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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 6 APRIL 2017

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On Tuesday, the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters asked me questions regarding the Monday's Public School Branch meeting and the presence of RCMP.

I'm pleased to follow-up with information to the House today in the form of a briefing note from Chief Superintendent, Joanne Crampton, Commanding Officer RCMP L Division. The facts were not as represented in the preambles to those questions. There was no filming by the RCMP of audience members. There was no surveillance of the bus returning following the meeting. And the decision to be there was that of the commanding officer.

I table this and I regret that either, Question Period or indeed the Recognition of Guests yesterday would be used to cast dispersions on the integrity or the function of the RCMP in this province.

Mr. Myers: It's the integrity of you (Indistinct) You guys called them in. You guys were scared to face Islanders. You're scared to face them every day. No surprise.

Speaker: Before I begin Question Period hon. members, just a friendly reminder – I'm not going to sit here and start scolding anybody on the third sitting day of this session.

Yesterday, there were 31 questions asked. Of the 31 questions, 10, the preamble, went over the 40-second limit, 10 of the 31 questions. Twenty-three of the 31 questions that were answered went well over the 40-second mark. That's 23 of 31. I could say that that's maybe showing a little bit of disrespect. Not for me, but for the institution itself.

Anyway, just a friendly reminder.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: I have purchased a new (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: And you have a big hook?

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, I would like to actually indulge a little bit and if you'd hold off on picking them up there.

I want to express my sincere thanks to the hon. Leader of the Third Party for his words in that statement, and my sincere thoughts to the families that were involved in that tragic accident.

Give me two seconds and then you can push the button.

Questions by Members**Poverty issues**

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Every day many Islanders deal with poverty, which is a root of social programs that we struggle with as a society. The complex implications of this poverty casts too large a shadow over our Island.

Question to the Premier: How can we be a mighty Island when so many Islanders are struggling daily with the realities of poverty that your government has failed to address?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, poverty reduction has been a central commitment to our government going back two years, and indeed much earlier than that. There are five ministries, including my own, who have poverty reduction as part of our mandate letter. We have, from the time we took office, starting with the Generic Drug Program; the renovations; the changes to income tax; the food and comfort allowances dealt with this.

Let me say, as did the hon. House Leader starting off, this is, indeed, something that we take to heart and which we intend to

keep working on, on all sides of this aisle to do better for Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Universal basic income pilot project

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, he talks about it being priority, but your government has done nothing but raise taxes and raise fees across the Island. Every MLA in this House have constituents that deal with poverty problems.

Motion No. 83 was unanimously passed by this House last December endorsing the concept of a pilot project or a pilot program for universal basic income across the province. The final motion, the final cause of the motion, called for a progress update.

Question to the Premier: What progress has been made, by you, Mr. Premier, on establishing a universal basic income pilot on Prince Edward Island by your Liberal government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You're absolutely right hon. Leader of the Opposition that everyone does deserve a change for fulfilling a rewarding life; a life that they can live with honour, and that they shouldn't have to need for anything.

The motion was unanimously passed in the House, and I wish I was there to speak to it because, actually, one of the first conversations that I had with the Premier after I was appointed was around the idea of a basic income guarantee pilot project.

It's not something new. It's something that's been around for over 200 years. The hon. Leader of the Third Party and I have had many conversations on it as well, and I have also had conversations with the – my hon. minister in the federal government, Minister Duclos, and I do have some updates on that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Poverty reduction strategy

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Back to the Premier: It was truly a priority by you, Mr. Premier. I would've expected to have seen movement by now.

During the last election, this Liberal Premier said – and this was about a universal income (Indistinct) pilot – he said: "We'd be actively interested in pursuing that... I'd call it a model program and build in a commitment to evidence-based research and action-based research."

Question to the Premier: Why have you and your Liberal Government gone soft on a promise to explore new approaches to reducing poverty for Islanders?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the motion that we passed in this House was connected to, or linked to, their being a federal partner. We continue to work on that and we continue to hope for it.

