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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

OF

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 14 MAY 2010

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker (Casey): The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Order, please!

Performers at Festival of Lights (further)

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Since the Minister of Tourism and Culture has been in the hot seat all week, I think I'll go back to him again this time.

Minister, you committed to bring back the information on the funding for the Festival of Lights. I'm sure you have it with you today.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, I don't have it with me today.

The hon. member - I believe it's called Charlottetown SummerFest you're referring to.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Madam Speaker, I'll go to the next question.

Mr. Minister, how much funding did you give to the Festival of Lights last year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, I don't have that number with me today.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Madam Speaker, I'm surprised the minister wouldn't have those numbers because the topic's been up all week, and I would think that he would have been briefed on that information.

Minister, did the province make the money back on that promotion last year? I understand it was a flop.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member there seems to have a pick on the Charlottetown or the SummerFest or the Festival of Lights.

I have with me a letter that was released from Charlottetown SummerFest. Can I, with your indulgence, read this?

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Vessey: Quote: "We have been made aware of some very disappointing comments made in the Legislature today regarding Tourism Charlottetown's contractual arrangements with Cirque du Soleil regarding cost overruns.

"Our plans for this exciting performance at this year's Charlottetown SummerFest have

not changed and these comments are, to say the least very unfortunate."

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Vessey: "Our contract with Cirque du Soleil has not changed in any way since its signing back in February.

"It is unfortunate that such inaccurate statements can be presented without the real facts."

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Vessey: "Spreading rumours and innuendo while we and our partners are trying to strengthen this important sector in tough economic times is not helpful.

"We are so fortunate to have Cirque du Soleil produce a custom designed show for Prince Edward Island and having Politicians make comments like this is once again disappointing to Islanders and to the Tourism Industry.

"As President of Tourism Charlottetown I commend the entire Team for their hard work on this great new event!

"Doug Newson, President
Tourism Charlottetown and the PEI Convention Partnership"

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Bagnall: The minister still hasn't answered any questions yet.

Minister, is the $250,000 that you were paying to the Cirque du Soleil in addition to what you paid last year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, it's unfortunate that the hon. member of the opposition has to drag the Charlottetown SummerFest festival through the mud in here.

They're trying to do a new event and a family event and to reinvent their event for all, and for the hon. member to question it at this time when it's just starting the first of tourism season, I think it's shameful.

An Hon. Member: Shameful.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Still he hasn't answered the question. What date did you confirm that you were going to give them this money?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, I think the hon. member is trying to make it look like we're hiding something here with the funding to Cirque du Soleil, but if he did his

research, which I honestly don't think he does very well - he just throws stuff out, whoever tells him or gives him a brown paper envelope or whatever - but if you do your research, you'll find that there is a signature event policy in my department which has all kinds of criteria to meet and anyone can apply to it and the funding is there.

We're open for business.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: That's what I expected. No answer again, Madam Speaker.

The problem being is, when he found out there was a problem, that 250,000 seemed to mysteriously get to this tourism promotion. So I'm curious as to why the dollar figure didn't go out with you when you made your press conference on this deal. Why did you hide the dollar figure?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Premier Ghiz: (Indistinct). You were already told that.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, again, Tourism Charlottetown do their own thing.

We fund it. They had an announcement. We announced that we were funding partners. It was done.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It just seems like the money mysteriously - 200,000 more has gone into the promotion very quickly -

Premier Ghiz: Again, that's rumour and innuendo.

Mr. Bagnall: - and so I got to - minister, so you stand in the House today and guarantee that there won't be any more tourism money going into this promotion?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, again, I find the question a little shameful for the industry.

Our tourism industry, they're a great group of people, and Tourism Charlottetown is a great organization. They've followed the rules of our department. They've applied for funding for signature events, and I find it shameful that the hon. member has a problem with that.

And no, there'll be no more funding going into that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: You know, Madam Speaker, I think the reason he never announced the 250,000 was because it was never there until

recently, and when he had to.

Premier Ghiz: (Indistinct) that's wrong (Indistinct).

Mr. Bagnall: It's just when mistakes and costs come to that there's extra money involved, Madam Speaker.

