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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2018

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, in response to a question asked yesterday by the Member from Souris-Elmira regarding payouts for crop insurance in 2017, the number is 28.9 million and the unit price offered for the 2018 crop year for potatoes to farmers for their guaranteed yield is actually 7.50, eight and 10 cents per pound.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

For a long time now we have raised concerns about government's chronic mismanagement of the Provincial Nominee Program and government has continually denied anything was wrong.

Mismanagement of PNP

Question today to the minister responsible for immigration: What happened this summer to cause you to change your story so abruptly?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This summer we nominated a number of new people to come to PEI and we're very happy we did that. It continues to help with our population growth, our economic growth, and our bringing new culture here to PEI, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

When we pointed out the many troubling issues with how immigration programs were

being run, government denied them and accused us of fearmongering.

Question to the immigration minister: Do you now regret not leveling with Islanders about the scale of PNP mismanagement by your government?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, there was no mismanagement of our program.

Our program was working well. There are lots of improvements that we could make in it, and we did that. Over the years, we introduced new measures to encourage more people to come to PEI, to better understand their intent when they come to PEI, and we're happy with the changes that we've been making, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

For over a year now, the way that this government has managed immigration program has generated negative headlines often ending up in national newspapers.

A court case begins later this week following investigations by the Canada Borders Services Agency.

Reputational damage to PEI

Question to the immigration minister: What is the cost of reputational damage being done to PEI by your government's handling of the immigration file?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our immigration program was not operating as well as we wanted it to. We weren't meeting expectations of Islanders and we weren't meeting expectations of our government so I closed it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On the topic of not meeting expectations, yesterday I asked the minister a number of questions about a business that went into receivership here this week in the province, when I thought the questions were extremely straightforward and the minister's answers were all in circles and all over the pond, requiring government staff to go into the media room later in the day and straighten it out.

Government assistance to DME

Question to the minister: Why did you refuse to say that your government had discussed assistance with this company yesterday when you were on the floor rather than make your staffer go into the media room and straighten out your mess?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wanted to make sure that everybody understood that we're here to support employees.

What we did over the weekend was we understood that there was potential of the company going into receivership. We worked with the local owners of DME; looked at a financing option; recognized that was not going to be enough and wasn't going to help, so we quickly turned out attention to the workers and that's what we're continuing to do, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What a difference a day makes when the minister has an opportunity to be briefed by the Premier's staff who appears to be the only one that's in the know on this.

This is a troubling pattern when it comes to this minister. He says one thing in the House only later to be contradicted by facts, and usually by his own staff.

Back in May when the Sherwood Motel caper was on he was saying the same type of things in here. He was all over the pond, offering all different kinds of excuses on what was going on around him.

Question to the minister: Why was it such a struggle for you to get your story straight about the facts going on in your department back in May?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The theatrics in here today are worth the price of admission.

Well-placed words like 'secret' and 'hidden' and those types of things to try to let folks think that there's a different meaning to what is happening here – we're working hard for Islanders and we'll continue to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure that I said 'secret', but I'm about to so it's like you read my mind.

Our office filed a freedom of information request on your department over emails concerning the Sherwood Motel and the Provincial Nominee Program over a 20-month period. We received 49 pages of heavily redacted emails from May and August of this year.

Redacted emails re: PNP and Sherwood Motel

Question to the immigration minister: What was going on in all of these emails flying back and forth that required so much of the information to be redacted?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The border services investigation is important. We are cooperating with border services and delivering any information that we have because we don't tolerate that kind of behaviour that folks are charged with and we're going to do everything we can to help border services get to the bottom of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's the exact kind of stuff I would have expected to see in these emails. I would have expected to see details of explanations of how the program worked, how they were monitoring compliance, the data and the stats that supported what the government was saying in the House at the time; the very claims that he was making in here saying that the program how the program was being run.

There was little to none of that in 49 pages of emails.

