



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island**

**Responses to Questions and
Oral Question Period**

(Preliminary Proceedings)

Second Session of the 67th General Assembly

Friday, 16 May 2025

No. 29

The Honourable Sidney MacEwen, Speaker

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[10:27 a.m.]

[Hon. S. MacEwen in the chair]

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

Tourism contract with NHL

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition asked: “It appears to indicate that the department was involved with the Boston Celtics. Did the minister pay money to the Celtics or to the NBA?”

The answer is no. Tourism PEI did not pay any money to the Boston Celtics or the NBA. Through the NHL partnership, the Boston Bruins invited Tourism PEI to activate at the Celtics game at no cost, providing the opportunity to showcase Prince Edward Island to Celtics fans.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday the Premier put on one of the most embarrassing performances that I’ve seen in my 14 years in this Legislature. That’s saying something, given that every day he’s stood up in here he’s embarrassed himself, he’s embarrassed government, and he’s embarrassed Islanders.

Yesterday the Premier knowingly spread misinformation. He claimed the opposition office....

Speaker: Hon. member, it’s the last Question Period of the year. Let’s try and keep it civil, okay?

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: He claimed the opposition office overspent its budget by 50 percent. That is not true, and I’ll be tabling that proof yesterday. He knew it wasn’t true when he said it. Just to be crystal clear, legislative offices cannot overspend.

Legislative office budgets

Question to the Premier: Why would you stand up in this Legislature and say something that you knew was not true?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Normally, the books are the books, and the numbers are the numbers. My comments yesterday simply referenced the 2024 annual report of the Legislative Assembly, which was signed, approved, published, and tabled here in the Legislature.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Question to the Premier: If you’re willing to knowingly spread misinformation about a legislative office budget, what other misinformation are you willing to weaponize for political gain?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[10:30 a.m.]

The budget for the Legislative Assembly is passed here in the Legislature – we just did that very recently – and those are the numbers that appear in the Legislative Assembly’s annual report. The books are the books. If there’s a budget approved by this Legislative Assembly and the spending exceeds that, it seems obvious to me what’s happened. But again, my comments were simply based on what’s in the Legislative Assembly’s annual report, which has been tabled here in the Legislature.

Speaker: Hon. member, we don’t accuse other members of lying or spreading misinformation in the Legislature. I’ll remind you of the rule that you had called a point of order on yesterday: “No member shall use language or words offensive toward...any member.”

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, not a single Islander voted for this Premier to take the job. A handful of Conservative Party members chose him behind closed doors. Islanders didn’t want him in 2015 when he lost the election and his seat, so others had to hand him the job.

[Interjections]

Hon. H. Perry: Entitled is the right word to describe the Premier.

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor, hon. members.

Hon. H. Perry: Entitled is the right word to describe this Premier.

Question to the Premier: Do you really think spreading that false truth in this Legislature is the way to prove to Islanders....

Speaker: Hon. member, I've already reminded you that we don't accuse others of that in this Legislature. Please rephrase your question.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, question to the Premier.

You know what, I don't even know how else I could put this, Mr. Speaker, because what he said yesterday in this House was wrong. He has yet to apologize to this House. He has yet to apologize to the staff upstairs who take the taxpayers' dollars very, very seriously and do the best work they can to follow within the parameters of what they have to do and provide us with a really good service.

So, my question to be the Premier basically is: You stood in this House yesterday; you accused not only me but my staff of doing something that was wrong. How can you prove to Islanders that you deserve the job that you have, a job that no Islander actually voted for you to have but was given to you?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I went out of my way to thank staff in the government members office here today. I know that staff throughout this building work very hard to support all the members of this Legislature. I'd like to say thank you very much. I'm sure that they're looking forward to perhaps the House closing today like the rest of us.

But Mr. Speaker, on that side of the House, they hold us accountable for the public dollars that are spent, and we present our facts and figures in the House here. Again, my remarks yesterday

were simply using the numbers that are in the Legislative Assembly's annual report.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

He knew exactly what he was doing yesterday just to try to get some kind of political gain, and I have yet to hear him apologize to the staff, to my staff upstairs.

So, these answers are pitiful, and it's pitiful that every answer this Premier has offered since he was gifted the job that others had to earn....

