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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 29 APRIL 2010

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and Attorney General.

Adults in custody (further)

Mr. D. Currie: Madam Speaker, yesterday the Leader of the Opposition asked for some clarification around occupancy rates around within our adult correction system.

I'm not in the position to answer questions about work being done by Stats Canada, as I'm not familiar with the criteria they use when compiling numbers. However, I would like to table the most recent statistics compiled by my staff within the Community and Correctional Services Division of my department. At this time, I'd like to acknowledge the dedication and commitment by our correctional staff, who work under some very challenging circumstances. I would be more than glad to table this information here today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Trip information and recruitments fairs

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

The Leader of the Opposition asked about trips that the Population Secretariat staff had taken with respect to recruitment fairs - recruiting skilled workers. She wanted to know about the last couple of years, and of

course I made the commitment to go back to 2005.

I'd like to report today that under the previous administration, in 2004 and 2005, and 2005-2006, there were no recruitment fairs. Under the previous administration in 2006-2007 there were four. Unfortunately the results of those trips were not tracked so we don't know the results. In 2007-2008, five under this administration, and in 2008-2009, seven under this administration. I have the results of those trips here.

I'd also like to report that in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, our staff provided exposure to Prince Edward Island to more than 37,500 people. Certainly not as many as our guests behind us here - our Olympic gold medalists - but significant just the same. I'd be pleased to table those results.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Use of Proceeds Agreement letterhead

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The minister of innovation last week in the House - or maybe two weeks ago - tabled the Use of Proceeds Agreement forms. A question to the minister. One sample was printed using IIDDI and the provincial government letterhead, the other was not.

Could you explain why the difference?

Madam Speaker.

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

To the same minister. Mr. Minister, out of the files that used one sample that you provided me with, in this Use of Proceeds Agreement, how many were signed that were allowed to use funds to pay down or pay out, and I quote: investee corporation's indebtedness to the PEI lending authority? How many were allowed to do that, Mr. Minister?

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

The Leader of the Opposition asked for samples of the Use of Proceeds Agreement. She didn't specify what type of letterhead she'd like to see it printed on.

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, to the same minister.

I can take that question under advisement, check with the staff at IIDI, and report back to the Leader of the Opposition.

I just want to clarify then: Are both examples that you provided, were they both used as legal agreements or contracts, Mr. Minister?

Thank you.

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

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

In consultation with staff at IIDI, I believe the answer to that question is yes.

Yesterday, to the same minister, you tabled your report for the same period from the PEI lending authority, and I noticed there were 25 companies in arrears. Out of the 25 companies, how many were given this privilege, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Use of Proceeds Agreement and corporate indebtedness

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you,

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

I would expect that if a company was given the privilege to pay down its indebtedness to the PEI Lending Agency, I can't understand why they would be in arrears.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, back to the same minister.

Mr. Minister, don't you see there's a problem here? I mean, you are the minister responsible for IIDI and also the lending authority. So the Provincial Nominee Program investment funds were to expand businesses. So you actually took money out of one hand and gave it to a select few on another to actually pay your own department back. What's going on, Mr. Minister?

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

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

The Leader of the Opposition raises a great point about the money that was raised for the business community in this province. The over \$200 million investment has gone a long ways to making sure that we've stabilized our economy in difficult economic times. We're very proud of the program, very proud of the cultural diversity that it's brought to the province, and we're very much looking forward to launching our new program.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the

Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, back to the same minister.

Mr. Minister, if you're allowing money to be used by your department to give money to a company that wasn't able to pay their funds back to the lending authority, were you actually setting up two standards? One for people to follow one set of rules to invest, and another for preferential treatment to a select few to take that money and pay you back. Can you explain that, Mr. Minister?

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

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

As it was explained in previous Question Periods, the Use of Proceeds Agreement changed and evolved over time to strengthen and improve it, as did the program itself. Under the previous administration there were really no guidelines with respect to the program. It was more or less a free-for-all to help out friends of the previous administration.