Mismanagement of PNP (further)

Question to the minister: Why did government seem to have such a poor handle on what was going on in the very program that they managed?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Maybe the emails talked about the other 85% of our program that brings workers in to fill skills gap in our community that helps fill jobs here.

I know the opposition members don't want to talk about that, but that's the largest chunk of our immigration program and we're happy to continue it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, the minister is wrong. That's not what was in the emails. It looks like Mary is going to be in the media room later today correcting all of your answers that you made so far.

Based on what wasn't redacted, these emails paint a picture of frenzied crisis communications at the highest level of government; emails largely focused on local and national media requests and trying to script together a believable story.

Question to the minister: Why were these bad headlines a bigger preoccupation than figuring out whether or not your program was working properly?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what headlines they're talking about but it could be where PEI is leading the nation in a number of economic factors.

It could be where we're leading the country in population growth. There's lot of things that are going on well here.

Mr. Trivers: Lowest wage.

Mr. Palmer: And there are things we can do better, and we're here to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Casey: Great answer.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Quite similar to yesterday, the minister chooses not to answer the question, here; instead he goes on with a whole bunch of rhetoric that does little or nothing to improve Prince Edward Island.

Reading the emails, you can see how the government's story keep changing as more facts come to light from questions here in Question Period and questions that come from the media.

Program officials, communication staff, the minister's office, even senior officials in

Executive Council and the Premier's office are all back and forth in multiple emails, sharing links and trying to cobble together a somewhat believable story for the minister to tell the media.

Management of files from fifth floor

A question to the minister:
Do most of the files you deal with as minister involve such a hands-on management from the fifth floor?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Everything that my department does comes from the fifth floor, that's where my office is –

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. Palmer: – and we're there to make sure (Indistinct) continues to grow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm sure the minister will be laughing later when I table these 49 emails and sees how incompetent that he actually is when it comes to doing his job, or how the Premier thinks you're so incompetent, or how all the communications staff thinks your incompetent or how Executive Council thinks you're incompetent.

But, back to the questions –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: The emails show that media requests sent off a flurry of activity among top officials, apparently, trying to get their stories straight to live through another day of the news cycle.

Routine media requests

A question to the minister: is this a typical response to routine media requests?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Maybe when the smoke comes off that gun he had over there, he could table all of that so that we could all understand what he's talking about, or if there's pieces that are not really in there that maybe were stretching a little bit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So it's no surprise the minister knows nothing of what I'm talking about; same as yesterday, same as the entire month of May, for that matter. But, it's because he wasn't included in any of the emails because none of the communication staff or the Premier's office trust him with the information.

One of the email chains involved an email from Billy Dow, of the e-gaming fame, detailing developments happening down at the courthouse.

Bill Dow re: Legal Counsel for IID

A question to the minister: is Billy Dow still a Legal Counsel for IID?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, we engage a number of legal experts whenever we need them for various files and I believe that Mr. Dow is one of those.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

An Hon. Member: No one is clapping for that one.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yeah, there wasn't one person banging their desk for that one. I wonder why.

All that Billy Dow has done to drag your reputation down how you could ever still give work to Billy Dow, is more than I could possibly imagine –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) today (Indistinct) carrying on or?

Mr. Myers: What's that Jordan?

Mr. J. Brown: Did your mother have to stay in today?

An Hon. Member: Oh.

Mr. Myers: Pardon, Jordan.

Mr. J. Brown: Was your mother able to get out of the house today?

Speaker: Order!

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The member from Brighton can talk all he wants when he gets to his feet here later.

On May 8th, the minister told this House: so, those 583 were not applicants to PEI and we would have no knowledge of them coming to PEI, it was an address they used for an application going to a different province.

PNP applications and addresses

A question to the minister: Do you still believe that statement that you said?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker.