The Premier opened the door to debate on legislative office spending, so let's deal in facts. The opposition and third party, combined, get less than the government members office. Now, how inappropriate is that? In almost every Legislature right across Canada, opposition parties are given more because it's their job to hold billion-dollar governments accountable. Meanwhile, the Premier's backbenchers did little more than clap when he spoke.

Question to the Premier: What's the justification for all this money for you and your backbenchers?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe the budgets for the offices of the parties in the Legislature are determined by the Legislative Management Committee and the members that sit on that. I haven't had the privilege of sitting on that committee; I'm not sure how they arrive at those figures, but I'm sure there's a very robust process for determining their budgets.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier is all over the place with his answers – all over the place – because he doesn't understand, and that's the problem. So, maybe the Public Accounts Committee should examine these budgets, where the money's going, and which companies or marketing firms are benefitting from it. Maybe witnesses should be called. Maybe subpoenas should be issued. Maybe the Auditor General should take it on.

Premier, what do you think? Do you like that idea?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

[10:35 a.m.]

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition comes here every day to hold government to account, and I'm sure that those are excellent suggestions for government accountability and transparency.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if anyone expected any decency from this Premier, so let's switch gears here.

The Premier was one of the Ministers of Education who knew about a serial offender in our schools and did nothing. We know Matthew Craswell would have been interviewed when children first came forward about this inappropriate touching at West Kent School, and, yet he was allowed to keep teaching for far too long. People in this government knew what was happening in Island schools and they did absolutely nothing. They let a predator continue to teach and traumatize students. What a disgusting failure.

Safety of children in schools (further)

Question to the Premier: Did your government take the word of a serial sexual predator over the word of child victims and their parents? Have you no shame?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have no idea where and what angle this member is trying to take, where he's getting his information, or how he's trying to spin this. We've stood up in this House time and time and time again over this session and acknowledged a failure, a breakdown, acknowledged that we need to do better, took responsibility for this situation, and initiated a third-party review. When the results of that third-party review come out, we will deal with the recommendations that come forward.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

This government really is an embarrassment. The Minister of Education has been sent out repeatedly to carry water for the Premier with a history of saying inappropriate things. We saw this again yesterday and again and again and again.

Question to the Premier: Why are you hanging your Minister of Education out to dry? Are you really going to let him take the fall for your mismanagement?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will stand behind everything that I have said in this House to date. We will continue to take the high road. We will continue to put in the work required to get to the bottom of this situation, regardless of how many times this member comes at us with attacks.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, the question was for the Premier. Actually, the last two were for the Premier.

The Minister of Education likes to say he's a man of action, a man with a plan. Now, we have yet to see that. The minister acts like a trained seal who craves the Premier's approval, even at the expense of children's safety. He only announced the review after questions were asked on behalf of parents about a sexual predator in elementary schools – only afterwards. A real man of action wouldn't wait for political pressure. He'd proactively protect students and hold people accountable. Instead, this minister ran for cover and kicked the issue down the road.

Question for the Premier: Why would you let your Minister of Education prioritize politics and secrecy over the safety of Island children?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: There's no one running for cover on this side of the House. I've spent a career standing up for and protecting the most vulnerable people in this province and in my community. I've demonstrated that for years and years. I'll continue to demonstrate that here as the Minister of Education and will keep working, putting in the time and the effort to make our system better, safer, and more secure for our students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, this minister has to actually prove that. He has to prove that not only to us but to the parents who are constantly contacting us about this.

Let's circle back to the responsibility in this Legislature. It is proven that it was false that the official opposition overspent its budget. In fact, we've returned money every year since forming opposition. We value taxpayers' dollars, unlike this government, which uses taxpayers' money to buy....

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor, hon. members.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, we value taxpayers' dollars, unlike this government, which uses taxpayers' money to buy matching outfits for its members.

Legislative office budgets (further)

Question to the Premier: If you're willing to spend taxpayers' money on matching jackets, what other wasteful spending are you willing to make?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government works hard every day. I think the Minister of Finance outlined it very well how hard her staff works to make sure that we come forward with a responsible budget every year.

[10:40 a.m.]

