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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF  
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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 26 APRIL 2018



Responses with Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

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

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

The oyster fishery is a big contributor to the provincial economy. The landed value of oysters topped \$11 million in 2016. That's according to the Annual Statistical Review.

**Oyster industry potential growth sector**

Question to the Premier: Does your government view the oyster industry as a potential growth sector?

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, yes, we have seen tremendous growth in the shellfish sector, both oysters and mussels, in the province. We are also seeing new and innovative ways to raise those products in a cost-effective and environmentally friendly way. On Prince Edward Island, we're big advocates of the oyster industry.

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

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

PEI arguably produces the greatest oysters on Earth with a well-earned reputation for high-quality.

**Dollars from Atlantic Fisheries Fund**

Question, again, to the Premier: Do you intend to use dollars from the Atlantic Fisheries Fund to support projects that will grow this industry?

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Yes, we do, Mr. Speaker. We actually have a number of applications in and have made some decisions on a number of oyster initiatives that will

enhance that particular industry, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Our oyster fishery adds to the wide menu of goods we export to markets off-Island. Our Premier here is well known for speaking about the mighty Island and the food Island.

**New markets for Island oysters**

While, I respect the insight and the knowledge of the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries on his file; I'm very happy to see he's up to speed on something, I have another question to the Premier: How is your government helping the industry to open new markets for Island oysters?

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, we are always looking at new markets, and in fact, both the Premier and myself and the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, were down at the Boston seafood show. We were promoting some of the great seafood products here, as well as, some of the lobster products and processing industries that we have here.

I must say that the mussel industry was front and centre at the Canada showcase. We've had numerous meetings with different businesses and organizations while we were in Boston, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Between harvesters, plant workers and spin-off jobs, over 1,000 Islanders earn a living from the oyster fishery. These jobs are, for the most part, are in rural and urban communities right across our province. Again, I'm very interested in getting the Premier's thoughts and perspectives on this subject.

### **Job opportunities in oyster industry**

Again, a question to the Premier: How is your government working with the oyster industry to identify future job opportunities in harvesting, processing and research?

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, we, as a Department of Agriculture and Fisheries work with a number of different sectors within the shellfish industry.

We have our oyster growers' association, which I was a speaker at, and we brought in some speakers to talk about the features of those industries. We work with the PEI Shellfish Association and looking at ways to get them in a more sustainable process. We have the mussel growers' of Prince Edward Island, the PEI Aquaculture Alliance; there is a number of organizations out there that represent various groups in the shellfish sector. Our door is always open on ways that we can seek out new opportunities and create new and innovative ways for these people to be profitable and grow the economy of Prince Edward Island.

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

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

Our world-class oysters give our culinary professionals an incredible product to display their talents with.

The sight of oyster fishers working on the water in our rivers and bays is an iconic experience for our tourists to see.

Again, I congratulate the minister for being up to speed on one of the files in his portfolio. Well done.

But, again, I'm looking to get a little bit of perspective from the man who goes across Canada, across the world promoting the mighty Island, food Island.

### **Oyster fishers on water re: tourism product**

My question again to the Premier will be:

Do you agree that the iconic images of our oyster fishers working the water makes our tourism product iconic?

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member, the Leader of the Opposition, is referring to the public fishery, although some of the lease owners can also fish by tongs and some of those different procedures.

Our industry is much broader than that. We have a lot of off-bottom leases. We have a lot of growers that are coming up with new and innovative ways. The Minister of Finance had mentioned that, you know, there's a number of students out in UPEI that have received funding to come up with new and innovative ways to flip the oyster trays.

There are companies out there, like cage commander that are out there doing contract work in coming up with innovative ways to get the oysters off the bottom and get them out on floating trays and things of that nature.

We're always looking at ways to promote the industry. And yes, the iconic way and the previous ways that we have been harvesting the shellfish, but we do it in many other formats, too, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

It's great to hear from the fisheries minister. He's got a pretty good handle of how the leases work and off-bottom leases.

