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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2017



Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier this year an investigative report by *The Globe and Mail*, titled, Unfounded, shed light on the gaps in how sexual assaults are handled by police across Canada.

Following that investigation police forces here on the Island reviewed their files and forwarded that data onto the province.

**Results of review of sexual assaults**

My first question is to the Premier: Premier, what did those reviews, of how sexual assaults are reported, show?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, following that publication of the work by reporter Robyn Doolittle, as Attorney General, justice minister, we made a request to the police forces on Prince Edward Island to conduct a three-year review, 2014-2016 of their sexual assault files. That was undertaken with a view to getting a greater degree of consistency, in both investigation and reporting, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Upon completion of those reviews the government, the Premier himself, actually, stated that those reviews would be publicly released.

**Results of studies publicly shared**

Question to the Premier: When will the

results of these studies be publicly shared with Islanders?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to pursue that and, indeed, to seek and participate in the sharing of that information. As well as, the learning that has come from that process.

One of the things that we're all learning is that sexual assault is something that we have to, kind of, understand, the trauma, the experience, and that belongs to police forces as well as to others in society who work to support victims. I'm happy to say that as recently as early November, the parties that are involved in that area met together in the province to work to a higher standard.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm asking these questions because this is a Premier, this is a government that said they were going to do things differently. They were going to be open and transparent. The Premier made a commitment that this information would be open to the public, but yet, he has failed to do so.

Community advocates and police forces themselves have called for clear, consistent definitions and reporting for sexual assaults here on PEI.

**Definitions and standards for sexual assaults**

Question to the Premier: What work has happened to establish more clear definitions and reporting standards for sexual assaults?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, in March of this year, representatives of the Crown, of Victim Services, PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Crisis Centre all took part in a symposium or a working conference in Ottawa about the development of knowledge and knowledge exchange and the criminal justice system's response to sexual assault in the investigation and in the follow-up and that was the further work that was done in early November of this year when the groups on the Island got together. Tomorrow, the chiefs of police are having their semi-annual meeting.

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Better public data is one of the steps we need to take to face the challenge of sexual assaults more efficiently.

#### **Reporting of sexual assault statistics**

Question to the Premier: Would you commit to publically reporting of sexual assault statistics annually so that Islanders have a better understanding of the scale of the challenge that we face here on the Island as a society?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I'm entirely in agreement with the spirit of the question that, indeed, better information, better awareness, better and consistent data – because that's really the only way in which it becomes useful is if all of the parties – and indeed the investigative forces – are using the same standards.

So, I will produce and release – and I have no reason not to – what we've learned from that three-year review, as well as the steps that are being taken to improve standards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Well, what I was asking for is if the Premier would release this information on an annual basis – of the statistics of the number of sexual offenses here on PEI – sexual assaults here on PEI.

The need for stronger reporting standards is only one area of how we deal with sexual assaults that needs overhauling. There are also improvements needed in our medical and justice systems. This is a societal problem that needs a more comprehensive response from everyone.

#### **Approaches from government and public institutions re: sexual assaults**

Again, question to the Premier: Do you agree that sexual assaults are a public policy challenge that requires a better approach from government and public institutions?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, on the day after our gathering on December 6<sup>th</sup> and that important national occasion certainly marked with all-party support and commitment here, of course we should all agree that this is an area where we can all do better and, indeed, it is a multi-party collaboration that is involved to, in the first part, prevent sexual violence, and to pursue it, and to investigate it, and to pursue those who are the offenders, and, indeed, to be consistent in our standards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

How we respond and prevent sexual assaults is a conversation that needs to be held in this province. Without adequate public supports, the cycle of violence and pain will continue to affect women, children, and men and add even more pressure on our mental health system. I feel that a legislative committee would be a good platform to move that conversation forward.