So you're going to tell us that you're not going to be putting any more money into it. Minister, you still never have me the date and when you decided to give them - announce this funding for them. When was that date?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Vessey: I believe the hon. member must have gotten a bad leak on this one because we're not hiding anything.

If he wants me, I'll bring back the date of the application that Tourism Charlottetown has applied under our policy of signature events, and I'll be glad to bring it back if I can.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Signature event funding

Mr. Bagnall: Can you table today in the House what other projects are going to be receiving money under this fund?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Vessey: This fund, Madam Speaker, is open to anyone.

People apply to it and then we evaluate it to see what they trigger for the funding. I don't have any more applications in today, so I don't have anything to table.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Cavendish Beach Music Festival funding

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you. How much will the Cavendish Beach Music Festival receive from your department of tourism this year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Vessey: Okay, so now we're dragging Tourism Charlottetown through the mud, so now we're taking a turn out to rural PEI to go at Cavendish beach, Madam Speaker.

Cavendish beach is a major - it's a new event that we're very proud to partner with. It's got great spinoffs, not only for Cavendish but for all of Prince Edward Island, and it's a major family event. They did, too, apply to the signature events program and I'm happy to say we've partnered with them for 200,000.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: So the biggest weekend of the year they're receiving less money than the Tourism Charlottetown one. Okay.

Minister, why would they be getting less money than the Charlottetown tourism festival? Why would Cavendish beach?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, this is an ongoing funding agreement we do have with Cavendish beach, and I suggest that if he wants to know the details of the business contract he talk to Cavendish beach.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Minister, would you table the two proposals that you've received from both groups for this funding?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Vessey: Hon. member, you mean the Cavendish beach and Tourism Charlottetown? I'll go back to my department and look into it, and if I can table it I will.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Signature event funding (further)

Mr. Bagnall: Minister, I guess a question, then. If there's other people wanting to hold events - like, let's say Summerside wanted to bring in - is this $200,000 available to them to bring in for their tourism thing, too?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, we're open across the province to work with people wanting to bring good entertainment to our province, and we have the doors closed on no one.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: I'm sorry, could he repeat that? I just couldn't catch -

An Hon. Member: The doors are open.

Mr. Bagnall: - I couldn't hear what he was saying at the end. Could he - ask to repeat it?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, again, my department, we have a policy in place to provide funding for signature events, and it's open to anyone in the province.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Potato board and Irving

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question will be for the Minister of Agriculture and Deputy Premier.

Minister, do you feel that is beneficial for potato growers to enter into an agreement with processing companies prior to planting so that they can ensure that they are able to sell their crops?

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, absolutely.

It's extremely important to have the contract signed before the crop goes in the ground so you know what varieties you need, what the criteria is and what the pricing is. Absolutely.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Minister, are you aware that the potato marketing board - the board of directors - made an order to this effect that was supported by the vote from the potato growers?

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, I'm going to need more information.

I'm not understanding the issue the hon. member is bringing forward.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Well, Madam Speaker -

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. Bagnall: - to the minister again.

Are you aware that the potato marketing board, the board of directors, made an order to that effect that was supported by the potato growers in this province?

An Hon. Member: What effect?

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

Mr. Webster: Hon. member, Madam Speaker, I think the issue is that the hon. member is suggesting that the potato board has taken a challenge to the appeals tribunal of the *Natural Products Marketing Act* to have the contract resolved by I believe it's April 15th.

If it isn't resolved at that point in time then it goes to binding arbitration. I think that's what he's asking.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: No, that isn't what I'm asking, but I will be asking it when I get down the road a little further here.

Madam Speaker, do you know how the Irvings feel about this issue?

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, there seems to be a fair bit of confusion around the questioning from the hon. member.

He'll have to keep asking his questions until

I get down to the point where I understand exactly what he means.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Madam Speaker, I'm not surprised the minister doesn't realize.

He doesn't know what is going on in agriculture, he doesn't know what's going on in the potato board. So I'm not surprised that he doesn't realize what's going on in the industry. Minister, are you aware that the Irvings have appealed the board order and that the board turned it down?

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, for 2009 growing year the contract with, I believe, both processors was not resolved until I believe it was well into June.

There were potato farmers that had their crops already planted assuming it was going to be the same volume as the previous year. What actually happened, there were reductions in french fry consumption in North America, and there were farmers actually had crops planted which they assumed was destined for markets in North America and the volume declined a little bit. That left the farming community in a pretty precarious situation because they had crops planted and no market, which they assumed was going to be there.