I want to talk about that because the Premier won't get up and say he supports the industry. He had what, five or six chances here today to stand and support it.

It's funny because earlier this year, him and his government, kicked in \$15,000 to the North Shore municipality to do a study to end the oyster fishery in the Covehead Bay.

### **Funding of study restricting oyster fishing**

Question to the Premier: Why is your government funding a study that will restrict oyster fishing in the Covehead Bay?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

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

It was at the request of the community of North Shore. It came from the community development fund. It was originally a \$15,000 project. It was reduced, at the request of the community development fund to \$11,000, of which the community development fund provided \$55,000, or \$5,500 of that cost and a 50/50 split from the community development fund.

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

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

We're well aware that money was given to the community. The question is, the Premier, and it's the Premier's interference. The Premier was at meetings. I have all the proof and the documents that the Premier was at these meetings. I'll table them here, later.

There are a lot of people on Prince Edward Island who earn their living from the shellfishery, right in the Covehead Bay and they aren't millionaires, they're just folks that are trying to get by.

On July 11<sup>th</sup>, the Premier met with the North Shore community council, himself, and informed them that the province was encouraged that the Covehead Bay was going to be on the roster for review of the, and I quote: physical and social impacts of aquaculture.

Question to the Premier: why do you want to limit these people's ability to earn a living?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I meet with the North Shore council as the local MLA, and it was in that capacity that I was there and it was a much more wide-ranging discussion than the member's question has indicated.

The real discussion in its fullness was about community planning and indeed, it's not surprising to me, and I took part in the creation of the official plan for the North Shore community, that the bay is indeed a central feature of that community and has been from time in memorial.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

It's funny that I have from the minutes of one of these meetings where the primary objective was to prevent any off-bottom oyster leases in Cove Head Bay. I'm told that the Premier is no friend of the shellfish industry out there at all. In fact, when he was running UPEI he threw his weight around pretty heavily to try to get some people to disappear out of fishing in the bay.

### **Off-bottom leases in Cove Head Bay**

Question to the Premier: Do you support, personally, off-bottom leases in Cove Head Bay?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I recognize the value of the off-bottom fishery and it has been a feature of Cove Head Bay for many years getting on now well into its third decade and we have seen this throughout our province, the growth in the shellfishery in aquaculture and indeed, this has been a very positive thing throughout our province and in the industry of our province, and in the culinary growth of our province, and I do indeed support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The Premier knows full well what I'm talking about at his time at UPEI. He knows exactly what he did and he knows what he's doing out there today. As a matter of fact, and I hear from many fishers out there that the issue is that it's the Premier's view and

the Premier's kayaking that's becoming interrupted out there is why he doesn't want the oyster fishers in the bay.

**Appropriate use of power as Premier**

Question, again, to the Premier: Do you think that's an appropriate use of your power?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I am the MLA for a district that has a strong community and I have attended various meetings, one with the council cited by the hon. member. I attended some public meetings and those discussions have been much broader and fuller and comprehensive than has been represented by these questions.

They have been discussions about community development, about the health of the bay, and about the enjoyment of the bay in its fullness. As an MLA, I am happy to take part in those meetings.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Of course as an MLA you're quite prepared to take in those meetings in your community, and as a resident who doesn't want his view obstructed or wants to be able to kayak freely through the Cove Head Bay, I guess you're available to interrupt those, except for that you're the Premier and this is where the problem lies, is you don't seem to understand the boundaries of your own position and you keep walking into things that you shouldn't walk into.

Ten years ago, you walked into the DFO office, I'm told, to try to get people to stop fishing right in front of your house.

Question, again, to the Premier: Do you think that this the appropriate use of your power?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, in my role as an MLA, it is my job to be in touch with what's going on in our community and I support the aquaculture. I support the community in its growth and development.

I have to say, at a time in this House when we've talked a lot about communities, incorporated or otherwise, I'm very proud of the community of North Shore, of its official plan, of all of the elements that it takes into account, of the way that people have built and grown that community, and indeed we are currently in the process of having a further amalgamation that will see the community expanded.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I support that.

