr. Webster: They do, yes, Buy Ontario.

Mr. Myers: Yes, they do have a Buy Ontario program.

Is there any measurement in place to figure if people are buying more –

Mr. Webster: Is it worth it or not?

Mr. Myers: I think it's worth it. I'm not questioning the value. I'm just wondering if we're making the right steps to make sure that it's sinking in. I think it's a great idea.

Mr. Webster: The farmer's markets have been growing over time and the producers tell us that our – have certain little niche markets. They tell us it's good. Every piece of business that we have, we want to maintain it and try and grow it. This is one way to do it. I feel if people know the producer that produced that beef, or that vegetable or that hort crop or cereal then it means something else.

In Japan now you can take your BlackBerry and go along to the barcode on the product on the shelf and you can see farmer Joe that actually grew the crop. You know where he was, you know how old he is, you see a picture of him. It connects people to the folks who actually produce the land, produce the food. That's the important aspect of it, although we don't have that technology here, but it could be here. I think it has its benefits. It's like Burger Love. There's a classic for 30 days. You promote that, there are banners, there are ads and so on, and that makes a connection from the consumer to the person who produced it. That's probably a link that's pretty valuable.

Mr. Myers: No, and I think it is, I think the Burger Love program is a great example of promoting our Island beef.

I think the challenges that I see with the Buy PEI initiative is the supermarkets. I mean, they're big. They're not necessarily located here. Their main offices aren't here. The company has buildings here and they sell stuff here. But how do you get more of the local product on to shelves? Because that seems to be a challenge, when you walk down and there's a mile of meat, but there's very little of it that's from the Island.

Mr. Webster: Hon. member, a lot of those decisions are corporately made. I know to be

on the shelf you have to be listed. If your area is producing something, a food product, there may be only a window of four weeks where that product is available locally. If you're listed, then that chain store could distribute your product.

But if the supplies go down so low that you may not be consistently there, they might just say: We're delisting you now. I know that's happened too. They go to central distribution at that point, which could be Debert, Nova Scotia or somewhere else. It all depends on the supply and what's out there.

Mr. Myers: It's created a unique challenge for our farmers. Not so much our potato farmers because we have a product that's well known as being one of the best products. When I was a kid the grocery store was all local. You'd only have – if it was on the shelf it was grown here because that was just the way it was. You wouldn't get corn but when there was corn, you would never see strawberries unless it was strawberry season. All of the beef and pork and everything would be all local stuff. It's created unique challenges for the market and how do they reestablish themselves in that market.

The things like the farmer's market are good. I know there's a farmer's market that's opening in June and it's going to be a four-day operation. It's building on what the good people who have been working so hard on that have been doing for the past number of years. They are solidifying it by moving into a building.

They could only be expected to do so much. How do we get it into the bigger places? Because, yes, I go to the farmer's market and buy stuff, but not everybody really has that – you're going grocery shopping, you have that one hour, you have to get everything. So you have to go to the big place to get it, and they, unfortunately, don't carry, in my opinion, enough of the local product.

Mr. Webster: Our food distribution system in Canada has consolidated significantly over a decade or more, and it's more centralized now. That makes it a little more difficult. I know some commodities have gone into those chains and said: I think you

should have my product or our product on the shelves.

I know one promotion campaign tried to do that and they just tell you to get out of the store. They run the store and that's it. So, there's been those kinds of—

Mr. Myers: No, I know, that's why it's a challenge.

Mr. Webster: You have to work with the system we have. Buy Local is probably growing in momentum, and that's a good thing.

Mr. Myers: Is there a way out of this? I know that's not a great deal of money there. But is there a way there can be incentives for operations that carry local produce or that would carry a percentage of their shelf to local products? You know what I mean? And it would be significant.

Mr. Webster: Supermarket?

Mr. Myers: Anybody, really, to help encourage them to get it out there.

Mr. Webster: That's a potential. My first impression is that you might modify behaviour by putting money there, which is typically what happens. But it could be subsidizing cheaper food for a large corporation. They might love it, all right, but again, it's taxpayers' dollars that fund the thing at the outset.

I don't know how that would be viewed or looked at.

Mr. Myers: It's a Catch-22. I mean, I know what you're saying. You're kind of damned if you do, and damned if you don't.

The Growing Forward Export Development Program, we've talked about that, and I've seen it in a few different areas, and I'm wondering what's different about it, where it sits here as opposed to when we talked about two days ago. You had it back over on one of the other — you could probably find it.

Mr. Webster: There's 100,000 there in Growing Forward product and development program. The program assists farmers and agriculture businesses with new product development activities to add value to an

existing commodity here on PEI. That could be controlled atmosphere packaging. It could be a different product to add shelf life. It could be different labeling. It could be many different things.

Mr. Myers: Just before we move on from this division, the professional and contract services part, where you talk about the Old Home Week stuff, the Sweet Spot Marketing, the expanded communications and stuff, are these just programs or are these actually people who go out and set up and deliver a service at a thing like the Old Home Week?