We brought in changes to strengthen and bring accountability to the program, changes we're very proud of. Those changes have been implemented. The Auditor General has reviewed the files and we'll implement the recommendations as we move forward with the new program.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. With the PEI lending authority often people apply for loans, whether it's agriculture, tourism, etc. With this Use of Proceeds Agreement, obviously you're allowing some people to participate in the program, take funds from one hand - because you are responsible for that - turn around and pay you back on the other hand. Can you explain to the people of PEI, especially clients of the lending authority, that they would be eligible for the same select service? Can you explain that?

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

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

The Leader of the Opposition is absolutely correct. Through the PEI Lending Agency we do provide loan assistance to fishers and farmers in this province. Of course, something we're very proud of as a government is bringing forward our low-interest loan program, something that the previous administration said couldn't be accomplished.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Campbell: I believe we have upwards of \$30 million loaned out to fishermen to support them in these difficult times. It's something we're very proud of.

The Leader of the Opposition knows about loans at the Lending Agency. I believe she has one herself, perhaps for a blueberry operation.

The Use of Proceeds Agreement, as well as the rest of the program, has gone a long way to strengthen the business community in this province. It's something we're very proud of and we're very lucky.

I see, as I stated yesterday, the latest release from Stats Canada showed that in 2008-2009 we were one of only two jurisdictions in the country to show positive real GDP growth. Us and, I believe, the Yukon Territory. A lot of that can be attributed to the great program called PNP.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. This is the great program we're still waiting from the evaluation (Indistinct). We're still waiting for the settlement strategy. But let's go back to what the department's actually doing here.

Mr. Minister, your department signed Use of Proceeds Agreements with businesses that required the business to pay back money to your own government. You're taking immigrant money and funnelling through the company to pay back loans to yourself. Do you not understand there's a problem with that, Mr. Minister?

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

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

Again, I'd like to correct the Leader of the Opposition. My department did not take money. We're very respectful of the fact that these are private investments between a private investor and a private company.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Use of Proceeds Agreement signatory

Leader of the Opposition: To the same minister: Mr. Minister, who signs the Use of Proceeds Agreement? Is it between your department, your government and the business?

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I believe it would be IIDI, a Crown corporation, and the business owner.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Payback of PEI Lending Agency

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you for that clarification. It's your government.

Now, my next question - and don't forget there were 500 businesses that were refused participation in this program. Do you not see there's a problem when you turn around and take money, give it to a business, and then allow them to pay your own department back - the lending authority? Do you not see there's a problem here?

Premier Ghiz: Exactly. The taxpayers shouldn't get their money back.

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

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

Premier Ghiz: Shame, shame!

Mr. Campbell: Again, to clarify, our department did not take the money and give it to anyone. It's a private investment between a private investor and a private company.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, according to the Auditor General it is a contract, an agreement between IIDI - his government - and the individual business.

Payment to Receiver General of Canada

Let's go to the next question. Mr. Minister, one of your conditions, on this same form was to, and I quote: pay the outstanding

balance of the investee corporation to the Receiver General for Canada. Can you explain that one, Mr. Minister?

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

Premier Ghiz: (Indistinct) pay the taxes.

Mr. Campbell: I believe, Madam Speaker, in the Use of Proceeds Agreement it was indicated that companies could pay down debt.

I don't know, maybe the Leader of the Opposition doesn't classify the Receiver General for Canada debt, but certainly most people that I talk to who owe a tax bill consider that debt.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

PNP and preferential treatment

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Mr. Minister, this program was set up to help businesses expand. It was meant to be a good program. It was to help the immigrants themselves. Can the minister explain how some people got this selective and preferential treatment to pay down debt while other companies that wanted to expand businesses, met all criteria, were turned down? Can you explain that one, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation

and Advanced Learning.