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

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

We know full well that you don't support the industry in the Cove Head Bay because if you did, why would the fishers think you didn't? I mean, being connected with your community is understanding what people are saying, and what they're saying about you is that you're interfering, and that you've been interfering since you've been president at UPEI when you were throwing your weight around, and you know what I'm talking about.

You walked into the DFO office and you tried to flex your muscles, and you're back at it again. But, now it appears you have a complete vendetta against people who stood up against you, which is your signature move and everyone in this Chamber knows it, and lots of people in government, and many at UPEI do.

**Use of taxpayers' dollars**

Question to the Premier: Do you think it's okay to use taxpayers' dollars to settle your own person vendetta against shellfishers?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I've said earlier and I'll say again: I am supportive of aquaculture, mussels, oysters, bottom, surface, the native fishery,

(Indistinct) and we've seen all of that in Cove Head Bay going back to Lorne MacMillan who was one of the earliest oyster fishers in this province.

I'm very proud of that work and of the industry and of the science and sophistication that is behind it. I am totally supportive of the aquaculture, and I am supportive of our community. I am proud to say that our community is doing well and that our community is currently, and that is the precise piece that's being asked about here, looking at its total development in building around its official plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. LaVie:** Well Mr. Speaker, the issue of the right whale in the Gulf of St. Lawrence may result in big changes to both the crab and the lobster fishery right here in Prince Edward Island.

### **Restrictions on lobster and crab fishery**

Question to the minister of fisheries: Do you support the new federal restrictions on the lobster and crab fishery right here on Prince Edward Island?

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

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

The reality of the issue in trying to protect endangered species like the right whale, the industry, Department and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, as well as our department, are always looking at ways that we can become more sustainable, make sure that we can protect endangered species and allow a fishery to thrive and prosper in this province.

There have been protocols that have been put in place and we're working with the industry as well as DFO to make sure that those protocols work as effectively as possible.

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

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

### **DFO protocols to protect right whales**

My second question to the fisheries: When did you find out about these changes DFO is looking at?

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the protocols regarding the snow crab industry; that has been going on for some time. We were aware of those particular changes that were recommended by DFO, I'm going to say, sometime in late-January, mid-January or something along that line.

As far as the issues and protocols that are affecting the potential to the lobster fishery, I've been notified of that on April 24<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Another question to the minister of fisheries: Yes, the lobster fishermen have to make changes to their ropes. Crab fishermen have to make changes to their ropes and another change that is coming forward is a temporary closing in the fishing where whales are spotted.

### **Temporary closure during fishing season**

My question to the fishery minister: Are you in favour of a minimum of 15-to-30-day closure in the middle of a lobster season and a crab season?

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, that is one of the contentious issues regarding, if a whale is spotted within a certain area. DFO has developed the Gulf of St. Lawrence into quadrants. They're four kilometre quadrants, and if a whale is spotted in any particular one of those particular quadrants, then the quadrants around it are also blocked off for a maximum of 15 days.

It could be longer than that. It's also 15 days prior to the final sighting of the whales. It is a concern because some of the natural foraging areas of the right whale happen to be up around MacLeod's ledge and a little bit more around the Eastern Kings area. So, it is of concern, but it's a very hard thing to predict where right whales will be found and spotted, and we'll do all the surveillances that we can and try to work with the industry to make sure we protect the fishers as well as the right whales.

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

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

These changes are supposed to apply to LFA 24, 25, and 26.

#### **DFO protocols to protect right whales (further)**

Question to the minister fisheries: How are these changes this big being drawn up while your government is asleep at the wheel?

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, the industry, through the snow crab fishery and the PEI Fisherman's Association – we've all been aware of the right whale issue. It was in fact, actually, a topic of discussion at the annual meeting of the PEI Fishermen's Association and there were extensive briefings on the issues regarding the right whales and the peril that they are in as a species.