Mr. Webster: It looks like we fund about seven or eight programs there. This total here is up to 9,100 in the previous year, which is the PEI Horticulture Association, and that's crop displays at Old Home Week.

Mr. Myers: Is that the ones you were talking about, about setting up the rows and the —

Mr. Webster: Yes.

Mr. Myers: Okay. So it's about promotion of the industry more than anything. There would be a certain amount of staff associated with the operation of those?

Mr. Webster: Oh, yes, we front that whole agriculture display and we're growing it. We have grown it and we'll continue to grow it.

Chair: Total Agriculture Information: 1,557,800.

Shall it carry? Carried.—

Total Agriculture Resource Division: 8,563,000.

Shall it carry? Carried.

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Agriculture Policy and Regulatory Division.

Division Management.

“Appropriations provided for the management and support to the Agriculture Policy & Regulatory Division and offers programs and services in support of agriculture and agri-food industry

development.” Administration: 22,000. Equipment: 1,500. Materials, Supplies and Services: 7,800. Professional and Contract Services: 73,000. Salaries: 574,100. Travel and Training: 35,700. Grants: 3,245,200. Total Division Management: 3,959,300.

Shall it carry?

Mr. Myers: Question.

Some Hon. Members: Carried.

Chair: Question, the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: There’s a lot of things in the grants here I just wanted to touch on because I see that there’s some 4-H program grants in here. Let’s talk about the 4-H program grant. Is that remaining the same or going up? Did that go up?

Jerry Gavin Director: Yeah, the difference here in the grant is actually up somewhat, and what we’ve done is we’re moving all our costs to 4-H through a contract. Even staff, we used to provide a staff within the department. He was working with a 4-H group and (Indistinct) and they preferred to have their own dollars to hire their own people.

Mr. Myers: So you just grant it out and they operate themselves?

Jerry Gavin Director: Yeah. So it’s actually up but it’s up because of that reason. It’s up because –

Mr. Myers: So that’s a full program grant –

Jerry Gavin Director: Correct, in there now, self-sustaining in that respect. Yeah.

Mr. Myers: Okay. So –

Jerry Gavin Director: That’s what they prefer.

Mr. Myers: The beef plant is in here too, I see, and it’s 1.5 million. It’s obviously down from the 3.2 million. Can we talk about that for a few minutes?

Jerry Gavin Director: Sure.

Mr. Myers: The reason behind the reduction.

Mr. Webster: Two or three years ago we did have the beef plant down to around 1.6, I think.

Mr. Myers: How much?

Mr. Webster: At the very best point in time, and because beef prices went up to the producer, we couldn’t push the beef, we just couldn’t move the beef prices to our customers, and as a result we had to eat a significant loss. That’s 3.166 million last year. Great for the beef producer, bad for the beef plant when you’re trying to sustain that in little tougher economic times.

So we decided in order to institute a challenge out there to our complete beef industry, we felt it appropriate that 1.5 would be a good target to hit. As a result, and it fits our budget, and it’s probably sustainable. I mean, not that many places in the world you build a budget to only lose so much, you know. You usually build it to make money and or break even, so we pulled that number and said: That’s a realistic number to put out there. Of course, we want to engage our trustee board of directors and staff to try to meet that target.

Mr. Myers: So I guess that’s the obvious question, what happens if they can’t?

Mr. Webster: We’ll have to cross that bridge when we come to it, if in fact we do. I personally want all minds at the table that are visionary to really take a look at this thing to see if we can reach that target.

I mean, if you look at the big picture, do taxpayers support large numbers of money on a consistent basis loss on the Atlantic Beef Products? I think it would be in a way a travesty if we – like travesty or something – that we just stand back and say: We don’t care what it costs, keep doing it. You know? I don’t think that’s appropriate in the business world, applying business principles. We feel that that might be a target that we can hit, and if we can hit that, we feel fairly good about that.

Mr. Myers: What are the reasons why, in your opinion, that they haven’t been able to hit it all along?

Mr. Webster: The plant was built to handle 500 a week, which is very small in the scheme of things. But currently we're only doing 250 a week, so that hurts. A plant in Alberta would process 2,000 to 3,000 a day. When you look at administration, you look at your office, your trucking, everything that's in that system, it's very difficult for that place to make money. That's known now, but we all knew when it was built and how it was built, and as a result now we have the challenge to get it closer to break-even.

Chair: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River with a question.

Mr. McGeoghegan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The question is kind of along the same line. I'm just wondering about volume, and how do we get the volume up? Are most PEI cattle producers using this plant as of now?

Mr. Webster: There are some producers, because of economic assistance from Quebec actually, if an animal finishes its last 100 days on Quebec soil they qualify for a \$250 grant approximately from Quebec. That makes it very difficult. We do know there are some animals going by our door. That presents a certain problem.