Freedom of mobility in Canada is a right that everybody enjoys, and if you are nominated, you can move across the country to whatever you would like to live. I believe the charges that come from here are boarder services as people are reentering the country and they're giving different address than they had given us on the application.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well it's very strange and I think what's strange about it is, according to the departmental emails that I have here, the CBSA officials briefed your department the day before May 7th, about the charges being laid in the Sherwood Motel case. So, your staff all knew the entire details.

CBSA officials and briefing to department

A question to the minister: Why would you give an answer like that when your own staff knew the actual fit facts in this case?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker.

We were working with boarder services then, we're working with boarder services now; we're there to make sure that if there is any wrong doing, we're there to support the federal government in any of the charges that they have laid.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's stranger still, because the same staff briefed the minister the day he said those things. According to one of those emails, the minister was briefed before making those comments in the House.

A question to the minister: Why would you have such an absurd answer in the House, when you knew the facts stated otherwise?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, I almost don't know how to answer that – with the accusation of absurd – coming from the other side. But, I will tell you that we continue to work with boarder services, we continue to make sure that we share as much information as we have to get to the bottom of this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to make the question simpler then. A question to the minister: Did you not get briefed by your staff before you answered the question the way you did?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker.

I don't recall the date in question, but I will tell you that my staff are very good to brief me, that we make sure that we're working together as a team, to continue to grow business in PEI, and to do everything we can to help businesses here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So again, I'll ask my second question, which was: If you were briefed by your staff like you say you were, that they always keep you briefed, why would you give an answer in this House that wasn't true?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker.

I think I'd like to start taking about some of the employment growth that's happening here on PEI –

Ms. Biggar: Yes.

Mr. LaVie: Of course you would.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – because that's the important part of our immigration program, is we're filling important gaps – I know nobody over there ever wants to talk about that, all they want to talk about are some of the issues that we're working really hard with boarder services to address and we've changed our program because it wasn't meeting expectation of Islanders and it wasn't meeting expectations of this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I too, am getting frustrated because I'm not getting any answers from this minister. And what I will say is this – the minister says he was briefed by his staff, so if the minister was briefed by his staff, he knew full-well what was happening out at the Sherwood Motel because they were briefed by boarder services prior to briefing the minister. It all shows up in the emails here.

If that's the case, then the minister came to this House and that minister told this House something that he knew not to be true.

A question to the minister: why would you do that? Either they didn't brief you properly, or you came to this House and said something that you knew not to be true.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker.

We're working with boarder services, we're giving them all the information that we have, their sharing information with us, and we're happy to do that and we're going to continue to do that. This program was not meeting our expectations, so we closed it and that's something that a good government can do. It's about action, not standing around and talking about foolishness all the time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, this is exactly what happened back in May when we talked about this, the minister stood and talked about two or three things. Actually, you're going to find in the emails, that those two or three things were vented through communications and they decided what the minister was telling the House. You're going to see that, and you are not going to be impressed with this minister at all, when these emails are tabled here later today.

So, I'm going to go back and ask the question again: Why if you were briefed – if boarder services briefed your staff and your staff briefed you – why you would say something in the House that you knew wasn't true?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker.

The truth is we continue to work with boarder services, we continue to share information, and we're going to continue to do that. This matter is in front of the courts, and we're here to help boarder services in anything we can because that's not the way we run business over here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: So, four times I've asked the question. I'll move on to the next question seeing as the minister doesn't want to answer it.

The next day on May 9th the minister corrected his original answer by clarifying: All files reviewed by border services were provincial PNP clients from the 2008 program which no longer exists. The federal charges filed two days before earlier stated that some of these individuals arrived on the Island as recently as 2015.

Government staff briefings

Question to the minister – you knew this wasn't true too, because your staff was briefed and you were briefed by your staff: Why did you come to this House and say it anyway?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Like I said, we continue to work with border services.

Our system does not connect with border services' system so there always is some back and forth that we have with the feds to make sure that we can get this right; that we can bring the very best people to PEI to help fill important labour gaps that we have in PEI.