There are a lot of factors that go into this. If right whales become endangered, it has impacts on potential trade. We've already lost some of our marine sustainability designations in the snow crab industry and we have to make sure we protect those markets and we'll do everything we can to ensure that we do that.

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

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

We know that the fishing season is short for the crab and the lobster fishermen – a fishing season that closes for 15-30 days is shortening up the lobster season and the

effects that'll have on, not only the fishers, but the economy of Prince Edward Island. This is one of our major industries right here on Prince Edward Island.

#### **Contingency plan for shutdown of fishery season**

What is the contingency plan in place if something like this is shut down?

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is very accurate in stating this is a very important industry. There are two factors here: One particular factor if you look at the snow crab industry, that's a quota fishery and I've urged the federal minister of fisheries to open that season as soon as he possibly can because it's a quota fishery and our fishers in Prince Edward Island come out. In fact, I wrote a letter on Monday to the federal minister to urge him to get our season opened as (Indistinct) possible. In the lobster fishery, it's a little different, it is a seasoned fishery and yes, it is great concern if there's a particular quadrant that might happen to be shut off, then those fishers would have to fish in another area and that would potentially put other stress on those particular areas.

So, once again, we are working with DFO to make sure we'll monitor this. We're hopeful that the whales will go to their natural locations which is the Bay of Fundy, as well as up in the Bay of Chaleur area and we'll watch it closely, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

This is going to affect PEI as a whole. If the whales are spotted, just spotted, this will affect everyone across PEI. This will affect plant workers, wharf workers, fishers, families; as a whole.

#### **Emergency funding re: closure of fisheries**

My question to the fishery minister: Do you have emergency funding in place in case of

a closure in the crab fishery and the lobster fishery right here on Prince Edward Island?

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

**Mr. Henderson:** I guess the first issue would be is that some of these issues that we're talking about here are federal issues. From our perspective as a province, we are working with the federal government and Mr. LeBlanc to make sure that our fishery comes off as smoothly and successfully as it possibly can – and safely. We are certainly monitoring the whale situation, but we also have to balance that with the potential risk of whale entrapments or death and that can also have some significant impacts.

I would say that in the Nova Scotia side, they have fished within the whale population for some time and with some measures that have been put in place like this. So we're not talking about closing a fishery, we're talking about fishers having to maybe fish in a little bit different location.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

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

The 2018 Auditor General's Report on the social assistance program identified that shelf-to-ceiling rates have not been increased since 2013. I quote from that report: Payments for shelter make up the majority of the monthly benefits provided to social assistance recipients and include rent or mortgage costs plus heat and utilities. That same shelter rate is used across the province and has not been increased since November, 2013.

### **Shelter allowance rates**

We know from the many budget announcements that there has been an additional allocation of \$500,000 to the shelter allowance this year and we're grateful to see that, but I have a question for the Minister of Family and Human Services: Was this funding decision based on the adequacy of ceiling rates and requested via Executive Council as recommended by the Auditor General?

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

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

Government is committed to helping those with their housing needs and quite evident in the implementation of a housing action plan that we have initiated in collaboration with community partners as well as across government. Shelter ceilings are something that we had in our platform when we were campaigning at the last election, so it was something that we had intended to do. Because we had a good year last year we did increase it and it was included in the Budget this year. Many of our clients have already reached out to us with gratitude, Mr. Speaker, and thanking us for that and we're looking forward to doing much more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Social assistance policy 5.1 states that: shelter ceilings should be sufficiently high to ensure the general availability of an adequate accommodation for applicants. (Indistinct)

### **Dollars to meet market rental rates**

Question for the Minister of Family and Human Services: Is the current investment in this budget sufficient to meet the actual market rental rates in the province?