Now, it's probably only maybe 25% or 20% of what we handle, so we are getting good support from our local producers. But we need more animals, and the producer owns them, so we have no choice in saying: You have to take them to us.

Now we're paying in seven or eight days, we're meeting the competition that way, but I can't meet the provincial Government of Quebec's budget line. We just don't have those kinds of dollars to compete in that market.

Mr. McGeoghegan: Would those rebates from the Quebec government, that would be to the Quebec farmers, though, wouldn't it?

Mr. Webster: A Quebec feedlot could buy our animals and ship them up there and hold them on their soil for 100 days and then they'd qualify for their \$250. That drives the price up to us, which we cannot afford that kind of competition.

Chair: Back to the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: So you said the plant was built needing 500 animals a week and they're getting 250. How many are being finished on the Island a week?

Mr. Webster: We're handling about 12,000 a year, 12 or 13,000, approximately, a year.

Mr. Myers: In the plant?

Mr. Webster: Yes, that's what we're getting.

Mr. Myers: How many animals would be –

Mr. Webster: Seventeen thousand range.

Mr. Myers: A year?

Mr. Webster: Yes. Now there's – roughly.

Mr. Myers: So we're not even producing enough on the Island to operate that plant?

Mr. Webster: That's right. We've downsized significantly because of low prices for five consecutive years.

Mr. Myers: Right. We talked to you earlier about the Enhanced Herd Health Program and the heifer retention program, those things. Do you see how extra money in those programs – because they were tapped out this year, to the max – how more money in those programs could help us get to the stage quicker that we need to get for that plant to be profitable?

Because in my opinion that's one of the issues. It's okay to say we can't get the animals, but when you have more demand on a program that helps herd retention heifers than you have money, then obviously there's a gap there that you're not looking at that matches up with your beef plant.

Mr. Webster: Right now there's an incentive to get in the beef industry.

Mr. Myers: Yeah.

Mr. Webster: Why is the incentive there? Because the price to the beef producer is high, good to high. They're making money. But if they were in the tank like they were

five years ago or six years ago and the producer was losing money, the industry is not going to grow. We believe the industry has flattened out now and it's holding and now maybe over the next year or so we'll see it escalate a bit. But there has to be profits in it or they're not going to be there.

Where is the market going to go? It's a lot of supply and demand. I don't know where it's going to go for sure. No one knows.

Mr. Myers: That's true, no one does. But I mean, in order for that plant to be sustainable they need 500 animals a week, and if we're already losing animals to Quebec we obviously need to ramp up our productions somehow in order to fill that. Would I be incorrect in saying that?

Mr. Webster: You're correct in saying we do need to do what we can do within reason to stimulate beef production here on PEI. We do have the best forages in the world, and lots of it. We ask ourselves in our department: How do we take that forage and put it through an animal, raise an animal, so the producer can make a profit? That's a self-evaluation in a way we go through on a regular basis. Unless the money comes from the marketplace it's very difficult to grow an industry in adverse conditions when prices are in the tank.

The challenge with the beef plant is it's small. In the world scheme of things, it is the smallest of the small. Now, it's a great building, it's a great facility, but it's a numbers game. If you're not in the numbers you're behind the eight ball from a perspective of coming out successful.

Mr. Myers: I guess I'm confused. It's small, but we can't fulfill its requirement now, so being bigger wouldn't make it better. We still wouldn't have enough animals, would we?

Mr. Webster: Not necessarily, but if you're competing with a facility that's processing 2,500 a day, can you compete? That's the question. What's your labour bill? What's your energy bill? What's your waste treatment facility bill? Those kinds of things that present a challenge.

Mr. Myers: What's the answer for the 17,000 animals a year that we produce if the

beef plant is no longer there? I know there are some small shops on the Island, but I mean they're disappearing. There is probably a stat on how quickly they're disappearing. I'm sure you'll see the butcher shops be gone in the next 20 years.

Will they all just be shipped off Island or will we have to cease participation in the beef industry? Because obviously shipping them is a major cost.

Mr. Webster: I don't think you'll see a reduction in the small abattoirs we have here. We have seven, I think, and they have contracts out there that they look after. We thought, at one time, we can take a product from the beef plant and look after all these contracts. But that means we put small abattoirs out of business. I don't want to put small abattoirs out of business so I'm not doing it.

We're staying and playing in the game that we're in, which is playing with the big players as much as we can so that we maintain that. I think there's a piece there for them and I don't see that really going away.

If you look at the logic, why are people driving by our door to Quebec and/or Ontario? I don't think – people could do that. We could move them all up there if we wanted to, I mean if you had to. It doesn't mean the end of the beef industry totally either. But I want to keep the beef plant going but I want to hit some good targets and have some incentives there that we'll try to get to. If you don't say: This is where my gold is, this is my objective, if everybody doesn't engage in that, you're probably not going to succeed, you're not going to achieve that.