### **Committee review of issues around sexual assault**

Question again to the Premier: Would you support a call to having a standing committee on health review the issues around sexual assaults here on PEI?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Let me say, Mr. Speaker, I have absolutely no reason to resist or oppose or be concerned about such a review, but that will be an initiative for the committee. On the question that's being asked about continuing or ongoing release of data, that's the only basis on which such information is useful, if it's a comparison and included in those comparisons, a challenge to do better, to do our best, and to work together through all parties to be sure that we're achieving what we should be achieving, which is the prevention, and reduction, and prosecution of sexual violence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I concur with the Leader of the Opposition and I think a letter from the Leader of the Opposition, from the Premier, and the Leader of the Third Party here in the Legislature to that standing committee would certainly send a message to the people that are involved and the people that might come forward to present at that standing committee. So, I fully support the idea and thank the member for that.

Most sexual assault victims need help right away and they turn to our health system. We know the pressures that our mental health system is under.

### **Frontline supports for victims**

Question to the health minister: Do you think that more effective frontline supports for sexual assault victims would help reduce the pressure on our mental health system?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** We have many health care professionals in this province that deal with a myriad of issues when they come to their door and they're all trained to their level of competencies and, in fact, most of our staff are trained in emergency rooms and within our mental health to deal appropriately with any particular sexual assault victims as they deal with their challenges.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I'm not sure if I agree with the minister there, that everybody is prepared to deal with that onslaught of help. I know – we've heard that the RCMP is looking into third party reporting as a way for victims to report assaults and one measure being used in other jurisdictions, to better respond to sexual assaults, is what's known as the third option. This allows forensic information collected from sexual assault victims to be safely stored for up to a year. Doing this gives victims more time to process what's happened to them and decide how to proceed.

### **Third party reporting**

Minister, what changes in the health system would we need to make the third option available to victims of sexual assault in PEI?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy and the Status of Women.

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As Minister of Status for Women, actually at our FPT meeting in Ottawa that I attended recently, that was a presentation in regard to the third person reporting option is different than the third option. I think they're a little bit confusing by that word 'third' person reporting. The RCMP did a presentation to all of the ministers at that particular meeting and the RCMP have made a commitment to change their policy in regard to receiving reports of sexual assaults from third party.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you to the minister for bringing us up to date.

Yes, I know that's the third party reporting system. I'm actually asking about the third option, which would be an initiative of this government. I'm pleased to hear that, potentially, that may be an option. If this third option was available to sexual assault victims in our hospitals, what extra training would be needed for our frontline staff?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy and the Status of Women.

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know that through the sexual assault and rape crisis centre, that is certainly a topic of discussion. I know there was an interview on it recently. In working with our inter-ministerial department, the sexual assault, the family violence prevention centre, those are all discussions that go on and are working with police enforcement on that and certainly, within the hospitals that is a protocol that has to be put in place to follow the line of evidence.

So, that's all an integrated system that has to be put in place. It is something that's being discussed, but it requires a coordination to ensure that evidence is secure.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### **Services available for sexual assault cases**

We've seen numbers out there of over 1,000 sexual assaults occurring in PEI every year. I think the advocate groups would tell you that we're pretty confident that that's probably understated. Because we know that it is being underreported. The minister mentioned a number of services available, but do you think that that's sufficient resources currently exist in our system now to help deal with the over 1,000 potential cases of sexual assault on PEI right now?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, in our department we try to deal with the services that people when they present themselves, whether it's around mental health facilities or whether it's our emergency rooms or to our family physicians and in all those cases we work in collaboration with justice and public safety, status of women, and we work towards trying to make sure that we're providing the least intrusion and issues as it pertains to the patient who presents themselves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

#### **Lack of trauma counselors**

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This comes down to priorities for the government and policy decisions. The PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre is an important community resource for sexual

assault victims. They have four trauma counselors to provide support for victims.

Does the minister think that four trauma counselors is enough to deal with over 1,000 potential sexual assault in PEI every year?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, one of the big initiatives that we've tried to deal with it when it deals with particular issues of sexual orientations or sexual assaults, some of those things, is our women's wellness centre. We are working with our staff that is getting up and running at the moment.

Once again, if any individual presents themselves with issues around sexual assault or other issues pertaining to women's wellness, they certainly can contact our resources there and they will provide the appropriate service in a triage format.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### **Funding for more trauma counselors**

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Mr. Speaker, I don't think these people can find the services they need. We can't find it at the ER right now; we can't find it at walk-in clinics. What's needed is more trauma counselor support for sexual assault victims. Victims need fast access to these counseling services.