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

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

As I already previously mentioned, we have initiated a provincial housing action plan. We have a housing task force that is working in collaboration with a co-design team. That co-design team is made up of many community partners – community partners who are active in homelessness and they are also active in poverty reduction across the Island. We are looking forward to the results of that housing action plan coming forth in June and we're looking

forward to implementing the commitments that we have initiated in this Budget, which include \$17 million worth of affordable housing across Prince Edward Island within the next two years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

IRAC regularly reviews rental rates and increased rates between November, 2013 and March, 2018 by a total of 6.75% for the private rental market, therefore, the actual investment required to bring social assistance shelter rates to 2018 levels is at least \$1.5 million.

#### **Increase of dollars to shelter rates**

Question for the Minister of Family and Human Services: Will you be announcing an additional \$1 million to the shelter rates as a follow-up to your current budget announcements?

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

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

As I mentioned in my last answer to my last question, we have committed up to \$17 million over the next two years that will go towards affordable housing and ending homelessness on Prince Edward Island and addressing homelessness on Prince Edward Island. We are doing this in collaboration with community because we all know that we cannot do this alone. Government cannot do this alone. Actually, if I might add, that Prince Edward Island was actually highlighted in the Tamarack Institute's newsletter last month on how we are tackling poverty. We're not doing it alone; we're doing it in collaboration with our community partners and we will continue to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

**Ms. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased to see the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women table a motion yesterday calling on government to ensure provincial agencies, board, and commission appointments are gender-balanced. This issue is close to my heart as I sit on the PEI Coalition for Women in Government's working group on equity in governance that has been meeting for the past three years – a group that is focused specifically on addressing how more women can be recruited and appointed to ABCs via Engage PEI.

#### **Percentage of women appointed to ABCs**

A question for the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women: Of all the Islanders who are currently appointed to ABCs, what percentage are currently women?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

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

One of the objectives that our government had in 2015 in looking at the makeup of our ABC boards was to increase that percentage from just around 30%. Since that time, we actually have come up to over 50%. We presently have 133 men and 162 women that have had appointments since 2015, to bring our percentage up over that 50% mark.

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

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

The data that we have from the PEI Coalition for Women in Government and the board I sit on currently puts that percentage at 37% as per the data on their website. Perhaps, we have got a little bit of a difference in how we count, maybe, who are women.

The 2013 Speech From the Throne stated that: Government is making a commitment to achieve greater representation of women on all appointed provincial boards and commissions and achieving overall parity within five years.

### **Diversity on provincial boards and commissions**

Can you explain why we have such a challenge with parity now?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

**Mr. Roach:** Who says parity is better?

**Ms. Biggar:** Mr. Speaker, we have made, since 2015, 295 appointments. Of those are 162 women, 23 youth. Eight are Aboriginal. Six newcomers and 57 seniors. We have reached over 50% of our ABC board make-up of different parity, different diversity, and we will continue to work towards more.

**Mr. Roach:** Great job. Great work.

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

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

We already know what needs to be done to achieve gender parity on ABCs. Legislated quotas are internationally proven as one of the most effective and efficient ways to increase the number of women on boards.

### **Legislation on gender parity**

To the same minister: Will you commit to bring forward legislation to implement gender parity rather than a non-binding motion?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

**Ms. Biggar:** Mr. Speaker, we will continue to advocate for diversity in our appointments, certainly within the Advisory Council for the Status of Women.

There is a formula that specifically targets, I will say, diversity, ability, diversity of work experience, diversity of cultural experience. We will continue, right across government, to advocate for that type of diversity, going forward, presently doing it. Again, to reiterate, out of 295 appointed, there is 162 women.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

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

My question today is for the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Minister, whenever anyone of us, and I'm sure most people in this Legislature have, whenever we go to the service station and we want to get a new set of tires put on our vehicle, we pay a tax on our tires in order to cover some of the environmental costs of bringing more rubber into ecosystem.

### **Tire tax revenues**

Minister: What exactly does the revenue from this tire tax go towards?

**Mr. Myers:** Did you tired tax or tire tax?

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

**Mr. Roach:** (Indistinct) you're not that deaf.

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

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

The province did implement the current levy structure in 2012, which does see Islanders pay \$4 per tire for tires up to 17 inches and \$11.25 for each tire greater than 17 inches.