So my understanding is the potato board decided to have a vote - a ballot vote, I believe it was, but don't hold me to that. But they had a series of meetings and decided that it would be appropriate if they had the contract resolved by April 15th so they would know what varieties to plant, what volume to plant and what the criteria was going to be on the contract. They've done that, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Madam Speaker, to the same minister.

It seems his memory has come back very quickly. To the same minister. Are you aware that Irving's is now appealing the natural products marketing - to them for an overruling, for the tribunal act to overrule the potato board's decision?

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

Mr. Webster: Yes, Madam Speaker, I am aware that one of the processors on Prince Edward Island is appealing the decision of the potato board, and that is appealed through the *Natural Products Marketing Act* appeal tribunal portion of that.

That's an independent appeal, and that goes forward over the next weeks and months, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Minister, who's side are you on here? Are you on the Irving's

side or are you on the potato growers side?

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, we as government will be following due process whatever the rules and regulations are of engagement on this appeal tribunal.

This minister of agriculture will not commit a criminal act in any way and interfere with a decision of an independent organization like the appeals tribunal. That's the court of law or the court of judgement, if you like, with respect to how agriculture products are traded. So we'll be seeing how the process unfolds, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Minister, will the province be seeking an intervener status on behalf of the potato marketing board during the tribunal?

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, the appeal tribunal members I believe are in place.

That whole process is there. There's a regulatory format that they must follow on how they make their judgement call. We'll be watching that and see how it plays out, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Minister, you didn't answer the question. Will the province be seeking an intervener status on behalf of the potato marketing board to the tribunal? Will you or will you not? Yes or no.

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, we will not be intervening with the process that is a legal and binding process.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: To the same minister, Madam Speaker.

Why not? You tried to pretend that you're standing up to the potato industry and that you're going to stick up for the growers. Why aren't you doing this? Why will you not stand up for the growers and seek intervener status?

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, I will not be interfering with the legal process that's in place now.

There's a process to follow and I will not commit any interference or criminal overriding of any organization or body that has a process that they need to follow, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from

Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you. The minister is completely out to lunch on that issue because he wouldn't be. Anybody has a chance to have intervener status and he can stand up at any time and speak to it again.

Now, minister, let's get down to brass tacks. Is the reason you're being silent on this issue because you sell to Irving's and you're scared that they'll cancel your contract?

Mr. Sheridan: Unbelievable. (Indistinct).

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, in my former life, all my business activities are held in a blind trust.

The process is there. The rules of engagement are that the minister of agriculture does not have any authority to be involved in the appeal tribunal process. For me to do that would be illegal activity on my behalf and I am not doing that, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: It would not be illegal and anyone can have intervener status on an issue before an appeal, and the minister should know that.

Minister, since you seem to be in complete conflict on this issue, will you walk away and step aside from this issue and -

Mr. Sheridan: You just asked him to intervene.

Mr. Bagnall: He's in a conflict because he won't do anything. So I'm asking - he's already said that he won't do anything else, so will you step -

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Bagnall: Minister, we know you're in a potential conflict here. Will you step aside so that another person can actually intervene on this issue?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

It's very unfortunate that the Member from Montague-Kilmuir is spewing innuendo again today. As the hon. Minister of Agriculture and the Deputy Premier of the province indicated, the Government of Prince Edward Island will be allowing the process to take place. There is an appeals tribunal and we respect the process.

With regards to the integrity of the minister of agriculture, we're very fortunate in this province to have a minister of agriculture that is as knowledgeable as he is with relation to these issues.

The fact of the matter is that the minister of agriculture has everything in blind trust. On one hand you have the Member from Montague-Kilmuir asking to interfere in the process. Then when he says he's not interfering, then he says that he's in a conflict because he's not interfering.

The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir should be ashamed of himself for making accusations that he knows are inaccurate. If he has any issues, he knows that there is a due process and that is to go to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. Just the indication that he's unwilling to do that is clear evidence that the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir is doing nothing but spewing innuendo against a tremendous minister of agriculture for the people of the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We have a minister of agriculture that wouldn't stand up for the potato industry, we have a minister of agriculture that will not apply for intervener status. The same minister sells the potatoes to the people that are appealing to the tribunal and he's in a complete conflict of interest.