We're putting it out there as leadership for the ag industry and saying: This is a good number, you need to get there.

Mr. Myers: So on the other side of that then, because there are a few shops in my own riding, from just going around and talking to different people in the industry, they're wondering: Is there help out there for the small butcher shops to help them with their competitors?

Mr. Webster: We haven't done anything in that regard. We've had that suggested to us. They are sort of niche markets and we respect they're there. I'm glad they came in to see me just to make their views known, and we listened. They're out there and they have their little piece of the business which is a good piece and it's important to them. There are two or three families living off that small abattoir and we're going to do everything we can do to make sure that they sustain where they're going, too.

Mr. Myers: So there is no subsidy there for them (Indistinct).

Mr. Webster: No.

Chair: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Mr. McGeoghegan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

In hindsight, do you think the plant should have been built originally to do hogs half the week and cattle the other half of the week?

Mr. Webster: According to our inspection requirements for the federal inspection through CFIA – they do the inspection – you can't actually process pork and beef on the same saws and the same line because of the potential of cross-contamination. You could use parts of the beef plant, you could use the lagoon system because it was 4 million alone for that to handle the waste water. Your office staff could handle paperwork in the same building. But you would have to build a piece on to the beef plant to actually process the actual pork.

But parts of the system could be used: your water heater system, which is a mega system, they got to use a lot of hot water. So there are things that could be connected, but there are things that have to be singular and separate to manage that.

Mr. McGeoghegan: Do you think, now that the prices of cattle is better, do you think the numbers will increase, a farmer put more production out?

Mr. Webster: That's a good question, hon. member. We don't think it will go down anymore, we think it's straight line now. Whether we can get a 5% growth, and we

might, we may somehow. Nova Scotia government did a project to actually finish cattle on forages. Now it's specific forages. But they had some research plots and they got some fairly good success. Typically here we have to either feed barley or corn to finish the last 100 days, let's say, which is very expensive. We've got lots and lots of cheap forages here. If there is a way to manage a species of forage and have that quality, maybe we can do that and have the right quality of animal for the marketplace. They've done it, they say it's doable. If they can do it in Nova Scotia, we can do it on Prince Edward Island.

Mr. McGeoghegan: Last question for now. Do you know what the numbers are from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick coming over using the beef plant, if any?

Mr. Webster: There may be a few, but very few.

Mr. McGeoghegan: Okay.

Mr. Webster: But there are a significant amount of the animals that we have here born in Nova Scotia. They come out of there as calves and they come over here –

Mr. McGeoghegan: And get finished over here.

Mr. Webster: – and they're aged here and grown here.

Mr. McGeoghegan: Okay.

Chair: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira has a question.

Mr. LaVie: I know you were saying we need 500 a week to keep the plant going. We're only at 250 and farmers are driving right by the plant. How can we get them farmers to stop at the plant?

Mr. Webster: Originally the plant was designed for 500. We've only been doing 250 a week. But three weeks ago – and the week before that we fell to 170 for those two weeks, so that hurt. Now it's coming back up again. The supply is coming up for us. I think last week they hit 251, which was a good number.

Now, we haven't gauged the dairy industry and said: Look, we need animals, you have retiring cows. We can handle those now because we do hamburger. That's 25 or 30 a week right there alone, so that's helping us out because we're doing okay on the hamburger side of it.

Mr. LaVie: So we went from 171 all of a sudden to –

Mr. Webster: That was a bad week.

Mr. LaVie: Yes. To 251, was it?

Mr. Webster: Yes.

Mr. LaVie: So where'd they come from all of a sudden?

Mr. Webster: Farmers thought: The price was going higher so I'll hold for a week, I'm not selling what I was going to sell this week. That puts a vacuum on the market. But guess what? A week or two later those animals then start showing up. That's what's happening now.

Mr. LaVie: Like the Member from Belfast-Murray River says, we don't get too many from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick?

Mr. Webster: No. See, if there's some animals in northern New Brunswick – for example, Woodstock – they're halfway to Montreal. Are they coming this way or are they going that way? They're most likely going that way.

Mr. LaVie: Just one more.

Chair: Go ahead, member.

Mr. LaVie: You were putting, let's say, 3.2 million I think into the beef plant prior to this year, and you're putting 1.5 in, and the price is going up. The beef plant probably puts out, let's say, 140 million a year to the economy?

Mr. Webster: It's 14 or 15 million. Something sticks in my mind that's a rough number for what we call fats.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah, but when it gets out economically, when you break it down to your whoevers out there, hydraulics or feeders, it's huge numbers. I'm just trying to

say isn't it good bang for the buck if you're putting – and if the price is up this year, and you're down to 1.5, that's a pretty good bang for our buck.