But in the meantime, our province and our government have stepped forward for starters with the Generic Drug Program; 16,000 Islanders registered. We, in fact, overspent that program because it has been so well-responded to by Islanders.

An Hon. Member: Because there's a need.

Premier MacLauchlan: We've got – there is and we're responding.

There's the home renovation programs, several of them; there's the food allowance, which is upwards of \$2 million that we've committed there; there's the action on disability supports; and others that I would respond to if I had more than 40 minutes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: Forty seconds.

Speaker: Forty seconds.

The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We just heard that poverty reduction is a priority of this government. To the Minister of Family and Human Services: Can you explain then why there has been no update to the poverty reduction strategy of this government for over four years?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can really only speak to what I've done since I've become minister, and within the last few months we have appointed a social policy person who will deal specifically with leading the poverty reduction strategy.

Over the last months, she has already connected with various groups within the community. She has consulted with academia; she has consulted with our NGO partners; and she's gathering all that information and she's putting it together, and it will contribute to a discussion paper that we will be putting forth within the next couple of months.

That discussion paper will launch the poverty reduction strategy and engage Islanders in the discussion process as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: Less talk, more action.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No update in four years – it says a lot to Islanders about how poverty is a backburner issue as far as this government goes. This is a minister who publicly just said she thinks that poverty is one of the top things in her ministerial mandate letter.

If you're the lead minister in this, shouldn't you have a better handle on whether you're in charge or not?

Speaker: The hon. –

An Hon. Member: Was there a question there?

Ms. Mundy: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear the question.

Speaker: Yeah, hon. member, the question?

Ms. Compton: To the Minister of Family and Human Services: If you are the lead in this poverty strategy, shouldn't you have a better handle on whether you're in charge of this or not? You said you thought you were. That's what you're quoted in the paper today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't recall saying that I was in charge of it. The poverty reduction strategy is going to encompass many departments. It's going to encompass my Department of Family and Human Services, as well as workforce and advanced learning, education, justice, health and wellness.

For so many years, poverty reduction has been on the shoulders of one department. We cannot keep applying 20th century solutions to 21st century issues. Poverty isn't just in community services. Poverty is reaching all of our departments and we need to work collaboratively as a government through our departments to reach the poverty reduction strategy.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. LaVie: You've been there for 10 years. You've been here since 2007.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I quote: “It’s a priority... I think it’s one of the top things in my mandate letter.” Your department, minister.

The poverty reduction plan said this is about follow up and follow through. A steering committee has been created to see that progress is made on the social action plan.

Question to the minister: If reducing (Indistinct) – sorry.

Mr. LaVie: No plan.

Ms. Compton: How many times has this steering action committee that you talk about met since 2013?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) no plan.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I can speak to what I’ve done since I’ve been minister, and one of the first things we did when I was minister is we appointed someone, a working group, to go out there and take a true look at poverty on Prince Edward Island. That was led by Wendy MacDonald.

In consultation with many anti-poverty groups, they said Wendy was the best person to have to lead this working group, and we do now have a little bit better of a picture of the true picture of poverty on Prince Edward Island.

Now, we have turned the work over to Sharon Cameron who is now leading the work on developing policy and taking the lead on the poverty reduction strategy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Impacts of HST on families

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I’d just like to point out this government has been in power for 10 years. You’re a new minister. You have a whole staff who should have you up to date on what’s happened in the past and how you’re moving forward. You’re not reinventing a new program and a new department.

The HST was brought in – I asked you this question before and I’ll ask it to you again: How do you think the HST – how has that affected poor families on PEI, and has it made Prince Edward Island a better place to live for those families?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our government is committed to ensuring that programs are delivered effectively and efficiently in meeting the needs of Islanders and also making the best use of our public funds.

We have over 34 programs that help low- to moderate-income Islanders. We have a social assistance program, and we are now in the fourth year of a food increase. That’s the first time in the history of this program. We have increased the comfort allowance to low-income Islanders, and still to come on our platform commitment we will also be looking at increasing the shelter allowance as well as the transportation and optical. That’s just in one program.