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

I think the Auditor General actually spoke to the point raised by the Leader of the Opposition, and I believe his comment was something to the effect that approvals were made in accordance with established policy. Of course, he made recommendations around the IIDI board, that policy changes should be documented by the board. He made a series of recommendations and we're very pleased and proud to be implementing each and every one of them.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Mr. Minister, with this Use of Proceeds Agreement, and especially where you were allowing some select companies to use their money to pay off the Receiver General of Canada, was that just a one-off agreement, or was that agreement, again, preferential treatment to probably five or 10 or 19 companies? Could you explain it?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

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

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

I believe the number of companies that received investment through this great program was significant here in the province, and again, the benefits to those companies and to the economy here in the province is substantial.

I don't know what the Leader of the Opposition is talking about, about preferential treatment. I know I've talked to business owners who took part in the program and they were wondering why they didn't hear about it before this government came along, but apparently the previous administration kept a very tight lid on it and really didn't tell people about the great benefits of this program.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

There were 500 companies from Brookfield, from (Indistinct) in transportation and public works department, we could go through many companies, including the (Indistinct) treasurer, that applied and met all criteria for this program but were turned down.

To the minister: How many did you allow to use this Use of Proceeds Agreement to actually pay down their debt, pay Revenue Canada, which probably means they were back in their payroll payments, GST, etc.? This program was to grow Island businesses. Can you explain that?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you very much -

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) got your (Indistinct) lending agency (Indistinct).

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

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

It's a very simple explanation. One of the greatest struggles that companies face here in this province is undercapitalization and excessive debt. I would suggest that if companies are allowed to pay down their debt that it certainly would improve their situation and allow for such things as expansion. Especially in challenging economic times. That's what this program has allowed, and we're very proud of it and we're very lucky to have had it here in this province.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Number of business signing Use of Proceeds Agreements

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. How many businesses actually signed these Use of Proceeds Agreements?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation

and Advanced Learning.

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

Just to be sure, I'll take that question under advisement and get the exact number from staff at IIDI, and I'll be pleased to bring that number back.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Just a few minutes ago the minister was referring to what he was following through with the Auditor General. The Auditor General had actually asked him to ensure, on an ongoing basis, that all companies use the Use of Proceeds Agreement and that the wording of all such agreements prohibit payments to shareholders.

What you answered was this: IIDI will ensure all companies participate with the program will sign a Use of Proceeds Agreement. Clarify what - are you going to follow through with what the Auditor General actually asked you to do?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Premier Ghiz: Absolutely.

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

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Madam Speaker, we will follow through with the recommendation that's put forward that the Leader of the Opposition mentions from the Auditor General.

Not only that recommendation, but each and every recommendation put forward by the Auditor General.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Use of Proceeds Agreement follow-up

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, to the same minister.

Mr. Minister, how many businesses has your department actually followed up with since their Use of Proceeds Agreement that they would have signed in October is now up. How many have you actually followed up with?

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

Mr. Campbell: I believe, Madam Speaker, I indicated here earlier on in this session that the companies who signed a Use of Proceeds Agreement, the use of proceeds comes into effect two years after the completion of investment by the investor in the investee company.

Companies that came due as of October of 2009, letters have gone out to them, and of course, as I indicated as well, we have to wait for companies to file their year-end

financial statements so we can review their information.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Use of Proceeds Agreements compliance

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

So when you sent out these notices, how many businesses did not comply back to you with your request, Mr. Minister?

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

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

I can certainly check with staff to see how many responses we have received on the letters that have gone out.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Mr. Minister, how many businesses will be charged with the \$55,000 penalty that you put in place if the businesses didn't comply?

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

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

We have speculation again from the Leader of the Opposition, and it's more innuendo. Of course, we've seen her go through members of this Legislative Assembly, Cabinet ministers, professionals, here and across the province, and now she seems to be talking about the credibility of businesses in this province.

It's absolutely shameful that she calls into question the credibility of business owners and hard workers in this province.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Since we're talking about credibility, and how many stories we've gone through this House lately from this same minister, let's go back with the same question.

Mr. Minister, how many businesses will be charged with the \$55,000 penalty your government put in place because of non-compliance?