Mr. Webster: That's the target that we're fairly happy with, hon. member. The trickle-down economics is a big thing here. Somebody takes a paycheque home. Somebody buys goods and services for their house. They buy everything they need as a family. That aspect is a valuable aspect. When it flips over seven times government almost has their dollar back. You invest a dollar and it goes around, it's good. That's what builds our highways, hospitals and schools.

Mr. LaVie: The 1.5, that could be up next year? We'll not let the beef plant go.

Mr. Webster: That would be a good target. We're going to strive for that. That's what we're asking. We're asking everybody to come together. We've come to the table as government. We have absolutely been there for five years with a significant amount of money. I wanted to go, to succeed, at good numbers. Let's engage the stakeholders and if we all agree, but if we all agree it can't be done, then that's a different issue.

Mr. LaVie: I don't know, it's probably more of a – it'll be a question at the end. We've got to real good credit to the board out there. The board works hard.

Mr. Webster: Pardon?

Mr. LaVie: The board themselves works hard.

Mr. Webster: Oh, fantastic.

Mr. LaVie: Fantastic.

Mr. Webster: Yeah. We've got great people there now and we've went through some tough times when we had to pick up the pieces and try to build her back. We've made some major gains. I want to keep that going. I want to keep the gains there and try to minimize the losses.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah.

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

Mr. Perry: How much of the animal now is being used percentage-wise?

Mr. Webster: Pardon?

Mr. Perry: How much of the animal, percentage-wise, is being used?

Mr. Webster: Pretty much all of the animal. I think livers were a little slow there a while ago, I heard. They were talking pet food. I'm not sure about tongues. Maybe we don't want to talk about that, but they sell everything that they can derive a nickel from and a dollar from. When the world went into a recession, hides went slow. Car sales were a little bit slower, right? They make car dashes and upholstery out of hides. All of a sudden that's back. We were only getting \$10 for them at one time. Now we're back up to 50 or 60. Every \$10 an animal or \$20 an animal adds to our bottom line and it's a good thing. We're trying to sell everything but the noise, or whatever.

Mr. Perry: Because I mean even cow hooves could be sold.

Mr. Webster: Pardon?

Mr. Perry: The hooves could be sold too. There's a market for that.

Mr. Webster: I understand, yes.

Mr. Perry: There's a market in the dog and the pet world for hooves as a chew.

Mr. Webster: That's right, yeah.

Mr. Perry: I know you mentioned they put the hamburger line in the last couple of years. You're talking about the byproducts. You use everything as byproduct, let's say, in commercial dog food. Is there a plan to expand, to use that byproduct for the dog food industry?

Mr. Webster: I know they look at every opportunity. Now markets are cyclical and somewhat seasonal sometimes. I know the offal, which you know what that is, they try to sell it all. If you're processing hogs you would sell everything but the squeal. That's the tone that was out there, or the noise. I know they exercise every option they can to extract dollars, but they have a bottom line

that will survive and that's what we need to get to.

Mr. Perry: If they wanted to put up a production line for using byproducts for dog food, would there be monies available for that to assist them?

Mr. Webster: There could be monies available for that. ACOA's out there too. We would look at anything that we would look at. I know they're putting in a new vacuum machine that's \$200,000. That's a good sign. You know the old one was breaking down on a regular basis, so guys, you can't break down and have 40 people standing around, or 50 people. Let's get one in there that works. They have that either installed or soon-to-be installed. That's a good thing.

Mr. Perry: Have they approached you about – or you haven't heard any talk about using the byproducts.

Mr. Webster: No.

Mr. Perry: Nothing like that?

Mr. Webster: No. Not a new byproduct that they aren't already using.

Mr. Perry: Okay. Now the grant that you give them, you're capping at 150 or 1.5. Are there any restrictions on how they use that money?

Mr. Webster: We pay the loss every month. They phone us up and say: This is what we need for the month. And it's a loss. This is our shortcomings. I know the board constantly looks at every opportunity to extract money, cash, from what they're handling there.

Mr. Perry: What about the transition from going – like, last year you said they had losses of 3-point-whatever million, right? You're capping at 1.5. There's going to be a period of time where they're going to have to get into that savings, right? Or trying to save those dollars. Is there anything allowed for that transition?

Mr. Webster: If you divided that up, it's 170, 160,000, whatever the math is, a month. I would suggest –

Mr. Perry: But if they came and said to you – like you just said, they phone each month. If they phone and said: This month we have 200,000. Next month there's only 50,000. The following month was 300,000.

Mr. Webster: That would be good. We would be excited about that. You'd have to have a cushion there because you might have a bad month for one reason or another.

Mr. Perry: So you guys will carry them through until that 1.5 is used up, whether it's sixth months –

Mr. Webster: I would go along those lines, yeah.

Mr. Perry: But if it went to 10, 11 months, then it would be renegotiable.

Mr. Webster: If it's gone in seven months, then they're not going to meet their target, right?

Mr. Perry: Right.