Minister, will you step aside from this file and allow a minister to step in place that will stand up for the industry, not look after your own interests?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Again, Madam Speaker, it's really shameful that the Member from Montague-Kilmuir continues to spew innuendo on the floor of the Legislature.

We saw a letter today from the Charlottetown tourism association really indicating that it's unfortunate that that member would come to this House without having the facts in place. He makes accusations of blackmail without even understanding the definition of blackmail.

Now, he attacks a very respected Minister of Agriculture and Deputy Premier in the Province of Prince Edward Island. He knows that if he has any allegations to make, that there is a process to do it. But we know that the Member from Montague-Kilmuir has one goal in mind, and that's to make headlines for himself on the backs of other individuals and bringing them down.

But on this side of the House, we're going to continue to work for the people of Prince Edward Island. I think that we're very fortunate in this province to have the current Minister of Agriculture and Deputy Premier representing the farmers of this province.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Back to the minister of agriculture. Have you been involved with this file up until now?

Speaker: The hon. minister of -

Mr. Bagnall: And -

Speaker: Sorry.

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, I'm aware that the vote was taken with regards to the

potato board.

They polled their producers and they made a decision. I'm aware that this activity is going forth through the appeals tribunal.

What I'm hearing today is the hon. member really speaking out of both sides of his mouth. He's telling me to interfere on one hand. The other hand he's telling me to stay away from it. So I'm very much unclear of what's going on. But I can tell you, that former minister of agriculture did interfere, and there was a ruling done three years ago where he overruled the appeals tribunal. But we don't operate like that, Madam Speaker, and he did it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Minister, yes, Madam Speaker, yes, and I did overrule.

Because I did stand up for the potato industry in this province. Not like you hiding in the sand. I stood up and made a decision. You had a chance, and you have a chance here to do this, to stand up for the industry, but you're more interested in your own purse-strings than you are the farmers in this province.

Why won't you step aside, minister? You're obviously in a conflict of interest every time something comes up in agriculture because it affects you. You won't make a ruling. You stand with your hands in your pocket and say nothing and do nothing. Why won't you step aside and do the honourable thing?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, again, probably taking a lead from the Leader of the Opposition, is making accusations in this House based on people's personal involvement, and knows full well that when members of this Legislature get elected and they're appointed to the Executive Council that any involvement in files is put into blind trust so that they're able to continue on with the duties that they've been so elected for.

To point it out, that also the hon. member not only has those things in blind trust, he acts in the best interest of Islanders. If the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir wishes to make any accusations like that, he knows that there's a process to go through. The fact that he's unwilling to go through that process is a clear indication that he's more interested in smear than he is with doing what's best for the people of Prince Edward Island.

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

Change to peddler's licence

Mr. McGeoghegan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I have a brief lead up to the question, so, with your indulgence.

My question today is for the Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural

Development. Last spring your department made changes to the lobster peddlers licence regulations that allowed fishermen to direct sell their catch to the public, and I commend you for that.

Lately I have had a number of calls from fishermen wondering if another change could be made, which would allow the licence holder to have one designated person peddle on their behalf. Right now, the regulation states that only the licence holder can peddle, but in a lot of harbours across PEI they don't get in from fishing till mid- to late afternoon. This time constraint makes it impossible to make use of this option.

Mr. Minister, will you consider making this change so that more fishermen can make use of peddlers licences?

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

Mr. LeClair: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The hon. member makes a good point. Not every fishermen gets in early. A lot of them fish late into the day and into the evening even, some of them. We'll certainly look into that. It requires a change in regulations. We did make the peddlers licence available to core fishers, and that's what the regs state right now. We take that into consideration and look at it.

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

Mr. McGeoghegan: Supplementary question to the same minister.

If possible, could this change be made this season?

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

Mr. Bagnall: Sure it can.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, we'll take this suggestion into consideration and look at what the regulations state and how it can be implemented, if it can be implemented.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kellys Cross-Cumberland.