The majority of that revenue goes to Island Waste Management Corporation for the disposal of those tires.

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

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

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

Thank you, minister, for indicating that that money goes directly towards our environment and making it friendlier.

### **Disposal of used tires**

My question to the same minister: Since implementing this tire tax, have tires been disposed of in a more careful and environmentally friendly manner?

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

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

We want to monitor the amount of tires that are coming into our environmental footprint. Island Waste Management Corporation recognizes it does have a responsibility to dispose of those properly and efficiently to ensure that we continue that that benefits the province.

Legislation does ban tires from our landfills. We have a contractor that picks those up across the Island and takes them to the facility in East Prince and then we ship them off-Island to various tire recycling and processing facilities.

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

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

My next question is to the minister, as well.

#### **Increase in tire tax**

Minister: In the future, are we going to see an increase in this tax?

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

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Mr. Speaker, absolutely not. There are no plans to increase the tire tax.

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Roach:** (Indistinct) first tax (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale.

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

I have had the occasion to witness constituents receive excellent care from Dr. Lecours and her staff. Also, the new Charlottetown facility enables them to provide – to ensure extra care for those who are in their end of life journey.

#### **Palliative care beds in the province**

Question to the minister of health: How many palliative care beds are there on Prince Edward Island, and do we have the doctor and staff available to take care of those beds?

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

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

I do appreciate the opportunity to stand today to speak about our wonderful Palliative Care Program on Prince Edward Island which provides, as the member said, wonderful end-of-life care for residents of Prince Edward Island, and indeed, their families. It's very compassionate care. It's very dignified care by our frontline staff at all of our facilities across Prince Edward Island.

Currently, we have 25 palliative care beds all spread all across PEI. As the member referenced we have our new provincial palliative care facility in Charlottetown has 10 beds. We also provide beds in Prince County, Souris area, and Kings County, as well, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, your first supplementary.

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

Minister, do we, obviously, we probably provide medication for those people that are in the facility. I know sometimes the families; they go home for a little bit and back into the facility.

#### **Drug funding for end-of-life patients at home**

Do we provide medicine for them if they go shortly to their home and back to the palliative care centre?

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

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

This year, alone, and as part of our balanced Budget, we were able to invest \$0.5 million into palliative care. Not only our Palliative Care Program, but our palliative care drug program, as well, hon. member, and our palliative care stay at home.

So yes, people that are faced with palliative care needs; we do offer assistance on drug funding. We use the Generic Drug Program. We also use the High Cost Drug Program so that those at the end of life situations, we are able to be there to support their needs, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, second supplementary.

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

Minister, you've indicated we provide palliative care all across the Island.

### **Expansion of Palliative Care Program**

Are you looking at expanding the Palliative Care Program in any way across our Island?

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

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

Certainly, this program is a phenomenal program. There is no other way to put it. Being able to provide 25 beds all across the province. Would we like to see more? Absolutely.

We are investing, as I said, this year alone, and enhancing our palliative stay-at-home program, where many of Islanders want to be during their final years with their families, with their loved ones. We will put in supports with Island EMS to enhance that service that has been an award-winning service on our province, over the last number of years. We'll continue to work on those needs, Mr. Speaker.

**An Hon. Member:** Wow. Award-winning.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

**Mr. MacKay:** Mr. Speaker, during the education minister's budget estimates, he

revealed another new assessment. This time, in grade 10 literacy.

This test is not for school credit. It's on pen and paper because technology and connectivity in our schools isn't good enough to conduct it online.

### **New grade 10 provincial literacy assessment**

Minister: Why yet another provincial-level test, one that is not for credit or able to be followed-up on?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

As I indicated when I was on the floor with estimates, this is a pilot project this year. The intention is to be able to take those students that are entering into high school and to be able to determine what we might be able to do for them to ensure that they reached the level that they need to to enter the workforce and we would propose to have interventions to assist with that, that would be coupled with this assessment program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

**Mr. MacKay:** Mr. Speaker, this government is smothering students with provincial standardized assessments; grade 3 primary literacy, grade 3 primary math, grade 6 elementary literacy assessment, grade 6 elementary math, grade 9 intermediate math, grade 11 high school math, PESA PCAP, and now this new grade 10 literacy.