Mr. Webster: We know that's a problem. I would be looking at it on a monthly basis.

Mr. Perry: If they went to 11 months, ten and a half months, and they ran out at that time, then you would reconsider and probably put a little more money into it.

Mr. Webster: We would have to make a decision at that point. If it was close, it would be better than far apart. But we want people to be engaged in this thought process so that we can achieve the best result we can achieve.

Mr. Perry: Where's our market?

Mr. Webster: Market is everywhere. PEI, Atlantic Canada, I think we got some stuff into Sobeys. We got some into the USA too, I believe, we move some there. There's some internationally too. We're all over. You get a sweet deal going where you got a good customer, like Costco in Newfoundland, you got a great customer for six months, fantastic, good pay, everything's great. First thing they phone up and say: We're paying you 5% less. You know how that technique works. We just said no. We don't do business that way, because a few

months later it's another five. We just don't go that way.

We try to find other customers. We got a really nice market in Toronto which is a distributor for high-end restaurants. It's high-end restaurants in Toronto that this customer's got about 40 of them. It's boxed meat, of course, boxed all up and sealed. Real good customer. We even have beef in Vancouver. The Premier was out there and opened the menu: PEI beef. How does PEI beef get by Alberta beef on the way to Vancouver? Because it's a good thing.

Mr. Perry: Now is that a result of the department of agriculture's marketing or do they have their own marketing?

Mr. Webster: That would be results of that distributor in Toronto having a connection in Vancouver, and some little uniqueness of PEI beef, and they highlighted it on the menu.

Mr. Perry: But you mentioned we have this market here, we have this market there. Who is marketing the product?

Mr. Webster: Oh, out of our shop?

Mr. Perry: Yes.

Mr. Webster: One of the salesmen is Alan MacDonald.

Mr. Perry: That's through the plant, though, it's not–

Mr. Webster: Yes, he's a staffer.

Mr. Perry: Not out of your department?

Mr. Webster: Oh, no. We don't do that.

Mr. Perry: So the department has nothing. When you were saying we, sorry, that's why I was getting –

Mr. Webster: Yes, no, we're not–

Mr. Perry: They do all their own marketing. You guys don't assist them in any way at all.

Mr. Webster: No.

Mr. Perry: Is that a possibility?

Mr. Webster: Oh, don't want to.

Mr. Perry: For what reason?

Mr. Webster: Why should the department of agriculture be competing against anybody in the private sector? That's not where we need to go.

Mr. Perry: But marketing, let's say, PEI beef.

Mr. Webster: Pardon?

Mr. Perry: PEI beef. If it's produced in PEI by a PEI producer – because right now you have a campaign out for PEI Burger Love. That, of course, is promoting beef that's been produced on the Island.

Mr. Webster: Promotion, yes, but physically marketing, no. We don't want to go there.

Mr. Perry: The PEI burger is all marketed.

Mr. Webster: Pardon?

Mr. Perry: That's marketing, too.

Mr. Webster: No, but it's marketing and promotion is one – well, promotion is one aspect. But we help industries promote what they need to promote, what they have to sell. But the physical desk selling, that's not a role that we should be into.

Mr. Perry: They do their own marketing, period?

Mr. Webster: Oh, yes.

Mr. Perry: You guys have never been a part of that, even right from the start?

Mr. Webster: No.

Mr. Perry: Okay. You mentioned earlier about the Member from Belfast-Murray River had mentioned about using hogs in the same plant, it'd be for half time, or whatever. You had mentioned about the CFIA with their regulations, that it would have to be cleaned, the blades and saws.

Mr. Webster: You can't do –

Mr. Perry: Is it because you can't use the same facility that it was in, or, if everything was cleaned to a certain requirement, could that facility be used then?

Mr. Webster: No.

Mr. Perry: You can't?

Mr. Webster: We looked at that.

Mr. Perry: Okay. It would have been a great idea if you could.

Mr. Webster: Oh, I think so. From the terms of efficiency, hon. member, yes. But, in order for us to meet our federal inspection that cannot happen.

Mr. Perry: Okay. Originally, back when the plant first opened, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were helping with the funding for the first year. I think – was it the first year?

Mr. Webster: Actually, when we came to power, in 2007, we were able to convince Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to put 2 million in each.

Mr. Perry: For one year?

Mr. Webster: For one time only. We each put 2 million in, for six. They said: Don't come back. They cut their cheque. There were no strings attached. We used that money to sustain our losses over the years.

Mr. Perry: What did that give them? That investment, what did –

Mr. Webster: They were shipping a few animals through our system. But it really gave them nothing. The plant was originally designed to handle product from their provinces. We were able to convince them that they should invest in this facility. We might be able to make a go of it if we had investment from them. They agreed, and they put the money in.

Mr. Perry: Why did they walk away from it, then, afterwards?

Mr. Webster: I don't know. They don't think it's sustainable. They don't have the money they used to.