We know that our good workers on PEI are the ones that help grow our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation released its rental market report today, and things are not looking good.

Charlottetown now holds the dubious honour of being the city with the lowest vacancy rate at 0.2% of any major municipality in the country.

You know it's bad when you make Vancouver and Toronto look like healthy rental markets.

Our recent economic growth has been predicated on quick and explosive immigration population growth and as a recent Scotiabank report notes, the provinces population act plan seeks to grow our population 4.4% higher than the current levels by 2020.

Rental vacancy rates

Question to the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning: How is this economic growth economically sustainable if we have nowhere for people to live?

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

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

Our economy is doing very well and thank you to the people who have come here and work in our workforce and create business and yeah, my figures show .3% not .2% and yes we have some concerns and our construction industry is doing the best they can to keep up with it, but you know, we can't fix this over night. It's something we've been working at in collaboration with my Department of Economic Development and Tourism and we'll continue to work at it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On one hand, government is actively exacerbating the housing crisis with its population action plan. On the other hand, government is trying to solve the crisis is trying to solve its housing action plan. In other words, government is trying to solve a problem of its own making.

Housing action plan

Question to the minister: Were you or your department consulted on the housing action plan and are you involved in its execution?

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All of our departments across government work together and may I add and inform this house that 7,000 new jobs created over two years here in PEI. Our unemployment rate was the lowest in the history since they've been keeping records in 1976.

The economy is flourishing – our housing, there is an issue. We cannot fix this overnight but I'll just mention to the hon. member, UPEI had 1,150 students apply for

444 beds. There were 706 students that had to get accommodations elsewhere. Everything is booming on PEI.

Ms. Casey: (Indistinct) residence.

Mr. Gallant: We're working on fixing it across government and we'll continue to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: It has become abundantly clear that the population action plan is having serious and unintended consequences on the Island housing market to the point where the crisis will soon become a barrier to population retention and immigration if it has not already done so.

Population action plan

Question to the minister: Will you put the population action plan on hold until this housing crisis has been dealt with?

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

Ms. Casey: Premier.

Speaker: Oh, the hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I think it's most regrettable that the Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale is standing in this house and blaming our population action plan for the housing crisis.

We have a demand for housing. We have a supply that's being met on the order of 1,000 new units being built this year and we have 7,000 new fulltime jobs in two years.

That's where the demand is coming from. It's from prosperity, from an economy that's flourishing, as the minister said, and we should all be proud of that and work to keep up with it and that's what Islanders are doing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My questions today are for the Minister of Family and Human Services.

Minister, last night we had a very informative discussion on autism.

First, I'd like to thank you for your support provided to me over the years on my many questions related to autism, and more specifically the Stars for Life Foundation.

The debate was very encouraging about the future coordination and navigation of services for families with autism. You spoke of the programs your department is already doing to provide support and services for families with autism spectrum disorder.

Community connectors

Would you expand on the hiring of community connectors you referred to in last night's debate?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for that question, I'd be pleased to let you know a little bit about the community connectors and what their role will be.

We are in the process currently of hiring three community connectors, one for each region. Their role will be to build on and enhance the community capacity on the front line as well as to help families and individuals navigate the many government departments and the many government programs as well as help focus on solutions to common issues as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, your first supplementary.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During the debate last night, you also spoke about collaboration with the University of Prince Edward Island on collaborative communication for families with disabilities.

Collaborative case management

What is this program about and when does it start?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are very pleased to be working with the University of Prince Edward Island on a new certification program on collaborative case management.

This will involve a holistic approach and it will bring together all the supports in an individual's life, which will include their family, their community as well as government and it will ensure that there is a standard of delivery that will incorporate the individual's needs, their family and community in the delivery of the process.

We're looking forward to rolling that out in the latter part of 2019.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During the debate last night, the minister of education informed the house that there were currently 422 students with ASD in the public schools and the French language schools branch and eventually these students are going to the leave school system and seek programming with the Stars for Life Foundation.