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: I have no idea what kind of response that was. That had nothing to do with the Minister of Finance's staff. That's paid by the department. I'm talking about the government members office, so obviously he wanted to avoid that answer because he knows.

It's clear that this government's bench struggles with math and numbers, despite their claims of being numbers people. So, here are some numbers for the Premier. You're two members down since the last Premier quit and your former colleague failed in her attempt to become a Conservative MP.

Question to the Premier: How much money do your government members plan on giving back this year to make up for the shortfall of members in your office this year?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, I can't.... I'm not sure if I understood the question. The member is obviously a little upset today and he's lashing out. I'm starting to tune out, to be quite honest. I'm not sure if I understood the question, but I'm willing to sit here and listen to him while he vents for the remainder of Question Period.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

He can deflect. He can do whatever he wants. He hasn't understood one question that we've asked this session. He hasn't taken accountability on one issue that's happened since he was selected by some backroom Conservatives to sit in that seat because he couldn't win it on his own merit.

When the Liberals left....

[Interjections]

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

Hon. H. Perry: When the Liberals left government, we left a \$100 million surplus. And what did this government do? They wasted it. They spent like drunken sailors, and what do Islanders get for it? I'll tell you what Islanders get for it.

[Interjections]

Hon. H. Perry: I'll tell you what Islanders get for it.

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the.... Hon. members.

[Interjections]

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

Hon. H. Perry: We left them a \$100 million surplus....

[Interjections]

Speaker: Hon. member.

Hon. H. Perry: A \$100 million surplus, and they wasted it. They spent like drunken sailors, and what did Islanders get for it? The worst health care access in the country, predators in our schools, the largest deficit in provincial history, and matching outfits for government members.

This Premier is so out of touch, he can't even understand a \$347,000 budget line item. No wonder his government can't manage a \$1.5 billion budget.

Question to the Premier: If you can't get the details of a single line item right, why should Islanders trust you with the province's finances?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

[Interjections]

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government is proud that we've got the strongest provincial economy in the country, and that's enabled us to make very strong capital investments in education, housing, health care, and many priorities of Islanders that had been neglected for many years under previous governments.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, our great-grandchildren will be paying off the debt that this government has created.

Let's recap this government's sitting:

The Minister of Finance failed to show any financial restraint and drove the deficit to record highs. The Minister of Housing threw temper tantrums and alienated a municipality. The Minister of Education....

[Interjections]

Hon. H. Perry: The Minister of Education failed to hold anyone accountable for letting....

[Interjections]

Speaker: Okay, let's let the hon. Leader of the Opposition ask his question, please, members.

Hon. H. Perry: So, again, the Minister of Housing threw temper tantrums and alienated a municipality. The Minister of Education failed to hold anyone accountable for letting a predator keep teaching. The Minister of Social Development left \$500,000 unspent for seniors.

And who sits on top of this pyramid of incompetence? The Premier.

Question to the Premier: How does it feel knowing your legacy will include complete fiscal mismanagement, taking the word of a predator over complaints of parents, tolerating open drug use in our cities, and spreading misinformation in this House to score petty political points?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, I can take the criticisms all day long here from the Leader of the Opposition. That's often the job when you're in government. But this government is here to work for Islanders, and we're proud of what we're....

[Interjections]

[10:45 a.m.]

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

G. McNeilly: That's the same government that built shelters instead of housing too.

Mr. Speaker, just the other day, we got conflicting messages from the Premier and the Minister of Education regarding protecting our children in schools. The Premier said the terms of reference are done; the minister said

otherwise. Not surprising – a government who doesn't even seem to know when this special review is going to begin.

Safety of children in schools (further)

Question to the Premier: Are the terms of reference completed or not? Will you table them today?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our third-party review, terms of reference – all of that will be completed. A review will begin June 2nd.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Question to the Minister of Education or the Premier: A motion in the Legislature passed urging government to incorporate public hearings into this review. It was voted on and passed unanimously in here.

Question to the Premier: You have said nothing to the public about these details of this review. You just said, just now, it's going to be completed on June 2nd. Will it incorporate public hearings as passed on the floor of this Legislature?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the member misheard me. The review will not be completed on June 2nd. It will be initiated/started on June 2nd, officially. Those details will be included in the final report of that review.

Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, we're in the twilight of the sitting of the spring Legislature. I've asked numerous questions in this House about the issue around

the oyster industry. I know that we passed a budget that has \$3 million of contingency money in that.

Oyster industry (further)

I'd like to ask the Minister responsible for Fisheries, Tourism and Culture to say when you'll be determining what the criteria are so some of these growers and public fishers can access some of that money.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries has the floor, hon. members.

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do thank the hon. member for the question. Actually, next week, the four associations are going to be getting together; they're going to be having a meeting – the Seafood Processors, the Aquaculture Alliance, the oyster processors, and the Shellfish Association. Basically, what they are going to be doing to meet is to talk about what the impacts have been. They will also be meeting to discuss what best supports are going to be needed. After that meeting takes place, I'll be meeting with that group as well.

I will say, though – hon. member, to your question – that even this morning, my department was meeting with the Department of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population just to make sure that we have those plans in place and how we want to approach the federal government through EI for the wild fishers specifically.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Well, I will say that the department has had close to 11 months since the MSX was found in the waters off Prince Edward Island. Once again, it's good that you are involving all of the industry into this. But it seems like you're waiting and waiting for the federal government. I realize that they have a role to play when it comes to the unemployment insurance side of things, but will you specifically be putting any specific money into

this particular program to help those public fishers?

I guess my other question in all that is: What if that money is not enough? Will you be issuing a special warrant to provide the resources required to support our oyster industry?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do thank the hon. member for the question. Again, as I have stated many times in this House, when I talk to either the wild fishers or if I talk to some of the growers, we are finding that it is very much on an individual basis. There is some mortality for some and higher mortalities for others.

Of course, the \$3 million is a leverage piece; we do know that. I do think it is beneficial to have Heath MacDonald as the new Minister of Agriculture for the country, living here on PEI, because again, with agriculture and aquaculture, there are a lot of similarities.

With regard, specifically, to his question on a special warrant – and I know the Minister of Finance mentioned that in the budget debate yesterday, that that’s what special warrants are for, is when that money is needed. For the industry, if a special warrant is needed, that’s something that I will be asking for.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A bit over two weeks ago, we started debate on the Health PEI budget, when I first requested contracts for the executive leadership team members, who are not employed under the Public Service Commission policy and who are, instead, contracted as independent contractors through employment agencies.

[10:50 a.m.]

Health PEI leadership (further)

Question to the Premier: Will those contracts, Mr. Premier, be tabled today so that Islanders

can see exactly what our Health PEI executives are being paid?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don’t know if they will be tabled. We are in possession of them. We had them offered up to the Member from New Haven-Rocky Point last night, but the offer was declined. I’m not sure if they can be tabled today. They were on hand and available last night, but I’m sure – we’ve committed to bring them forward here and make them public. We’ll just hand them over to the media maybe, if that’s the quickest way to make them available, but I don’t personally have them to table here today.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Premier, there were six hours yesterday where those documents could have been brought....

[Interjections]

M. MacFarlane: I’ll reference a quote from the Minister of Health, Mr. Premier. The day after I requested the contracts, I asked for them to be tabled again, and I was told by the minister: “We have them, but we don’t have them with us. We can get them sent down.” Never got them sent down yet, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Premier: These contracts were ready to be sent down and tabled two weeks ago. Who blocked them from coming down to the Legislature?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Nobody blocked them. In fact, as I said, they’ll be available and made public in whatever way we can here. I personally don’t have them right now, but I can tell you – I just want to say thank you to Melanie Fraser and her staff at Health PEI who moved mountains yesterday afternoon to actually obtain the documents for us. Many of the staff are out of the country travelling, which is why....

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hon. Premier has the floor, hon. members.

Hon. R. Lantz: The Minister of Health's staff—he indicated this yesterday, which was the reason he was having trouble finally getting them. Many of his staff are out of the country travelling, but the CEO Mel Fraser went out of her way to help us access those documents. So, we do have them in our possession somewhere. They're not here on my desk to table here today. We'll make sure that they are made available to the House or to the public as soon as we possibly can.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Premier, the minister said he had them. "We could have them sent down." We still don't have them.

So, yesterday, I again asked that these contracts be tabled before we closed. I thought it was a simple and reasonable request since they were ready weeks ago.