Mr. Perry: So, you guys didn't go after them to find out why?

Mr. Webster: Pardon?

Mr. Perry: Did you guys go after them to question why?

Mr. Webster: No. They just said they weren't overly interested the first time, but our Premier was able to convince them that there was an opportunity here that – and we all learn. They said they would do it one time only and see what happens after that.

Mr. Perry: The reason why I'm asking, because if they were still putting it in, even 1 million per year, then that would, you know –

Mr. Webster: We have hinted that and suggested that at our FPT meetings and the usual answer is no.

Mr. Perry: Okay, then that's that.

Are there any plans in the future to reduce – like an extra to reduce this funding again, are you going to just wean them off it again, or do you have a plan on stopping it soon, the funding?

Mr. Webster: No, we've said, on many occasions, that this target is a reasonable target. We've said we can sustain this on our own as a province for the value of the beef industry and the value to agriculture. I wouldn't foresee that number being altered a whole lot.

Mr. Perry: As you mentioned earlier, you're giving them a figure and you're hoping it'll hold them to it, and they stay within that.

Mr. Webster: That's exactly right.

Mr. Perry: That's all I've got. Okay, thank you.

Mr. Webster: Now, we haven't spoken with the board yet, we want to go and speak to the trustees. They know what our thoughts are, we've spoken to them, but we want to engage a meeting of all the stakeholders and say: This is what we want to try in the meantime, and see what happens from that meeting.

Mr. Perry: Okay. Thank you.

Chair: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River just talked about the calves and bringing them over from Nova Scotia and they'd be raised here. Is there any incentive out there to use that as a means to grow the industry, like to buy calves, even in eastern Canada, and ship them in as a means to more rapidly ramp up the – because one of your issues, besides the small plant, is not being able to meet your production requirements with animals, right?

Mr. Webster: There has been a significant amount of calves coming over from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. I think the number that sticks in my mind, at one time 60 or 70% of what was born in Nova Scotia was raised here. A big number.

Here's what's happened now. The market changes on a regular basis, and they've – Quebec market – all the markets are strong now. Therefore the price of calves goes up. Quebec's down in Atlantic Canada trying to buy everything with four legs on it to take it to Quebec. We're competing against those markets. It's hard to get more animals out of that market.

Now, there is stuff going from Newfoundland to Upper Canada. It's going right by Amherst. Can we get any of that to keep our line going? I know they're looking at that as well, but it's always a tough buy, unless you're paying above the market price, you're probably not going to get them. They can only pay market price.

Mr. Myers: What they're doing in Quebec, did you mention there was a \$200 perimeter?

Mr. Webster: Approximately 250.

Mr. Myers: Approximately 250. How does that work? It's provincially funded, obviously.

Mr. Webster: They buy the animal here at 1,000 pounds. It's nearly finished but it's not finished. Ship it to Quebec, put it in their

feed lot for 100 days. It's on Quebec soil for 100 days, I'm told. Then that business up there, Quebec, could sell that to the marketplace and pick up the rebate cheque.

Mr. Myers: So the Quebec government subsidizes the Quebec farmer 200 dollars per head.

Mr. Webster: Yes.

Mr. Myers: And it's to a private –

Mr. Webster: It can be done that way or they can buy the animals in Nova Scotia, Quebec dealer, and put them on Prince Edward Island and ask the grower in Prince Edward Island to take them up to 900 pounds. They own them all the way through. They take them up there for their last 100 days and they fit the system. I can't compete.

Mr. Myers: How does that compare per capita to the money that you're putting into the beef plant.

Mr. Webster: We'd be losing – I'd have to put some rough numbers on it, we could do easily, but we'd be losing, over the life of that plant, 200 or 300 dollars an animal. Huge.

Mr. Myers: Because you own the plant to boot, is why.

Mr. Webster: Pardon?

Mr. Myers: Because you also own the plant and half the funds, is that why? You lose twice because your funding (Indistinct).

Mr. Webster: The taxpayers bore the cost of the plant. That's not even figuring in the cattle.

Mr. Myers: The cost of –

Mr. Webster: The 15 million for the plant.

Mr. Myers: Right.

Mr. Webster: It's not even in there. It's already paid for.

Mr. Myers: The hamburger line in the plant, I'm struggling with that. You talked about how that helped improve you because

you were able to use a higher percentage of the animal. If you're not meeting your capacity as far as animals, I'm just kind of confused how the hamburger line is going to help in the long term there.

Mr. Webster: What was happening, roughly two years ago in beef was in the low prices. Retiring cows, I'll use that for an example, some of them may have been a little lame or something and they couldn't make Quebec. We didn't do hamburger at that time. Where were they going? They were going to dead stock and being exterminated. Hate to say it, but that's what was happening. We saw all these animals, 30 a week, going that way, and that makes excellent hamburger.

Mr. Myers: It's basically animals that you wouldn't have butchered otherwise. That's where you're getting at.