We’ve also made great gains to our disability support program which we just announced actually last week. We’re now including mental health, so we are making progress, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you. It’s hard (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Child care subsidies

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've asked questions before to the minister about child care subsidies, and as it stands now we have an increased minimum wage, but the income threshold to access full child care subsidy is lower than what someone working at minimum wage fulltime would earn in a month.

Question the Minister of Family and Human Services: How is it fair that your government expects Islanders to be making less than minimum wage to qualify for a child care subsidy?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, this government respects and we understand that strong families begin in early childhood, and the hon. member knows I rose in the House last spring session and I said that that was one of our top priorities of review was going to be that child care subsidy program, and we have reviewed it. We had a working group working all winter long –

Mr. Trivers: Less talk, more action.

Ms. Mundy: – in consultation with the early childhood centres.

I've been out to the early childhood centres. I've spoken to the owners. I've spoken to the parents. I've spoken to the executive director. I've been involved myself –

Mr. Trivers: Less talk, more action.

Ms. Mundy: - and we will –

Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Ms. Mundy: Sorry.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister: Do you recognize that this is a roadblock? Let's talk about this. Do you recognize that this is a roadblock for families to be able to actually go out and earn a living?

Minister, you talk the talk. You've met – you've done all that you say you can do, but still we have parents looking for that child care subsidy. We know you just have to go to Cabinet.

Will you commit today to real action on poverty and adjust the income threshold for child care subsidies at your next Cabinet meeting?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Currently, our child care subsidy program – we subsidize 30% of the licensed child care centres in Prince Edward Island.

Last week I had a look: 62% of families that are accessing the child care subsidy are getting full subsidy. That means they are not having any parent contribution. It is a valuable resource that is being used by families out there. When my working group comes back to me with recommendations on how to improve the program, I will welcome those recommendations and I look forward to them, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Immigrants and rental units

Mr. Trivers: Will the minister of advanced learning explain why his government is forcing out dozens of immigrants and low income islanders and bulldozing their affordable rental units in Charlottetown?

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, hon. Speaker.

As everyone in this house is quite aware, we're all very concerned about poverty reduction in this House and across the Province. I'm only to elude that the hon. member referring to the initiative by Holland College on their expansion for beds for rooms for their students in the upcoming season.

Holland College is a partner with government and we do what we can to work together. We are aware of some of the initiatives they have put forward. They've followed all the city ordinances, they've dealt with IRAC, they've said they would help with the rent – they would not collect rent during their period of notice. With that, we're doing what we can and we're well aware of the situation.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

The minister shouldn't try and pawn off responsibility to other groups. On February 28th, Cabinet approved a \$6 million capital project that involves tearing down seven properties in Charlottetown that house low-income rental units.

Minister: Why did you fail to put any safeguards on this project for the people living in these units?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In all due respect to the member's question, we work very collaboratively with Holland College and over their skills programs to try to help people get an education and a place to live. We will work together to support these people that are being misplaced. As I must reiterate, this was an initiative of Holland College and we cannot interfere with advancement in their business plan and with any city ordinance or anything with IRAC.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

It's the government that gave approval for the loan. This minister is bulldozing a large part of this community with many immigrants who moved to our province to build a better life. They poured a lot of their money into small businesses in this new stage of their lives here in Charlottetown.

Minister: Why do you support destroying these people's homes and bulldozing the business they've worked so hard to build here?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I had indicated earlier, Holland College – there's an act that Holland College follows and we have to approve any borrowing or any spending they spend.

I'd just like to say that the college has hired a real estate agent to help these tenants find new accommodations – at their cost. The college is also giving the commercial people notice. As I said earlier, this is an initiative of the college and we're going to do what we can as a government to help our youth get an education.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Affordable housing

Mr. Trivers: Our PC team are not the only ones asking questions. Residents and business owners in the area came to a public meeting held by the City and they voiced their disapproval at this plan. The City response was that affordable housing is a provincial responsibility. Indeed, one this Liberal government has failed on for 10 years.