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

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

I'm certainly hopeful that there will be nobody charged under the Use of Proceeds

Agreement because we believe that companies acted in good faith and that they'll be in compliance. However, if we determine that there has been a blatant disrespect for the Use of Proceeds Agreement, well, then we'll take the appropriate action at the time.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, Mr. Minister, if company A paid down some debt because in their Use of Proceeds Agreement it allowed them to, but company B across the street paid down debt but didn't have it written into their Use of Proceeds Agreement, are you charging them for 55,000?

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

Mr. Campbell: I can't see why you would, Madam Speaker.

If it wasn't written into their Use of Proceeds Agreement I don't see what would prohibit them from doing it.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, I'll go back to the minister, and we'll use that example again.

Because you were select and gave

preferential treatment to a few people, in their Use of Proceeds Agreement they were allowed, because it was written in, to pay down the debt. If company B, in their use of proceeds there was no allowance for that but they chose to. That's not complying with what was in their agreement. Will you be charging them?

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

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

As I indicated, if we find that a company is in blatant disregard for the Use of Proceeds Agreement, we'll take the appropriate action at that time.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

New PNP and investment dollars

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Every once in a while we hear from this minister that he's talking about a fantasy new program. My question with that fantasy new PNP, will you be allowing companies to use investment dollars to pay shareholders? Will you be doing that, Mr. Minister?

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you very much,

Madam Speaker.

I don't know that I've referred to the new program as fancy, but I do appreciate the compliment from the Leader of the Opposition.

We are certainly looking forward to it. This program will go through the IIDI board with respect to policy, with respect to the new program and Use of Proceeds Agreements.

I'd be pleased to share with the Leader of the Opposition both the contents of the new programs and of the Use of Proceeds Agreements when that process is finalized.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Executive Council draft report

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Auditor General also had asked government to clarify and strengthen Treasury Board conflict of interest guidelines regarding their specific application to and the expectations for deputy minister level employees.

Minister, you responded. You said that the Clerk of Executive Council had finished a draft report in 2009. Will you present that in the House, Mr. Minister?

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

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

I don't think it's common practice to table draft reports on the floor of the Legislature. I will check with the Clerk to see exactly what stage that draft is at, and if it's complete, I'd be pleased to share it.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, to the same minister:

This is a minister who talked about discussions with a new program with the federal minister in 2009. There was no such discussion. A settlement strategy, an evaluation, why, we'll soon be getting to the examination of the economic impacts.

Departmental delays

But what's going on in your department? How long are you giving your staff to do work? Once again, I asked you the question. The work was supposed to be done the end of 2009. You tell the Auditor General it was draft then. This is almost May. Mr. Minister, what's going on and why the delays on this important program?

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

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

The Leader of the Opposition asks what'S

going on in our department. I wouldn't like to use up all of Question Period, but I can certainly tell her that there's lots going on in our department, and perhaps that's an explanation to why things take a little bit of time.

We've made a commitment to be comprehensive in our reviews with respect to settlement strategy and evaluation of programs. But I can tell the Leader of the Opposition that there is all kinds of good things going on in our department. A good indication was yesterday, with 100 new jobs in Summerside.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Campbell: Next Tuesday is a very exciting day. I don't like to let the cat out of the bag, but we have a very exciting announcement for next Tuesday as well.

There is a lot of great things going on in the department, whether it be through Skills PEI, the Population Secretariat, the department itself. There's so much going on. I'm very proud of the hard work of the senior bureaucrats and all the hard workers in the public service of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Economic impact studies

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, to the minister.

Mr. Minister, well over a week ago I asked

you to bring back to the House the famous examination of the economic impact study that you told the Auditor General that you had done and completed. When are we going to see that tabled, Mr. Minister?

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

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

I've asked staff at IIDI to check with the companies who prepared that economic impact examination. Out of respect to their work, they were asked by IIDI to compile that work and we're currently checking with those companies to see if they have a problem with releasing it here on the floor of the Legislature.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, the previous minister talked about this great economic impact that this program was having back in October of 2009.