Soon we're going to have a new mandate in how the province deals with families with autism.

Minister: will your department ensure the Stars for Life Foundation going forward has the necessary core funding for programming to allow those exiting the school system – and I'm going to use Peter Rukavina's words from last night: That those with ASD can not only survive, but thrive.

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do thank you again for your advocacy for the Stars for Life Foundation and people with autism on Prince Edward Island over the years that I have been sitting in this ministry.

We value Stars for Life Foundation, they provide a tremendous service to individuals and families with autism. They provide community supports as well as residential supports and as always, and it will be my commitment to you hon. member, that I will sit down with the Stars for Life Foundation and see if we can work on sustainable funding for them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. McIsaac: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today my question is directed to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

In the federal budget this year, the government established an advisory council on the implementation of national pharmacare. The council was directed to provide independent advice on how best to implement national pharmacare in the manner that is affordable for Canadians and their families.

National pharmacare program

Minister: Where are we with the national pharmacare program?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly thank the hon. member for that question.

Our government strongly, strongly supports discussion on national pharmacare and what it would look like for Prince Edward Island.

The hon. member is right, back in April of last year the House of Commons standing committee released recommendations on what a national pharmacare program could look like. As a result of that, Dr. Eric Hoskins was tasked as chair of this advisory council and Dr. Hoskins is the former minister of health from Ontario.

That led to a couple of meetings on Prince Edward Island. A really good discussion, but honestly quite frank discussion with Dr. Hoskins and to how this could be a financial burden on Prince Edward Island to meet a national standard, unless the federal government came to assistance in that. So those discussions went on.

I look forward to further discussions with Dr. Hoskins and his advisory council when he releases his report.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, your first supplementary.

Mr. Roach: Minister, the federal standing committee on health tabled a report recommending that Canada establish a universal, single payer public prescription drug system.

National pharmacare system

Are we going to be waiting for the federal government to implement a national pharmacare system, and if we are, what is your department doing now to address the need of Islanders in the meantime?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, I look forward to further discussions at FPT Tables of ministers of health all across Canada as to what this new program could look like, but we are not waiting, obviously not.

This year alone we invested \$3 million in adding 28 new drugs to our formulary right here in PEI. Those 28 drugs included drugs for: 13 for cancer treatments, there was new drugs for cystic fibrosis, and other ailments for Islanders.

We will continue to make those investments. We will work closely with our Provincial Drugs & Therapeutics Committee to determine priorities of new drugs that will assist Islanders all across our wonderful province.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, your second supplementary question.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well that's great to hear that we're having more drugs added to the formulary continually.

Islanders benefitting from drug programs

How many Islanders are currently benefitting from our province's drug programs?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As of today, we have 27 drug programs that exist on our province here; 57,000 Islanders are assisted by these programs. To date, we have 21,400 Islanders registered in the Generic Drug Program, almost 5,000 in the Catastrophic Drug Program, as well as another 250 Islanders that are participating in our Hepatitis C Drug Program that was recently released.

We will continue to work with Islanders to ensure that their health care needs are met when it comes to drugs, when it comes to funding drugs, and when it comes to getting drugs at the lowest prices possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While not many of us are thinking about beaches these days, but my seatmate here from Kensington-Malpeque asked some questions last week about a beach in his district. This summer, Points East Coastal Drive saw many tourists embracing the 50 beaches brand. This initiative exposes

tourists to the beauty of our Island beaches ensuring they get the most out of their stay on PEI.

Site reviews and plans for Island beaches

Question to minister of tourism: What site reviews and action plans have this government undertaken to support these Island beaches?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know tourism is a very important economic driver here, and we continue work with RTAs and DMOs right across PEI to further enhance the regions and the products that are available there. We also work with TIAPEI on a five-year strategy plan. We continue to work in this ever-changing dynamic industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well I think my questions are a little bit easier than the questions received earlier. I asked you what support has the province given to these beaches. There are 13 of the 50 beaches in District 4, and many of my constituents are expressing concern at the lack of facilities implemented to support the influx of tourists, as there are no disposal locations for the excess litter and the complaint is coming to me that the residents are picking up the litter.

