

# FROM THE CELLAR

Updates from the Office of the Third Party



## OVERVIEW:

- Spring wrap-up
- Update from Peter
- Update from Hannah
- Update on Bill 38

After 39 days, the spring sitting of the legislature has finally wrapped up. It was the longest sitting so far this century, and everyone at the Office of the Third Party is looking forward to winding down a bit. But before we relax too much, we've prepared a special newsletter recapping highlights from the sitting.

## UPDATE FROM PETER BEVAN-BAKER

Looking back on the session, there is much to celebrate. A number of noteworthy government and private member's bills passed, including the ban on single-use plastic bags, a new Business Corporations Act, and a long overdue update of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPP). Although I have called the amendments to FOIPP anemic and I think the Act really should have gone further to make government more transparent and open, the amendments did bring post-secondary institutions and the four largest municipalities under the Act and that is a significant step forward.

In terms of legislation I was both surprised and pleased by government's sudden reversal on election finance reform. For those who have not been following this issue closely: in the spring of 2015, Premier MacLachlan promised to reform political party finance rules and ban all union and corporate donations and put caps on individual donations. This is a policy that I wholeheartedly support, especially since the Green Party is the only party that has never accepted corporate or union donations. These reforms would also bring PEI in line with legislation that is being implemented in other jurisdictions across Canada.

Unfortunately, within a year of making the promise, the Premier started to back away from the commitment.



*Celebrating Indigenous history in Canoe Cove with (from L to R): Chief Brian Francis, Elder Doreen Jenkins, Marjorie Lewis-Paul, Peter Bevan-Baker, Chief Matilda Ramjattan and Mari Besiletti.*

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Over the last couple of years I have been somewhat relentless on calling the Premier to account. In fact, I have brought it up in Question Period at least a half dozen times. During this sitting the Premier finally relented, introducing legislation that will ban union, corporate, and off-Island donations and cap an individual's donation to \$3000 per party per year. This is an enormous step forward to reduce the influence of "big money" on parties and subsequently on government.

Of course, the ultimate highlight of this sitting was having the amazing Hannah Bell sit next to me. After years of being the lone Green MLA, it has been an absolute delight to have a colleague with her intelligence, passion, and empathy on our team.

## UPDATE FROM HANNAH BELL

This has been my first full sitting since being elected, so I'm still quite the neophyte in the legislature. In the fall I was sworn in just as the fall sitting was winding down. I always say being the newest MLA is like trying to drink from a fire hose--there is just so much you need to know--legislative procedure, policy issues, constituency concerns, interpreting legislation, and in this sitting trying to assess whether Bill 38 would survive a constitutional challenge.

For me the highlights have been around what I like to call my "Security and Dignity for all Islanders" campaign. In the weeks before the sitting, I met with close to a dozen organizations that work with persons with disabilities and on issues such as poverty reduction. Based on their feedback, I brought forward motions, including a motion on ostomy supplies and a motion on security and dignity for all Islanders and I raised many, many questions during Question Period.

I have been really pleased with government's response: they have made significant changes to the Social Assistance programs, and there have been several meetings with the Minister of Health to discuss the need to cover the costs of ostomy supplies. There is still a lot of work, especially around affordable housing, food and transport allowances, and access to medical needs, but it shows that even though we are in opposition, I can present solid evidence-based arguments to government and have a positive impact on the lives of individual Islanders.

## BILL 38 UPDATE

Bill 38: the Electoral System Referendum Act sets out the rules for the next vote on Electoral Reform. As originally drafted, Bill 38 put incredible, and possibly unconstitutional, restrictions on proponent and opponent organizations wanting to advocate during the next referendum.

The third party fought hard to amend the bill, and at one point there were 28 amendments drafted and ready to be debated. Ideally, the bill should have been sent to committee for review and public input, but government insisted on amending the bill on the floor. The bill did eventually pass, and although it is vastly superior to what was originally proposed, the rules are still needlessly complicated, and we are already seeing inaccurate information being shared on social media.

A Referendum Commissioner will be appointed who will be able to lay out some of the details, but until then anyone with questions should contact the Department of Justice and Public Safety at

(902)368-4589 or [ccs@gov.pe.ca](mailto:ccs@gov.pe.ca).

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