My question to you, Mr. Minister. I also asked you the question: Who is the famous company or companies? Did you do one or did you do two economic impact studies?

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

Mr. Campbell: Two.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the

Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, to the same minister.

With the first economic impact study, what were the results and was this piece of work actually tendered and who did the work?

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

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

Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition could check with the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters around tendering policy for IIDI. IIDI is not subject to the same policy and Treasury Board policies with respect to tendering as government departments.

The Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about the economic impact. I think all we need to do is take a little bit of a look around. I spoke about the StatsCan analysis of real GDP growth, but all we need to look at is new home builds here in the province, leading most of the country in new home starts. Leading most of the country in new automobile sales. Great indications as to how strong the economy is here in this province, and we're very grateful to have this program to assist that.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam

Speaker, back to the same minister.

If this economic impact study was so great, the first one, and then you choose to do a second one, surely you're going to share it with the general public what the details are. My question is to you. Mr. Minister, tell us what was the process you used to choose who was going to do the work, how much did it cost and what were the terms of reference?

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

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

The senior officials at IIDI looked at experts who do this work, not only here on Prince Edward Island but in other jurisdictions across the country. They did an in-depth analysis to look at the work of companies who do this and made a selection based on that evaluation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: To the same minister. Please share with us who was this great expert. In terms of the work, again, you have the treasurer who's always talking - or the minister of transportation is always speaking about the great work the stimulus package from Ottawa and Gail Shea has done to the economy.

How do we know that it's not the stimulus package that's done so well in comparison

to your mismanagement in this program?
When are you releasing the details on this?

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

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

Yes, as a government here, we are very grateful for the stimulus package that was put forward by the federal government. But more so to that we're very grateful to our own provincial treasurer, the Minister of Finance and Municipal Affairs, who actually demonstrated to the federal government what happens when you bring the stimulus package forward. Led the country in bringing fourth the stimulus package and we're very happy that the federal government took a look at what we were doing here on PEI and decided to duplicate it.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Atlantic Coastal Action Program funding

Mr. McGeoghegan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry. Could the minister please update the House on the status of the funding for the Atlantic Coastal Action Program based on the letter you wrote to the federal minister requesting a continuation of the program on behalf of the Atlantic environment ministers?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry.

Mr. Bagnall: He wouldn't know that.

Mr. Brown: Yes I would know that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Yes, when the federal government proposed to cut these vital programs that study Atlantic coastal regions and the effects of climate change, two particular groups on PEI were losing their funding. A joint effort was made by all ministers across the country in lobbying the federal government in order to get this funding back.

I'm proud to report today that the federal government has seen the wisdom of the provincial ministers in the Province of Prince Edward Island here and the funding is being restored to these groups.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Mr. McGeoghegan: Supplementary question to the same minister.

Could you tell the House what kind of work will be carried out now that the funding has been approved?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry.

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, these two

groups do a tremendous job in terms of watershed areas, and they also do a tremendous job in doing the studies, the effect of climate change on Prince Edward Island.

We are a coastal community and the effects of climate change will effect Prince Edward Island.

Anyway, I'm proud to announce that the federal government does recognize, through the efforts of myself and other ministers, that global change is happening. Up to that point in time I didn't think the federal government understood the effects of global change. When we met in Ottawa we convinced the federal minister that it is happening -

An Hon. Member: You're so good.

Mr. Brown: And lucky. These two groups will be studying the coastal erosion, coastal problems that happen, and those reports will go back to the federal government and ourselves and we will make plans in order to mitigate those changes.

Thank you.

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

Housing projects for people with disabilities

Mr. Greenan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour. A

couple of months ago there was an announcement in Summerside about two housing projects for persons with disabilities. I've had several inquiries on time lines around those projects.

I'm wondering, Madam Minister, if you could update the House on those projects?