Minister, we've had programs announced outside of budgets before for emergencies. Will you commit today to funding more trauma counselors for sexual assault victims to your list?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, I would find it hard to believe that any person who presented themselves to an ER that there wouldn't be a triage nurse that would be able to find that information out on how to

access the women's wellness centre or any other particular mental health issue –

**Mr. MacEwen:** Days later. We need it right now.

**Mr. Henderson:** That's their point of contact, and it's their responsibility to work towards trying to find that service for that particular individual –

**Mr. MacEwen:** Weeks (Indistinct)

**Mr. Henderson:** – no matter what issue that those individuals present themselves with, and we will continue to work with women's wellness and the women's wellness program and evolve services as required.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

#### **Review of sexual violence support grants**

**Ms. Compton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the spring, the matter of sexual assault supports were brought to the floor of this Legislature. The minister responsible for the status of women announced a \$7,000 grant for review and evaluation of programs for supporting survivors of sexual violence in Prince Edward Island.

Minister: Is this review complete and will you table it in the House today?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy and the Status of Women.

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The grant that the hon. member is speaking to was to the sexual and rape crisis centre. I haven't received that report myself. I'll go and check that out, but what I would like to also point out is that through the interministerial secretariat this year we have put out a \$50,000 additional grant to address the prevention of violence against women.

We have to work together as a community, as members of the Legislature, as families,

to all address the issue and the attitudes towards violence against women.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Ms. Compton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister of education joined with the members of the official opposition in highlighting the lack of a dedicated 24-hour line for victims of sexual assault.

Will the minister responsible for the status of women tell us what progress has been made since April in making this much needed support a reality?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy and Status of Women.

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you.

Actually, the reason I was looking to another minister is because the funding for that doesn't come out of my particular department, hon. member, but it's something that we have worked in meeting with the sexual and rape crisis sexual assault centre. It is not, and has not been, a 24-7 service that was provided. It is a service that is provided for women who are seeking counseling, but I do know there's a 1-800 number, a crisis call number that's provided through health and wellness that people can call –

**Leader of the Opposition:** (Indistinct)

**Ms. Biggar:** – anytime that they are in crisis, and if it has to do with sexual assault, hon. member, they can be referred further on.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**24-7 line for sexual assault victim support**

**Ms. Compton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're well aware that it's not a 24-7 line and that is part of the issue here. People are not getting the help that they need.

To whatever minister would like to answer the question: When will Islanders have a 24-hour line dedicated for victims of sexual assault?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, the line is a 24-hour line. People are there to take calls –

**Ms. Compton:** Not a sexual assault (Indistinct)

**Mr. Henderson:** – and basically take that information and try to provide whatever counseling services they can provide.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Ms. Compton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, maybe I did miss-speak on that. It is a 24-hour line but there's no one on the other end and that's the issue here. They're getting an answering machine. People who are devastated and in crisis and have nowhere to turn, so that's the issue.

I remind this government that the rape centre coordinator said this spring: We could all use more resources, but there's plenty of asks out there so I guess it's a matter of government priorities.

Minister: Why is this not a funded priority of your government?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy and the Status of Women.

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to commend the work that the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre does do on behalf of those that approach them to

provide the service. It is a phone system. Yes, it's operated 24-7. If the person calls the line they can – most of the calls that they get there are a follow-up from an emergency incident which require the further services of counseling.

Any victim who is in the immediate aftermath of having a sexual assault should present themselves to the ER. There are nurses on staff that are trained in testing for sexual assault.

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

### **Funding for more trauma counselors (further)**

**Ms. Compton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, this government has made announcement after announcement on the fly during the recent by-election, but the gaps in our sexual assault supports are real and are still not addressed. Government provides the core funding in the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre for \$240,000 a year. Imagine what they could do if it was fully funded and it was operating the way victims expect it to operate,

This budget line has not moved since this Premier was elected. Will the Premier commit to instructing his budget Cabinet to increase the funding level for the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, budget Cabinet tends to work in the opposite sense.

Ministries bring forward their proposals which is then vetted through various phases and that work will start shortly. This is something that – let me go back to the first part of this exchange. There's no question about the commitment or the priority that our government, and I would say that applies to people throughout on all sides of

this House and in our community, attached to a proper and effective response to victims of sexual violence.