In addition to those contracts, on May 2nd, while discussing the travel and accommodation costs associated with the interim positions, I was told by the stranger on the floor that if those expenses were covered under the contracts, they would also be provided; we would get those amounts for the travel and the accommodations.

Question to the Premier: Still asking for those contracts to be tabled, but also, will you make sure, Mr. Premier, that all of the costs associated with travel, accommodation, and employment agency firms are also tabled so that Islanders can be assured that government is being fiscally responsible and that these positions are being compensated fairly?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm sure the Minister of Health would be able to provide more specific answers about these contracts. I haven't seen them, but what we've prepared will be made available. There's absolutely no reason why we can't provide the details that the member is asking for.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I look forward to those.

Earlier this week, Cabinet authorized the Irving family to acquire an interest in an additional 747 acres of land across the province. Unfortunately, and as usual, there is no way for Islanders to see how IRAC interprets the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* or the advice or recommendations that it provided to Cabinet, which has the final say.

IRAC (further)

Question to the Minister of Land: I did have a bill last sitting, minister, that would have created this transparency around the work that IRAC does, yet here we are still with no transparency on land approvals. What consideration, minister, did IRAC give when making its recommendation to Cabinet on allowing the Irvings access to these 747 acres of land?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Every year, anybody who has global leases has to take them through the process and take them to IRAC for approval, so what you would have seen was exactly that. It was the renewal of the Irvings' global leases that went through the most recent Cabinet, which they do, absolutely, every year.

[10:55 a.m.]

The only overage that may be there is the shareholders changed because one of the members of the family passed away. But I think my understanding is IRAC gives the corporation five years to clear that up, to either divest of the land or add appropriate shareholders to make sure that they come back in line with the law.

So, any overage you've seen is because of a death, and it's inside the law, and IRAC has the purview to instruct the company to come back into line with the law.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What the issue is, is that Islanders don't know what goes in between IRAC's recommendations and the Cabinet's decision on the matter. Secret IRAC recommendations and Cabinet approvals are a recurring issue, and it affects Islanders' trust that landholdings are within legal limits. Multiple corporations and organizations are accused of being beyond their legal limits, and there's no way for Islanders to truly feel confident that land laws, both in letter and in spirit, are being followed because of the secrecy surrounding Executive Council approvals.

Question to the minister: The necessity of the investigation into the landholdings of the Buddhist organizations on the Island is a result of the secrecy that has existed around land transactions for years on PEI. Minister, will you table the original 2018 investigation report today as a show of goodwill and transparency with respect to these land acquisitions?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Hon. S. Myers: I mean, just for the record, we asked to debate the LPA last night and you said no. If you're so concerned about land in Prince Edward Island, you would have said yes, and you said no, so you can back and tell your followers that you're trying to attract to go vote for you instead of Hannah Bell that.

What I will say, on the case of the 2018 report, it was an IRAC study, not a government study. It was an internal report to IRAC. I've asked for it, and I, in fact, myself, haven't received it, or you would have it by now because the minute I get it in my hands, I'm going to make it public. But it doesn't appear that it exists.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's been three and a half months since this minister sent a letter to IRAC directing a new investigation into the landholdings of the Buddhist-owned organizations. When I asked for an update earlier this week, the minister said he had not received any response from IRAC yet, and he didn't seem too fussed about that, either. The only way for Islanders to have any transparency regarding landownership is through this minister.

Question to the same minister: We all recognize, minister, that IRAC is a quasi-judicial body, as you noted earlier this week, but you're the minister in charge, and you're the gatekeeper of this information that Islanders are anxious to get updates on. Will you commit to following up with IRAC so that you can publicly share an update on the investigation that you requested, and its timing?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There have been communications back and forth between my department and IRAC. If I said to the House that there wasn't, in this particular case, there is. On the 2018 report, there hasn't been. What I did say in the House is I'm not going to bring you back a weekly update. I'm not going to badger them to report back to me. When they're executing their work, I expect that they'll execute it to the fullest because they have an obligation to this Assembly to do precisely that.