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

Ms. Sherry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

That's a very good question, and I'd be only to pleased to stand and update the Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors on those projects. I'm sure you're referring to the project at Community Connections and the Scotcor project on Duke.

I'm very proud to say that they're finishing up some site work there and they're hoping to start construction in a couple of weeks. Very proud to say that we'll have 17 new units for persons with disabilities in the Summerside area.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Economic impact studies (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

So much for open, transparent and accountable government. You know, our Public Accounts Committee is shut down. There are no discussions with the federal

minister on a new program in 2009. We have no evaluation, no settlement strategy, and now two economic impact studies.

Mr. Minister, who has done these two economic impact studies? Tell the House and the public today.

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I believe the economic impact studies were done by Grant Thornton and PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

How much was each of those contracts worth, Mr. Minister?

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

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

I'll, again, take that under advisement, check with staff and be pleased to bring that back.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Would the minister mind telling us from either one of those reports how much they were suggesting that the PNP actually stimulated in the economy? Rec fisheries, for example, under energy and forestry is probably worth one dollar to every nine. What were the spinoffs that both of these reports told you?

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

Mr. Campbell: The spinoffs, Madam Speaker, I think I alluded to some of them here just a little bit earlier.

The spinoffs were strengthening our economy during tough economic times and leading the country in housing starts and new auto sales.

Of course, if she wants to talk about spinoffs of this program, I think probably we can't lose site of the fact that one of the greatest spinoffs of this program is growing our population and the cultural diversity that it has brought to this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I think he's still talking.

Speaker: Oh, sorry.

Mr. Campbell: (Indistinct), Madam

Speaker.

new one.

Speaker: Sorry, hon. minister, I turned my head, I thought you stopped talking.

Thank you.

Premier Ghiz: I thought he was (Indistinct) too.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Speaker: Thank you.

Lobster prices

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'd like to (Indistinct) the minister of fisheries. Fishermen across the province are loading their boats today, anticipating another lobster season starting tomorrow. Mr. Minister, are you expecting good prices for our lobster fishermen this year?

We'll give him another chance. To the same minister: Please tell us how much the ratio was to the spinoff. Was it one to one? Was it nine to one? Four to one? You've had two reports. Please tell us.

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

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

Mr. LeClair: Yes, Madam Speaker, I'm expecting and hope for the best price possible.

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Again she talks about spinoffs. All you need to do is take a walk around the city here. You want to see spinoffs of the Provincial Nominee Program. The new Islanders that we meet on the street, there's a great spinoff of this program. Walk through the hallways of our schools here. There's a great spinoff of this program. Of course, the investment into the companies in this province is a great spinoff.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Minister, exactly what price are you expecting this year for our lobster? What's your forecast that you're hearing through your department? Because you always hear the numbers coming in. So what are you hearing?

Again, I spoke of the additions to our economy and strengthening our economy. An absolutely fantastic program. We're very proud of it and can't wait to bring forward a

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, I thought we explained that before, that we, as

government, don't set the price for lobster.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Minister, do you think \$3 a pound is a fair price for our lobster?

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, a fair price would be the best price that we can possibly get this spring for our lobster.

Premier Ghiz: Ten dollars.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Price fixing re: lobster

Mr. Bagnall: Minister, do you feel there's price fixing amongst people in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, the industry on PEI has to work together.

We need all areas of the industry working together. Processors, buyers on the wharf, fishermen, PEIFA - everyone has to work together in order to bring the best price possible to the fisher, to the processing sector. That way we can all gain from getting the best price possible. The only way to achieve that is for everybody to work in

unison and get the best price.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: So, minister, you're saying that there is price fixing. Is that what you're telling the House here? That there's price fixing here in this province. Is that what you're telling us?

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, I don't know if I need a translator here or am I speaking in a different language, but that wasn't the issue at all.

I said the best thing we can possibly do across this province is for all members of the industry to work together. That's the only way that we're going to get the best price possible.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Minister, the Member from Belfast-Murray River spoke in the standing committee this winter in our hearings and he said that there is price fixing in this province and he had the proof to back it up. So you mean to tell me he hasn't talked to you about the price fixing that's going on and with his proof that he has?