One of the areas where we are making some headway, and there's more work to be done, is in the whole process of the investigation and the understanding, and the understanding of the neurobiology even, of trauma. We are committed to that and we will provide the resources.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

### **Herring stocks in PEI**

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier today in my member statement I talked about the concerns that many have raised about the health and sustainability of the ocean surrounding our Island. As in all ecosystems, species live interdependently and the health of one is intimately dependent on that of others and of the whole system itself.

Just over a decade ago in 2004, fishers in the Souris area fought hard to protect the herring stock from seiners, yet today fishers are reporting herring stocks are collapsing in Prince Edward Island waters.

A question to the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries: What does the current data tell us about the health of herring stocks in our region?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

**Mr. McIsaac:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

With all the species out there we work with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, they have the responsibility with setting the quotas on those. We work with the fishermen's association, with the fishers, not only those in house, but those who are on the water that are experts in their field, as

well as the people who are working in the department, our staff as such.

We look at the herring stocks. We look at the tuna stocks. We look at the mackerel stocks, which are shrinking, as well. Decisions, based on the science, decide what the quota will be the following year.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The Leader of the Third Party, your first supplementary question.

### **Moratorium on breeding tuna**

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I infer from the answer that herring stocks are, indeed, shrinking. Herring is a critical element of the gulf marine ecosystem and it's used extensively for bait in our lobster industry, as well as being an essential food source for whales, dolphins, sharks and, in particular, tuna.

In 2016, the premier's cup was presented to Ross Keus, whose fish, due its lack of body fat, was sold for a mere \$1.25 per lb. Ross actually lost money because of the cost of freight. Now, a prime breeding fish is gone.

Minister: Given the uncertainty of the stock assessments on tuna, will you recommend a moratorium on taking these mature breeding tuna, releasing the big spawners as is done with some other large predatory fish?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries

**Mr. McIsaac:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Again, we work with DFO on these issues. The quality of the fish, the size of the fish does not mean the dollars he's going to get for that. It has a lot to do with the quality of the fish. You can get two fish the same size; are going to get a different price for it based on the grading that happens there.

We work with our fishers. We work with the PEI Fishermen's Association. We work with

the department of fisheries and oceans to look at each and every one of these issues. The stocks, for sure, be it mackerel, be it herring, be it tuna, whatever that may be. We are serious about watching that.

You mentioned in your member's statement about the demise of the cod quota, cod fishery, years ago. We do not want anything like that happening again. We will work with all the partners in this fishery to make sure the future is very bright.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party, your second supplementary.

### **Study of ecosystem surrounding PEI**

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you.

Indeed, the price is entirely dependent on the quality and it was of such poor quality, that the champion fish, the president's cup fish, lost money for that fisherman because of the cost of flying it to Japan.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization: 85% of global fish stocks are either overexploited, depleted, or recovering from depletion.

Question to the minister: Will your department spearhead a call for a full-scale independent study of the marine ecosystem surrounding Prince Edward Island to ensure that our waters remain healthy, and that future generations of Island fishers will have access to the resources on which they depend?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

**Mr. McIsaac:** Thank you very much.

The tuna cup that is presented by the Premier is based on the size of the fish. It has nothing to do with the quality of the fish. The fisherman in the next boat may have caught on that was worth twice as much because of the quality of it. It has to go through that. We work, like I said, with the DFO, with the fishermen's association,

whatever, in the different species to make sure the future is bright.

We're looking at marine protected areas that you mentioned in your speech, as well. The federal government has set the goals of 5% for 2017. We look like we're going to reach that; very close. I think we have reached that maybe already. By 2020, we want to be at 10%. We're working on that and advancements on that. We have a marine protected area, right now, off of Basin Head. We're going to get counted, the scallop banks off the eastern end of the province, may fit in for 2020. Things like that are great.

We do work with all the partners to make sure our fisheries do not collapse and they're very strong into the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

### **Shortage of physiotherapists in West Prince**

**Mr. Perry:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Minister, I am personally aware of people from the West Prince area, who are required to travel and incur added expenses in order to receive physiotherapy. I am also aware that positions in West Prince have been posted for almost a year now.