Mr. Webster: That's part of it, but it's part of the parts of the animal that's of the fats – well, I call the fats. It's part of them, too, that end up in hamburger, and we can make lovely hamburger, two or three grades of it. It cost us 400,000 for the equipment and we did it. It's another value-added to what we do. It's trying to salvage more, plus we're improving the dairy industry. We're taking some of their issues and going forward, so it's got its benefits. Is it the end-all be-all? No it isn't, but it helped. I think it helped. Customers are happy and paying, so that's a good thing.

Mr. Myers: The hamburger that comes out the other end, is that an (Indistinct) the shelf consumer product or is that a restaurant product?

Mr. Webster: We're not doing the patties, we're doing it in the long salami – I call salami bags.

Mr. Myers: So is it being sold to –

Mr. Webster: I don't know where that goes. It's customers that are probably turning it in to patties.

Mr. Myers: So maybe sold as wholesale to the restaurants (Indistinct).

Mr. Webster: Wouldn't it be sweet to get MacDonald's or Burger King contract or something?

Mr. Myers: Okay, so it's not something that I can go and find on the shelf at Sobeys?

Mr. Webster: No, absolutely not.

Mr. Myers: Okay, off the beef plant. Just the horse development program. I'm wondering what that entails, 38,900 there.

Mr. Webster: The horse development matinee program, is that what you're referring to?

Mr. Myers: On my sheet it just says horse development program, so I'm not sure what (Indistinct).

Mr. Webster: The 91,400, that's the matinee track and that's a budget reduction, hon. member.

Mr. Myers: I don't see that line. The line I'm looking at is under grants and it's broken down, and 38,900 and horse development program is all it says.

Mr. Webster: We did spend 38,900 in a horse development program and we did spend 17,400 on the matinee track and system program. I think that was truckage for matinee.

Mr. Myers: Because there is no money in the matinee tracks so they can get their animals back and forth (Indistinct).

Mr. Webster: I think that was assistance for trucking.

Mr. Myers: What about the 38,900, is that also trucking?

Mr. Webster: It's conferences and training and those kinds of things, I'm told.

Mr. Myers: Okay, who is that for, like, the harness racing?

Mr. Webster: Pardon?

Mr. Myers: The harness racing association?

Jerry Gavin Director: Yes.

Mr. Myers: So it's the industry association that would tap into those funds?

Jerry Gavin Director: Yes. Matter of fact, they're (Indistinct) this now and they're planning on continuing some of those programs out of their funding from the race tracks.

Mr. Myers: Okay.

Jerry Gavin Director: I think it's about 2 million that they have a year, so they're going to take a small amount of that money and put it towards a matinee program as well as horse development.

Mr. Myers: So would it be like a professional development for trainers or drivers or –

Jerry Gavin Director: I don't think it's professional development for drivers per se, but it's just improving, for example, the genetics in terms of (Indistinct), having a conference around that. How can you improve genetics around the harness racing industry?

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) horses -

Jerry Gavin Director: Yeah.

Mr. Myers: I was looking to breed a better horse, I might be able to tap into that program (Indistinct). I'll keep that in mind down the road if I ever get to retire. I may try to breed a super horse.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) carry this section or more questions?

Some Hon. Members: More questions.

Chair: I'll revert to the Member from Tignish-Palmer Road has the floor.

Mr. Sheridan: (Indistinct) 9 hours 17 minutes 42 seconds.

Mr. Perry: You get paid for it.

You mentioned earlier about dairy, your retired heifers, right? Is that what you use in your hamburger line?

Mr. Webster: (Indistinct) retired cows.

Mr. Perry: Okay, so it would primarily be heifers. What about calves?

Mr. Sheridan: (Indistinct).

Chair: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road has the floor.

Mr. Webster: Pardon?

Mr. Perry: What about bull calves that are coming out of the dairy farms?

Mr. Webster: There's market for them now but there wasn't three years ago. The market was so low they were actually –

Mr. Perry: But do they come into the plant?

Mr. Webster: Oh no.

Mr. Perry: They don't come into the plant at all. You don't use veal –

Mr. Webster: They go to mink feed and that kind of product.

Mr. Perry: Calves don't come in, but the retired Holsteins would, on the dairy?

Mr. Webster: Oh, absolutely.

Mr. Perry: Now, what about storage of that facility, what's their capacity?

An Hon. Member: Call the hour.

Chair: The hour has been called.

Mr. Webster: Mr. Chair, I move that the Speaker take the chair and that the Chair report progress and beg leave to sit again.

Chair: Shall it carry? Carried.

Madam Speaker, as Chair, of a Committee of the Whole House, having had 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. Government House Leader.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I move, seconded by the West Royalty-Springvale, that this House adjourn until April 27 at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

See you tomorrow.

The Legislature adjourned until tomorrow, Friday, at 10:00 a.m.