I think when I talked, I talked more about their independence. It's a very tightrope walk that I would walk because if I get too far into pushing their business, I'm going to be accused of trying to get them to make the report show my way, and if I get too far away, you're going to accuse me of not pushing them hard enough. That's the line that I unfortunately have to walk.

I get it. I spent a lot of time in opposition, which you're destined to, as well. I will say that anything is possible when you're in opposition. Unfortunately, when you're charged with upholding the law like I am, fewer things are possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On the Public Service Commission website, there was a job posting for a director of finance. In the posting, it mentions a training budget of \$2,500 for the person who is hired to do this job.

Professional development in education

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Can you confirm, in this year's proposed budget, the dollar amount allotted for professional development for CUPE 3260?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know that was one of your questions, member, in our budget debate on this budget line there. I think we might be a little bit confused on that budget line. You had mentioned \$3,000. That is specifically for training PD for staff within the department.

[11:00 a.m.]

There are specific training dollars allotted for each union; the PEITF would be one, and CUPE 2360. We provide a lump sum to each authority for training for these unions. Specifically, you're asking about the 3260. I believe PSB received \$260,000 this year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've heard the minister speak of the sheer number of CUPE 3260 employees that have been added into the system over the last couple of years. There are over 700 CUPE 3260 employees working in education. We've also heard in standing committee in June that there were a number who were uncertified.

Question to the Minister of Education: During budget debate, it was suggested that \$3,000 was provided to the Public Schools Branch from the Department of Education for training. What training has been provided in the last number of years, especially to those working in our system who are uncertified?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Always a very, very good advocate for the profession, and happy to try and answer her questions. Sometimes she stumps me a little bit here with her knowledge.

Training for EAs, members of CUPE 3260, is inevitably the responsibility of the educational authority, and that is why we provide them with the dollars – again, I think it was \$260,000 – in this budget for professional development, and then it's up to the authorities to determine what training topics are provided and who receives that training.

I'm aware that the unions meet regularly with the educational authorities to discuss those priorities. In fact, I met with a number of unions – the days go by quick – the day before yesterday, I believe, and in that discussion, PD wasn't specifically identified as an issue, but I certainly understand the need and the value. I'll investigate that, member, and you and I can sit down and chat more about it.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's disappointing to hear that PD wasn't on the radar of our union. I certainly can tell you from my years working in the system that it certainly was on my radar.

While I appreciate that the minister hasn't been in his role for very long, he's here now.

So, question to the same minister: While words of praise are always nice to hear, what actions are you willing to take as the Minister of Education to support the Public Schools Branch to provide professional development to CUPE 3260 employees who support students in our classrooms every day?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: That is a fantastic question, member, and I thank you for that.

Again, professional development for EAs is the responsibility of our educational authorities, but at the department level, I can certainly work with them and collaborate with them to put together the best possible package and the support required so that they can provide those oh-so-vital and important PD opportunities for our EAs. We'll continue to collaborate.

I'm very thankful to have a member such as Charlottetown-Belvedere that can bend my ear, or I can bend hers, on how we can make the system better and do better for our EAs, and I look forward to getting out of the House here and having those conversations.

Thank you, member.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Here in this Legislature, we passed a motion supporting access to education for in-demand trades. It was unanimously passed, and that's because I think we all agree students benefit most when they can see how their learning connects to real-world applications.

When I was Minister of Education, we started an initiative that really is embedding essential skills within career pathways. This government, as usual, was taking action to move forward, like using carpentry to teach literacy and numeracy. Really, it's showing the potential to increase engagement and graduation rates, and get more people in the workforce earlier, with better skills. But to make informed decisions about its future, we need a better understanding of this program's impact so far.

Essential skills achievement pathway program

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: How many students have participated in the essential skills achievement pathway program since its inception in 2022, and what metrics are being used to evaluate its success?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for bringing this up to me the other day. We had a pretty good chat about it.

[11:05 a.m.]

The essential skills achievement pathway program is a fantastic one. Right now, I believe there are just under 100 students enrolled in the program. For any of the students that have participated, they're seeing the connections to

what they're going to experience and do in the real world, and that's oh so important.

Some of the metrics that you're asking about:

Students do complete a feedback survey each year. There's also some pretty good teacher feedback on the program. There's better attendance. There are less behavioural issues. They're more engaged. Those are all messages that we're getting from the teachers regarding this program.