Minister: What is being done to address the physiotherapy shortage in West Prince and the lack of services?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road would be aware, that earlier in 2017 we did have a spate of vacancies created, 2.6 full-time equivalent vacancies in physiotherapy at our community hospitals in both O'Leary and in Alberton.

Recruiting and retention put on everything

they could to try to find somebody to, and we still have those positions advertised, but we didn't have any success. At that point in time, we decided to do an RFP to see if there were any companies out there that would like to provide those services, to which we also had no success.

Currently, I can say that we are in negotiations with a particular company to provide some of those services.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, your first supplementary.

### **Competitive compensation incentives for recruitment**

**Mr. Perry:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Appreciating that the private sector pays better than the public sector, what is government doing to ensure competitive compensation incentives?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, there are two initiatives that we are working on in that particular issue. One is we have asked that the classification and compensation package be reviewed for physiotherapy in the Province of Prince Edward Island. We're working with our union representatives on that.

The second initiative that I'm quite excited about is that we're developing a three-year return-for-service sponsorship program for physio and we're currently going to be meeting with a lot of the different students in physiotherapy across from the province and other locations. We're hopeful that that will address both of those issues. The union does support both initiatives, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, your second supplementary.

### **Private sector partnerships for open positions in health care**

**Mr. Perry:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Should the health care system be exploring more private sector partnerships when it runs into situations like this where positions are difficult to recruit so that Islanders continue to receive services in a timely fashion without interruption to care until such a time as positions can be recruited to?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** That's precisely what we're trying to do. We believe that, in that what we're initiating with physiotherapy, we have already, like I alluded to earlier in my previous question, that we had entered into a contract with a company called You Move Physio in Alberton. They're going to provide services on a short-term basis to fill the gap.

I think it's important that if we're looking at other professions that are hard to recruit, we want to also work with our partners, the health care professionals involved with those partners, unions, et cetera, to see if that option exists for short-term services to provide continuing services to the patient.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

### **Addiction services removed from Prince County Hospital**

**Mr. Palmer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. A recent publication in *The Royal Gazette* suggests amendments have been made to the *Mental Health Act* removing addictions services from Prince County Hospital.

The removal of addictions services from Prince County Hospital is not acceptable.

Minister: On what basis do you think you can remove addictions services from Prince County Hospital?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that there is no removal of addictions services at Prince County Hospital or any change in addictions services anywhere on Prince Edward Island.

I'm not sure if it would take a lawyer to figure out *The Royal Gazette's* notification, but ultimately the notification was that it's regarding that we have, basically, involuntary services here and voluntary services, so we have actually no involuntary services for addictions on Prince Edward Island. There is no change.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, your first supplementary.

### **Designation change to Prince County Hospital**

**Mr. Palmer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Another amendment outlined is a designation change to Prince County Hospital.

Minister: Can you explain why Prince County Hospital's designation is being changed under the *Mental Health Act*?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, actually, in fact, in the Prince County Hospital's situation, once again, I have had a number of calls of this, too. I'm not sure where it's coming from.

The reality of is, we're actually raising the level acuity at Prince County Hospital so that we can also include involuntary services for mental health patients, which mean that the Prince County Hospital will play a bigger role in the delivery of mental health services in the province. It will prevent those individuals from having to travel to the Hillsborough Hospital, which is our only current involuntary location, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, your second supplementary.

### **Provincial addictions facility designation change**

**Mr. Palmer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister: Can you also explain why our provincial addictions facility designation is also being changed under the act?

**Mr. R. Brown:** (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** It boils back down to the original question, Mr. Speaker. We have no services here that are considered involuntary when it comes to addiction services, and I want to emphasize there a difference between addiction services and mental health psychiatric services. So, basically, a voluntary situation means that we cannot hold any particular patient for more than 36 hours, so should they decide to leave any of our addiction facilities, they can if they so choose. So, we have no involuntary services here in the province. We just wanted to make that clear.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

### **Federal and provincial student loans**

**Mr. LaVie:** Mr. Speaker, our university students are coming to the end of the first, fall semester and getting ready for the second winter semester. The federal student loans are issued for the fall. PEI student loans are issued at the beginning for the January semester.