Minister: You and the rest of the Cabinet have responsibility for all of post secondary institutions, affordable housing, and immigration. Why did you drop the ball?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just to kind of combat that, I don't think we dropped the ball, hon. member. The minister of family services has indicated that there's a poverty reduction strategy plan in place. I'm not the only minister that this falls under. There are other ministers in our government and we're all working forward to see what we can do going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, the ministers across the floor often reference their close relationship with the federal Liberal government. Can the minister explain why this government has failed to put pressure on Ottawa and access the urban affordable housing money that was announced by the feds last month? There's a solution for you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The national housing strategy will be released sometime in 2017. The money that was allocated in the federal budget last year will not be spent until 2019. And we are – I am at the table currently. I've been to at least two meetings on housing with my federal –

Mr. Trivers: More talk.

Ms. Mundy: – and provincial, territorial ministers. I fight for Islanders' unique views and I bring their views to the table. The money is not coming until 2019. I still have

a year to make sure that Islanders' interests are represented and I will be there, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

An Hon. Member: People are losing their homes (Indistinct).

Poverty reduction strategy

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's obvious that this government needs a more comprehensive approach to projects that may impact vulnerable Islanders. In this case, it's obvious that not enough thought was given to the people that will be displaced because of this development.

Minister of advanced learning: Will you commit to bringing in a new policy that requires that government plan for and mitigate the community impact of major capital projects?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We, as a government, and as I had indicated earlier, there's numerous departments that are working on this poverty reduction strategy and to see what we can do. We're working collaboratively with the federal government and across government to do what we can do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Poverty issues

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

As we all know, today's Guardian is devoted entirely to the issue of poverty on Prince Edward Island. Almost every article in today's paper talks about the root causes of poverty and how any truly successful strategy is going to have to tackle those underlying issues.

Question to the Minister of Family and Human Services: What do you believe are the root causes of poverty?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That is a great question. If I had more time, I could have listed 34 programs that are geared toward low- to-moderate income Islanders. For years and years, what we've been doing is throwing money at the situation and that's not solving anything. As the papers show today, we still have poverty on Prince Edward Island. We need a more comprehensive strategy that will get to the root of poverty and what causes it.

Right now we've got some great programs that we've been working with my department and Workforce and Advanced Learning in trying to mitigate and intercept at a younger age. There's – sorry.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

New poverty reduction strategy

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

For the last several months, this government has been promoting its Mighty Island strategy. A strategy that continues the decades long focus on export growth and competing in global markets. This economic model has seen a continuous increase in GDP over the last 30 years – 500% increase – while poverty levels have remained pretty well unchanged. Clearly, economic growth does not automatically translate into prosperity for all.

A question to the minister: How will the new poverty reduction strategy take a

different approach to improving the well-being of all Islanders?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And again, Islanders will have plenty of opportunity to have their voice heard during the consultation process on the poverty reduction strategy. I don't know that there is one particular area. And again, it goes back to what I said earlier: We have been always focusing on one department to handle poverty when we know that poverty isn't in one department.

We're going to have to work closely with our partners in Workforce and Advanced Learning, in Economic Development and Tourism, in Justice and Public Safety and in Health and Wellness. Every department in government will have to have some kind of input into the poverty reduction strategy – employment being a big one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Everybody in this House recognizes the critical importance of reducing poverty and there's a great opportunity, I believe, here for multi-party collaboration to put partisanship aside. We saw that last fall when a motion brought to this House on universal basic income was unanimously approved by this House. It was a great example of non-partisanship.

Since we have multi-partisan agreement on this idea, which the minister talked earlier about looking for 21st century solutions; Hugh Segal, the Conservative Senator talked about universal basic income as a 21st century solution.

Will this minister ensure that basic income is included in the upcoming discussion paper and poverty reduction strategy?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can't commit to anything because that is going to be up to Islanders; whether that is something they want to have in their discussion paper. But, as for the discussion paper that you mentioned that Hugh Segal wrote, you know what? Right now Ontario is using the basis of that discussion paper to launch their own universal income pilot project, and we're looking very closely. It's a three-year project that they are undertaking right now as well.