By all accounts, member, I believe that it's a very, very successful program, and I look forward to seeing it continue.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's no doubt that this is a great program. The essential skills achievement pathway pilot was launched three years ago – it was three years ago – at Colonel Gray and Montague Regional High Schools to support grade 10 students who may be uncertain about their post-graduation direction. As we mentioned, this program allows students to explore career paths while embedding literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills within the context of their chosen field.

But it's important to support decisions with evidence and also expand the program.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Can the minister confirm whether the essential skills achievement program is still considered a pilot? Are there plans to expand it to all Island high schools? What evidence does the department have that this is improving student outcomes?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's very refreshing to get quality questions from members of our party on that side. Yes, the Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere. And you know what, I'm going to give some accolades to O'Leary-Inverness. There are some good questions coming here.

Member, you're right. Colonel Gray and Montague, I believe, are in their third year of this program. Kinkora is on year 2. In February, just past, we have initiated it and rolled it out in every school across the province.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's fantastic. Our government has done great, innovative things over the years, and this is just one example.

I look at how government has really worked to break down silos between departments. I mean, if you look at Education and Early Years working with Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population, working directly with Economic Development, Innovation and Trade, and even bringing in Agriculture, of course, and Environment; they all come together.

But one department where they kind of take accountability for where the rubber meets the road is Housing, Land and Communities. We've seen great programs like supporting municipalities with early years centres. I helped bring the one into Kinkora, which was just fantastic. They're a great community doing great things. It's good to have a good Conservative there to help them out.

Speaker: It's Question Period, hon. member.

[Laughter]

B. Trivers: Yes. I did want to give the Member from Kensington-Malpeque some credit for his work with Holland College and housing there, but I wanted to know from the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities whether he could take some of his programs in support of his colleagues to really help more of the trades, including early childhood educators, carpenters, and machinists – the whole works – into the private industry by incentives in your programs.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think that when you look at our housing starts that we've had in the first quarter, they're the

most housing starts since the '50s here. Charlottetown is booming, Summerside is booming, Georgetown is booming, Souris is booming, Morell is booming, Tignish is booming, O'Leary is booming – everywhere you go on Prince Edward Island, it is booming. That is part and parcel to a great government that you've had leading you over the past six years.

When it comes to integrating skillsets into it, obviously everything we can do with the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning to make sure that we're bringing the right skills to the workforce so that we can have the skilled labour onsite.... We're looking at innovative ways of doing things. We're looking at innovative partners. We've grown innovative partners because we've had gaps that needed to be filled. We have a great sheltering service down here now that didn't exist under the Liberals because they completely ignored it.

[11:10 a.m.]

I mean, quite frankly, I've been around for 14 years. Like I said, I've watched politics my whole life, and this is absolutely the best government I've seen in all my years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The federal government is taking incredible steps for cutting bridge tolls and...

[Interjections]

G. McNeilly: ...ferry tolls. This Premier, when he got appointed or placed or whatever, talked a lot about what was going to happen, but I have not heard one single dollar amount that this Province and this Premier are going to put in to relieving pressures about getting off Prince Edward Island.

Bridge and ferry tolls

Minister, what money are you going to put in as the Premier of the province to help Islanders with bridge and ferry tolls?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I don't apologize for advocating very strongly to relieve Islanders from the financial burden of leaving our province. Now, I'm not sure why the member is asking the government to commit more taxpayer money to enable Islanders to leave Prince Edward Island. The Confederation Bridge will fall under ownership of the federal government, and the federal government is responsible for the ferry service.

What we've asked for is financial relief for Islanders, and we hope that's what we're going to get.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition, final question.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the Premier used words that were offensive to the opposition office in which he is quoted that the opposition office could not stay within their budget. Regardless of whether he knew before or after, he now knows that he was wrong in saying that. So, I'm going to give him this opportunity to apologize.

Legislative office budgets (further)

Premier, will you take this opportunity to correct your wrong?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If the Leader of the Opposition is asking me to apologize to his staff – did I understand correctly? – I absolutely will. I have no problem apologizing to his staff if they were offended by the comments in here yesterday. I'll stop by on the way up the stairs.

[End of Question Period]