My question is to the minister of advanced learning: Are you aware that PEI student loan for the second semester are always less money than the federal loans?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There was a new program initiated this year called career connects and we saw over a thousand students apply for it. 700 have been approved, a few were declined, and there's about 200 or so in the process. These individuals, if they are entitled to unemployment insurance benefits, it will affect their student loan. When they get a review, that is part of their student loans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

### **Provincial student loan clawbacks**

**Mr. LaVie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister is correct. They did come in with a program where the students can collect EI while going to university.

To the minister of advanced learning: Why are you now clawing back the PEI student loan because these students are also in your program?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Myers:** Oh, good question. That's a good question.

They're supposed to save up their EI and (Indistinct).

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just to make it perfectly clear, this is not a clawback by our department or by the provincial government. This is an entitlement – they are receiving unemployment insurance, so it affects the amount of their student loan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Myers:** Clawback by any other name is a clawback.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

**Mr. Myers:** Soon.

**Mr. LaVie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Island students are now heading in to the January semester – they're getting ready for January. They're drawing EI. You're clawing back their student loans from the province because of their EI.

Will you correct this?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To address the hon. member's question, I'll repeat again: We're not clawing back. If a student gets an income, it affects their student loan. So, some of the students can get from \$3,000-\$5,000 through unemployment insurance during –

**An Hon. Member:** Holy.

**Mr. Gallant:** – their year. Then they don't need as much student loan. This helps the student, at the end of their studies, to not be in debt as much as they were before.

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

**Mr. LaVie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the minister of advanced learning: If this was your plan all along, why didn't you let the students know at the time?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Myers:** Good question. That's a good question. Good question.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My department had dealt with some of these students and the ones they've dealt with were made aware of this back at the time of their application. Things can change over time. As I said earlier, if there's going to be some money made through an EI benefit, it's going to affect their student loan. They won't need as much of a student loan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

**Mr. LaVie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This minister is putting money in one pocket and taking it out of the other. How do you expect these students to afford school this winter?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. LaVie:** You came in with this program to help them and now you're taking it away from them. How do you expect them to make it through the winter?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Myers:** Good question.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I need to be clear again to the hon. member's question. We're not taking money away from the students –

**Mr. Myers:** You're not. You're not giving it to them.

**Mr. Gallant:** – what this will do, this will give the students like millions of dollars to spend and they won't have that much of a burden at the end of their education and have such a great loan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

**Mr. LaVie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These students still have tuition they have to pay. He gave them EI, but he never told them it that is was going to claw back on their loan.

Minister: Will you take immediate action and fix this problem?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a federal program, and as far as taking immediate action, to the comment that the hon. member is making, like, they are getting an income; be it EI, be it working. If affects their student loan. It's based on their income when they apply for their student loan. To say that we're clawing on anything is not something we are doing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

**Mr. LaVie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a federal, but it's administrated through your department. You give out the loans. You give out the EI. You give out both through your department.

Minister: Will you fix this mistake before these students return to the fall semester in January?

**Mr. Myers:** Good question.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On another point of clarity, our department is involved with this, but we do not give out

the EI, hon. member. If anyone has any concerns with their student loan they can contact our department and they'll be addressed or they're be looked into.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, your final question.

**Mr. LaVie:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These students had faith in this government that they were getting their EI. You made the announcement out of your department. You give the EI out through your department. You give the students loans out through your department. Now, you're paying Peter to rob Paul.

Now, will you stand up in the House today and tell these students that are calling me to fix this problem today?

**Mr. Myers:** Good question.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Anything that our department or our government can do to help our youth get an education without a major financial burden when they're finished, we will continue to work at. I may repeat that our department does not give out the EI benefits. Our department is a catalyst in this. We have staff involved in this. We will continue to work to help our Island students. If anyone has concerns they can contact our department.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. R. Brown:** Come on, on board (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** Before we continue on, hon. members, I want to give way to the hon.

Member from Borden-Kinkora for recognition.

**Mr. Fox:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to recognize Tom and Fran Albrecht from District 19. They have been great advocates for health services in rural PEI. I applaud them for that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]