Waste disposal sites for litter on beaches

Question to the minister of tourism: Will you commit to providing locations for waste disposal on the various sites to keep our beaches clean?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad Islanders are doing their part in helping to clean up the beaches, but we need

to help with that as well. So I invite the member opposite to reach out to my office anytime whenever we're having issues and we're there to support communities right across PEI so that our product stays as one of the best products there is in Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well litter is not the only issue that we're facing with the 50 beaches brand. Due to lack of environmental signage and designated parking, visitors are parking on the marram grass at the visiting beaches. Marram grass is essential to maintaining the dunes and holding together the dunes during storms and high winds.

Designated parking areas on beaches

Question to the minister: Will your department commit to providing designated parking areas to prevent further damage to the natural ecosystem of our beaches?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, beaches are one of the very important pieces of our product here in PEI, and if the member wants to reach out to me at any time we'll certainly work with communities to make sure that those beaches are protected.

I know even this past summer we worked to put a number of signs up to make sure that our tourists were aware of how vulnerable our dune system is and the grasses and to keep people off.

We're happy to work with all communities across PEI to make sure our product stays great.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well this is a huge initiative: 50 beaches in Eastern PEI. So we would assume that the department would be involved in this. In District 4 alone, we've got Big Point Road Beach, we've got Beach Point Beach, Machon Point Beach, MacLeod Road Beach, Panting's Shore Beach, Point Prim Beach, Ponds Road Beach, Poverty Beach, Seal Cove Campground which is privately owned, and Simon's Beach, and we have three provincial parks. We know that the parks are being looked after with waste disposal and signage, because they are provincial parks.

Continued success for 50 beaches brand

But for the other 10 parks in the district, minister will you assure that your department will look into providing what is necessary to ensure that the 50 beaches brand is more successful and continues to be successful?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm so glad this came to the floor today, because we will work with communities to protect those beaches because we know they're so important. Anytime if anyone wants to give me a call to help protect their beaches, we're happy to do that because we know it's very important here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know the industry is doing a great job of promoting our Island beaches, but getting the word out to tourists is only the first step. What is needed is proper management and support going forward.

I've had this discussion with people from eastern tourism about, you know, be careful about the success that we're having because you have to ensure that when the tourists go to those beaches, which are fairly secluded, that they're not experiencing litter, that they're not getting stuck – and that's happened in the marram grass because they

don't understand the impact that that will have.

Question to the minister: Will the minister's department commit to having his department do the legwork and release the funds to support and protect and maintain our Island beaches?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: We certainly don't want to try to shrink the greatness; we want to grow the greatness. So if there's anything that our department can do to continue to highlight the important beaches that we have, the great asset that we have here in PEI, we'll do that.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And again, these are not timely questions because we have snow outside, but come the spring these questions will be coming forward again to me and a number of my colleagues because the beaches are in their districts.

As I said, 13 of those beaches are in District 4. Many constituents coming to complain, and I'm confused and frustrated to see such an important initiative as the 50 beaches go forward without adequate support from our government.

Minister: Can you explain to me what back and forth you've had with the eastern tourism association to ensure that the 50 beaches remain successful?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: We work with the regional tourists' associations all the time. We provide funding to help promote the area, to make sure that we have great products in the area and yearly, we are in contact with the RTAs and we're in continuous discussions with them through the seasons to make sure that everything is focused the way that it should be, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, your final question.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I look forward to that work being done next summer.

Conflict of interest disclosure of government member

Question to the Premier: Which senior member of government did not file their conflict of interest disclosure?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I believe I answered this question about 10 days ago.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]