I have been talking with my colleagues in Ontario to get feedback on their pilot project, so we will continue conversations with our federal government, with the parties that are already making some progress in it, and I will have an update to table a little bit later.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Counselling services to assault victims

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women: Minister, at a recent hearing of the Standing Committee on Health and Wellness, a representative of Mothers Helping Mothers outlined a number of concerns in our health care system.

One concern that stood out related to the rape and sexual assault centre helpline. It was explained that a recent rape victim had called the helpline and received a recording stating that: If they left their name and number, someone would be in touch within seven days. I understand that the response came within a day or two from that time.

Minister, do you feel that counselling services to victims of rape and sexual assault are being provided in a timely manner in this province?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I did attend the meetings that were in Summerside and Charlottetown and participated in them and listened to the stories of the women that have been victims of assault and sexual assault in Prince Edward Island, and I also listened to the recordings from your committee.

Rape and sexual assault is certainly a serious matter, and it's imperative that we do support survivors.

In regard to the rape and sexual assault centre, it's a non-profit organization that does provide counselling and therapeutic services, but it's not within our governmental department. It does provide crisis support in timely fashion. But I would encourage anyone to call 911 and to be aware that there is a 24-hour Island helpline for those that are in immediate crisis, or to go to the ER.

Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, your first supplementary question.

Response time to assault victims

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I applaud the work of the rape and sexual assault centre and note that it is a community-based organization funded in part by government.

I would think that the response time is a critical factor in providing counselling services to victims, especially recent victims, and that seven days seems too long.

Minister, has your secretariat had any discussions with the centre with respect to improving response times or confirming that they are, in fact, getting back quicker than the seven days stated in the message.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that the rape and sexual assault centre is not the only place that victims of violence can go to for support. There's many agencies right across this Island, including services right at the ER.

I want to commend all the organizations on Prince Edward Island that support victims that need that support.

I would like to announce that the Interministerial Women's Secretariat has provided a \$7,000 grant in funding for review and to evaluate the program for supporting survivors of sexual violence in Prince Edward Island. Also, that this is not just a responsibility of the rape and sexual assault centre. It's medical professions, violence victims services, mental health, private and community.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, your second supplementary.

Counselling services for assault victims (further)

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, going forward can you advise this House today as to whether there are any plans to review, or see if there needs to be a review done, I guess, of the services for counselling for sexual assault victims in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, part of the funding that we provided to the rape and sexual assault centre is for them to do a review, but also internally within government we are working together with health and wellness, with mental health, to provide services for those women right

across Prince Edward Island, and we do not want them to be afraid to go to and ask for help and to be aware that we do care what is happening with them.

I will be asking your committee, hon. member, to have the rape and sexual assault centre come into your committee and highlight the great work that they do and what Anderson House does and what every organization across this province does for women in crisis of sexual assault.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mandate of senior policy analyst

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Minister, I understand that your department recently hired a senior policy analyst. Can you just give us an idea of what his mandate is?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, seniors are a long-term – seniors are certainly important contributors to our Island community, much like the (Indistinct) here, and we are working to ensure that we are developing a continuum of long-term care that meets their health care needs, and this position – the senior policy analyst – is being created to look at a number of typical issues.

Number one, would be how we address home care – can we invest more in home care to help meet seniors' needs? What assessment tools do we use to admit seniors into long-term care? If we require more long-term care beds, how many and where would they be located? And, how we work with our community care facilities to also meet the needs of seniors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Senior assessment tool-interRAI

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, it's my understanding that at the present time our province is the only one that uses a seniors assessment tool. All other provinces use interRAI.

Is there a possibility of implementing that system to assess seniors here on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Yes, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road is correct. Prince Edward Island, we happen to use the Senior's Assessment Screening Tool and we are the only province that uses that particular tool to assess seniors for admittance to long-term care as well as community care, and the interRAI system is used by most other provinces.