West River bridge

Ms. Docherty: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. The minister's department and staff have been diligent in their inspections of Island bridges just to ensure that they're safe for both Islanders and visitors alike to travel on. As I understand it, the West River bridge, which connects my district with the minister's district, has been identified in need of replacement. Can the minister inform the House what actually is wrong with the bridge that it needs to be replaced?

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

Mr. MacKinley: Basically, what's wrong with the bridge, the bridge is worn out. It's past its time. It's got be replaced.

I took criticism from the Leader of the Opposition on the Priest Pond bridge here,

to leave it - back it up. Then all of the sudden we had it posted and shut it right down. We are not experts on this. I got to rely on the engineers and the people that are professionals in this business. There are two examples of bridges we're getting to.

This had been neglected - these bridges - for 11, 12 years. I have $11 million to put into bridges. I can do so much, and this is what we're doing. We fixed the Dunedin bridge for you last year, and that was in order to get the traffic around 5.5, 7.1 kilometres longer, depends where you're coming from, in order for when we shut his bridge down.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kellys Cross-Cumberland.

Ms. Docherty: Madam Speaker, can the minister inform the House when construction will actually begin, and how long will it take?

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

Mr. MacKinley: When the tender comes back in, construction could start in July. It could take between three and four months. It depends who tenders on it. We wouldn't know how long it's going to take until the tenders come in and we review the tenders. But we have called for - set up a - as soon as we get the tenders in, and we get that information, we have booked Afton Community Centre for the 20th of May, Thursday evening at 7:00, so our engineers can go out and explain just exactly what's taking place.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Crab draw fee

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

A question to the minister of fisheries. Minster, I've been getting a few calls from fishermen wanting to know why you are forcing them to pay $200 for the crab draw this year, and why the increase?

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, I'm not forcing anyone to pay anything for any draw.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Madam Speaker, the fishermen are telling us that in order to qualify to be in the crab draw they are forced to pay $200 in order to participate in the crab draw.

Can you tell me, minister, why that has gone up from $100 to $200 this year?

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, I think the hon. member will have to ask the PEIFA.

The crab allocation is given to the PEIFA by the DFO, and I'm not aware of the restrictions or the conditions that are put on the allocation as far as giving it out to the fishers.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

So minister, you're not aware that this is taking place?

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, the question that the hon. member asked me is why I was doing it, and I'm not doing it.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: So minister, are you aware that fishermen are going to have to pay an increase from $100 to $200 in order to participate in the crab draw?

I think that's very clear.

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

Mr. LeClair: Yes, Madam Speaker, I have heard those conditions were being asked by the PEIFA.

From certain fishers I've heard that. We are looking at it. We have calls into DFO and the PEIFA, but that's an issue between DFO and the PEIFA and the fishers.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Madam Speaker - to the same minister - I think as you as minister, that's an issue for you as minister to be looking at.

Minister, fishermen are phoning and telling me that they are being forced to join the PEIFA because it costs $100 to join the PEIFA, but if they don't belong they're being forced to pay $200 to be able to get in the crab draw. Do you feel that this is fair?

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is saying it's up to me to intervene.

The DFO is a federal initiative and the crab draw is a federal allocation. It's given to the PEIFA. I would suggest maybe you talk to the federal minister and have her intervene if there's something being done that you would like to change.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: That seems to be the answer that I get from this minister every time an issue comes up. He always says: Go to the federal minister. Doesn't want to take responsibility for what's going on in his own province here.

Minister, do you not feel this is another cash grab against the fishermen? They're suffering hard enough right now. Why would you make these fishermen have to pay an extra hundred dollars in order to get into the crab? Even though the allocations are cut back, the province is still making them pay another hundred dollars. Why?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, the PEIFA - is right - is an organization of the fishermen.

It's not owned by government, and certainly I don't intend to take over the PEIFA and dictate what they should be doing.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Minister, I'm sure the fishermen are going to be pleased that you don't want to stand up for any of the fishermen in this province and you want to turn everything over to somebody else.

When an issue comes up that you can deal with you either say it's the federal minister's fault or you turn it over to the PEIFA. Minister, when are you going to stand up and take some charge of your department yourself?

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

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, the PEIFA is an entity that is an organization for the fishermen.