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, like I said before, the members that are in the Legislature here that are fishermen, definitely we talk on a regular basis.

He indicated that the fishermen were looking at forming a commodity board. They're into that process, as far as I know, working with Murray Myles.

All the initiatives that they have brought forward to this government, like I've told you before many times, we've initiated and brought into play. So we listen to our members. The commodity board direction may be an avenue that they can look at and I'm glad that they are proceeding in that direction.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

What the member said, that there is price fixing, and he was asked in the committee: Do you have proof of that? He said: Yes, I have. He was asked to table it, and he said it was already tabled. So I would assume that you, as minister of this department, would be talking to the member who's a fishing member in this province and saying that there's price fixed - what have you done about it?

You're the minister. What are you going to do with price fixing? Are you going to let that happen? Your member says it's going on. He says he's got the proof and you've done nothing about it? What are you doing?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries,

Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, we have a processing sector here and a fishing industry that has to work together.

We have co-ops across the Island. We have all different aspects of processing - you know, private enterprise, cooperative enterprises. They're all working towards getting the best price possible for the industry to the fisher and to the processing sector.

With the economy the way it is, they're all working hard, and certainly I hope they keep up the good work and that we see an excellent price for this spring.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: So, minister, are you telling us that the member didn't sit down with you and tell you that there's price fixing going on in this province, that he has the proof and the documentation to back it up, and you never did anything about it? Are you telling the House that that actually happened? That you didn't do anything? That you didn't come to the plate and protect the fishermen in this province?

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, we talk all the time, the members of the industry who are MLAs.

That's how we get that low-interest loan program. That's how we got rationalization.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LeClair: That's how we got the \$4 million into marketing and product development in the industry this year that we announced. That's how we changed the peddler's licence. That's how we changed the buyer's licence on the wharf. All the things that we needed to move this industry forward, we've done.

It's because of the good input that we've had from the members, the MLAs in this government. We listen and we're willing to do that. We'll continue to do that.

The best I'm looking for is the best price possible for the spring.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you. Madam Speaker, it's the same minister.

I can't believe that you would have a member that would come before a standing committee on fisheries and make a statement that there's price fixing going on in this province and that he had the proof to back it up and you, as minister, have not done anything about it. You never even checked into it? Why are you not standing up for the fishermen? Why are you hiding?

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, I've just listed off the low-interest loan program,

rationalization program, the Canada lobster purchase we put in, the changing of buyer's license, the rationalization in district 25. All these initiatives that were brought forward that we've done that your government wouldn't even consider.

One thing I can't believe is how you cut the feet out from under the industry by Polar Foods.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacKinley: That's a good one.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: It's -

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)!

Speaker: Order, please! Order, please!

Mr. Bagnall: Madam Speaker, it seems pretty weak when a minister can't answer a question and he goes back to four years ago to try to answer questions.

We're talking about a lobster season that is opening tomorrow, that we're looking for prices. Can you tell us what the posted price is now for lobster for this year?

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, there's no posted price for lobster on PEI until the industry starts.

It's like that every year. You should know

that. You were minister before, weren't you?

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, final question.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you. Madam Speaker, here is a minister that's been talking all winter about pricing for lobster and what they were going to do to have a good lobster season.

He can't tell us that there's any price, he hasn't met with the processors. There's an allegation out there from the Member from Belfast-Murray River that there's price fixing going on, and he hasn't got any idea what's going on.

Why will you not stand up and do some work today for the fishery instead of going back into the past and talk about things that happened? We're talking about tomorrow and the price that fishermen are going to receive. What are you doing?

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, the reason why I have to back is to explain to the hon. member that there is history involved here, why we're standing here today, and why we had to put at least \$50 million into the industry in two-and-a-half years to try and fix up the mess he made before.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Order, please! Order, please!

[End of Question Period]