We are working with our Atlantic partners to see how that system works, and that's one of the ideas that the senior policy analyst will be looking at to see what impacts that would have on seniors' assessments here in the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Beds to existing manors

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, with this, will you be adding more beds to the existing manors or to the community care facilities on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That, once again, will be one of the situations that the senior policy analyst will look at, but I have made statements in the past at legislation committees that we would like to work with our community care facilities and partner with them. Right now, they're partnering with us for approximately half of our long-term care beds in the province, but the seniors policy analyst will certainly look at the pros and cons to building more beds for – in our own system should that be required and working in partnership with our community care facilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Gas prices on PEI

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, poverty has many faces. Poverty is hunger. Poverty is a lack of shelter. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job. It's a fear of the future; living one day at a time. Poverty is being sick and not having access to a doctor.

Premier: What is the current price for gas on PEI?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: I suppose the hon. member is referring to the regular gasoline. The last time I filled up it was \$1.13, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, this government raised the price of gas April 1st. It's \$1.07.02 –

Mr. Aylward: But he goes for full-service so he pays more.

Ms. Compton: Yeah (Indistinct) province (Indistinct)

Mileage rates for Social Assistance travel

Mr. LaVie: To the Premier: What is your government's mileage rate for people on Social Assistance travelling to medical appointments?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That question would be taken as notice and I can get back to probably before the end of Question Period.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's not surprise that the Premier doesn't know, but his minister doesn't even know the answer.

Premier wouldn't even know what a taxi-run is from his North Shore mansion into Charlottetown. Premier, the rate is 20 cents. Twenty cents per kilometre.

Premier: Why do you think 20 cents per kilometre is enough mileage rate for a social assisted client travelling for medical appointments?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do have the answer to your question, and you are correct. It is 20 cents a kilometres to a maximum of \$31 per month, or the actual costs, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the Premier: Premier, what's a government employee's rate for travelling to an appointment to medical assistance?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any government employees who have to go to a medical appointment, they have to pay for that out of their own pockets.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Trivers: Unless you're a minister driving a (Indistinct) government vehicle.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Government rates for travel

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, if you're travelling to a meeting, what is the government's rate? To the Premier.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are several rates that apply to government employees who use their own vehicles when they travel, or if they have to use their own vehicles within their work frame. Those would probably range anywhere from, I'll say, 34 cents to 42 cents per kilometres.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the Premier and to the Minister of Finance it's 42 cents. And the Premier wouldn't get it. He was brought up on a silver spoon. That's why he doesn't get it.

Born in privilege, raised in privilege. There are a lot of people who are not born in privilege and raised in privilege here on PEI.

I'm one of them, Premier. I had my name on the wall for IOUs. I walked the hall down to the Social Services. I know what's it's like. I know what it's like to lose a job with two kids home. I know exactly what it's like.

Do you think it's fair for somebody on social service going to a medical appointment to get 20 cents a kilometer when you're getting 42 cents a kilometre?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: There you go. His mother hired somebody to cut the grass for him.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: I'll take that question, Mr. Speaker.

Special circumstances, our social assistant caseworkers with work with the client; in many cases it exceeds the 20 cents a kilometre. If we have patients that are travelling, or clients that are travelling off-Island we work with them to make sure that they won't ensure any hardship.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do get 42 cents, minister of finance; I do have 42 cents a kilometre. There are a lot of days I never got 42 cents. I'll tell you, I couldn't afford to put gas in my car. I know what it's like to lose a job. I know what it's like to have an IOU out there.

To the Premier: Will you be raising the 20 cent rate for people on social services to 42 cents, the same as government employees?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Here we go.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, our caseworkers, they deal with very complex and challenging situations and they have empathy for the clients that they serve and they work their clients –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) five years (Indistinct)

Ms. Mundy: – and they come to me and they say Madam Speaker, we need to take a look at our programs and they need to be more modern and they need to be more efficient. If you take a lot at my mandate letter it does say to review all of the programs and services to make sure that they are meeting the needs of the clients that they are intended to serve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]