Fishermen pay dues to belong to the PEIFA, and the dues are $100 or $125. I don't know if, in actuality, they're charging $200 for the crab allocation or the crab draws. But that's between the PEIFA and DFO. If DFO wants to change those conditions or put restrictions on them so that the PEIFA has to bring down that charge for the draw, they can do that. I don't have any jurisdiction there.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Psychologist shortage

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

There's a severe shortage of psychologists in the province. To the minister of health: What are you doing to fix this position?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We recognize there is a shortage within the system of psychologists. Like other health professionals, our recruitment and retention office is doing what we can to recruit those positions right now.

We have approximately half of the positions that are vacant and we are recruiting those. We do recognize there's a bit of wage differential between the department of education and the Department of Health and Wellness. So we are working towards that.

There are, obviously, issues around the retention issue and recruiting. But we are working towards that, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Learning disability assessment times

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you,

Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. One of the most severe shortages is actually in the area of assessment for learning disabilities. The question to the minister: What are you doing to help reduce times and hopefully eliminate the problem here?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Just so we're clear, though, there are psychologists within the Department of Health and Wellness but there's also in the education and early childhood. So just to make the differential with that, with those professionals.

Again, a lot of our psychologists within our department are at, for example, perhaps the Hillsborough Hospital, the QEH, within our institutions as well.

Maybe the leader can sort of frame the age bracket, in terms of learning disabilities, that she is - in regards to her question.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I can actually throw that question to the minister of education because it's really in the school system.

Thank you.

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

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

Learning disabilities are a very serious neurological disorder that can range from mild to severe. The allotment for and the hiring of school psychologists is done through the boards. We recognize through the media this week that there has been a focus on the wait times. As a department, I'm very interested in looking at continuing to work through.

Right now, we're working on a learning disability strategy which is a multi-action plan. Through that planning we'll be looking, immediately, at the health human resource challenges and the number of psychologists that are hired by the boards.

We'll also be looking at early identification and intervention as part of the five-year-olds coming into the public school system. Just recently we implemented the early year evaluation. Vehicles and tools that will provide the school system to provide more efficient access to individuals and families.

It's a very serious issue. The wait times that I'm hearing from the boards are, right now, a concern. I'm very interested, as the minister, to work at implementing a strategy to support them and to continue to find ways to bring supports into the classrooms.

As a former educator I'm very familiar with assessments. I used to administer assessments as a resource teacher and a school counsellor. They were very labour-intensive. The WISC-IIIs are a very

extensive assessment and only can be done by qualified, certified psychologists. We are looking at ways that we can reach students and provide the support.

But I do want to clarify, when an assessment is in the queue to be done, there still are constant interventions for children in this province. We don't want to give the impression that children are waiting for resources and interventions while the assessment's being done. So it's a very important point.

The assessment does reinforce the investments that are being made, which are already being done.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Psychologist shortage (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To, probably, the minister of finance on this one. We heard from the minister of education - some of the issues around the psychologists - the minister of health. But one of the big issues that she identifies, and everybody else is aware of, is the issue of wages.

Now, to the minister of finance. We know that you've supported wine and beer experts. You certainly supported all kinds of office renovations. This week I've learned now that Regis and Kelly are coming to the province. What are you doing directly to ensure the psychologists' wages are increased so that we can attract and keep people here?

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

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

I'm very proud to stand in the House today and inform the Leader of the Opposition that health and education were the two departments that got increased funding from our department. One in the order of 4.9% and the other in the order of 6.2%, as we continue to usher in our belief on how this province should be run properly.

One of the things that we stand very strongly on is ensuring that we have enough professionals in place to have Islanders receive the services they need. There is not a shortage in psychologists only in Prince Edward Island, and it's not only because of the wages that are being offered. Psychologists are in high demand and in short order right across this country.

Thank you very much.

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

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

To the same minister. What exactly are you doing to negotiate an appropriate wage to help attract psychologists to PEI and to keep them here?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and

Municipal Affairs.

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

It's very important for everyone in this Legislature and listening today that there is a very firm process in place with regards to how classification takes place in our system. The Public Service Commission has a full classification review that goes on within certain sectors in our public service. If and when there are certain market adjustments that need be made, they take a look at that inside the classification service.

They are always fully aware of what is taking place right across the Atlantic region and, of course, right across this country. If there was such a huge discrepancy, there would be adjustments inside the classification orders. We continue to strive - always - to be competitive in the professional market.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]