The minister of education in Ontario has just released a report that recommends an abrupt departure from the current assessment program.

### **Additional education assessments**

Minister: Why is Ontario, the province we modeled our assessment program after,

scaling back standardized assessments when PEI is adding additional assessments?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

As we indicated both while I was on the floor with my budget and previously in this House, we will also be reviewing our assessment program. I should say that that's not to say that there will inevitably be less assessments or more assessments. We will be looking at what assessments we do and why we do them and what we hope to gain out of them.

But, let me also say that we would do less assessment right now than most of the other provinces across the country, and in Canada we do less assessment than most of the other provinces in the OECD, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

**Mr. MacKay:** Mr. Speaker, a key recommendation from the report is somewhat ironic in PEI's context. The Ontario report recommends moving away from high school literacy assessments just when this minister is introducing one.

### **Implementation of high school literacy assessment**

Minister: Why have you implemented another provincial test when the province your broken testing system is based on is now cancelling it?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

I'm not going to pretend to speak to the Ontario high school literacy assessment, but what I am going to speak to is what the plan is in relation to our high school literacy assessment, and that is that it be coupled with a literacy intervention course. Through a pilot project, we have seen that we can bring up to one-third of the students that

were struggling to attain a satisfactory level of literacy back up so that they can graduate with the standard level of academic literacy that we would expect of Prince Edward Island students when they go out to enter the workforce or go on to further study. That's why we're looking to do this program.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

**Mr. MacKay:** Mr. Speaker, a new question for the minister.

Mr. Minister, the Ontario report also recommends that provincial assessments at the primary or grade 3 level be done away with completely and new supports be provided to teachers to help with classroom assessment.

Minister: Why is your government's position on these provincial assessments different from Island parents, teachers, our PC team, and the government of Ontario?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

I'm not going to purport to speak for the PC team in what their view of the world should be, but what I can tell you is that our assessment program is based on evidence and fact. We're out there to do what's best for Prince Edward Island students and I think that our track record with this assessment program in place over the last decade has been exemplary. That's not to say that it's perfect, but it is to say that we're making huge progress with our education system, and we will continually look to do better.

That does include looking at interventions with our early years literacy program so that our students can do better every year that they go through the system, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, your final question.

**Mr. MacKay:** Mr. Speaker, the minister's responses are very different from what my

PC caucus colleagues and I are hearing from parents and teachers.

students can do their very best and so we can succeed as an Island.

The Ontario report, which I'll be able to table today, supports the position long held by the Progressive Conservative Party of PEI, that supports for student assessment should be at the classroom level, and we should move away from provincial standardized assessments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]

The minister shouldn't be spending tax dollars on a review. They have heard from parents, from educators, and from us on this side of the House. Now, the minister has a new report from Ontario, and these all say the same thing.

### **Dollars spent on standardized tests**

**Minister:** Given the views of Islanders and the new Ontario report, how do you justify spending millions to support standardized tests and on your review when those tax dollars should have already been directed right into Island classrooms to help educators and young learners?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

I will say this: When I became minister, this was something that I will say I had a big interest in, but I didn't purport to know anything more than the average person on the street about and I will say it is an incredibly complex system that works through expert evidence and scientific research to provide the best outcome for our students.

I will say: I recently had a long chat with Andreas Schleicher who's the OECD head of education. It was his thought – and this is his area of expertise – that we need to be continuing to do these kinds of things to supplement the great, professional work that our Island teachers do in the classrooms and to help to understand across each cohort and through our system where we might have weakness and where we might be able to improve and how we might be able to improve so that we can put the proper interventions in place, both through coaches and through curriculum so our Island