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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

TUESDAY, 9 JULY 2019

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land, Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In response to a question from the Member from Mermaid-Stratford last week about departmental funding for sustainable agriculture water supply ponds: in 2019/2020, there was no new funding for ponds.

In the fiscal year of 2018 and 2019, the sustainable agriculture water supply category of the agricultural storage ship program funding was to a single pond of the amount of \$4,900.

The Agriculture Stewardship Program is funded by the Canadian Agricultural Partnership. The project involved a pond that is filled by surface water collecting precipitation over 12 months for use when needed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

During media interviews following Question Period last week on midwifery services being introduced on Prince Edward Island, the Minister of Health and Wellness indicated that government was considering a user-pay model for midwifery here on Prince Edward Island.

User-pay model for midwifery services

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: How many other Canadian jurisdictions expect families to pay directly for these services?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Actually what I said in the media interview and in this House, as well, is that government is very proud that we're finally going to be able to bring midwifery here to Prince Edward Island and that we're looking at every option.

We're in the consultation process right now and ongoing with regards to the colleges and the associations to see how best midwifery can be brought in and complemented with the other health care professionals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

And indeed, the minister did say that, but he also said that they were considering a user-pay model.

No other jurisdiction in Canada – I'll answer your question, minister – no other jurisdiction in Canada has adopted a user-pay model for midwifery services, and a lot of Islanders are surprised by this option even being on the table.

Midwifery is not some sort of gold plated elitist service that should be available only to those who can afford it.

As Peter Rukavina put it in a recent blog and I quote: "Midwifery is not an upgrade to business class, it's basic health care. There is no rationale whatsoever for classifying it as anything other than this, and to fly a trial balloon that positions it otherwise is an insult to those who have worked so tirelessly for so long to reintroduce a practice that was standard and accepted during our grandparents' day."

To the minister: Why is midwifery being considered in this light by your department?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Again, I'll repeat what I said before. The government is extremely proud that we're going to finally be able to introduce

midwifery here to Prince Edward Island as another health care service. Until we have all the details, until we have all the consultation, all those decisions are yet to be made.

Again, the government is very proud that we will be introducing midwifery.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I don't look too often to Ontario these days for political leadership, but just yesterday, that province announced greatly expanded funding for midwifery services. Committing \$178 million in spending in this fiscal year, with the minister of Health in Ontario, Christine Elliot quoted as saying this, and I quote "Midwives are an essential part of our public health care system." She also added that midwives promote best practices that lead to higher breastfeeding rates, fewer medical interventions and shorter hospital stays.

The province is also expanding midwives scope of practice to allow them to prescribe more medications. Scope of practice is something of course we've talked about repetitively in this House.

As I mentioned on Friday in Question Period, the cost savings of midwifery services are well documented.

Cost saving services with midwifery

A question to the minister: Why would we even consider user-pay for a service that provides a net saving to the province?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Again, I'll repeat, this government is extremely proud that we will be the government that is finally able to bring midwifery services here to Prince Edward Island. If the hon. member wants to talk

about cost savings, is he suggesting that we're going to release some of the OBGYN's that are currently working here on PEI and providing services for the roughly 1400 births annually?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I don't think I'm obligated to answer questions but the answer is absolutely 'no' to that question.

Public health system and user fees

To the same minister: Are there any other areas of the public health system where we might expect this government to introduce user fees?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

You know, again, I question how the hon. member can think we're going to have cost savings when we're going to actually be adding another service here to Prince Edward Island. The answer to his follow up question is, no.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Also during his comments last week the minister stated that introduction to midwifery services was and I quote: In our platform. Meaning I would assume, in the PC platform for the recent election.

Could the minister please direct me to the page where I will find this commitment?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll be more than happy to bring that back.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Good luck with that minister, because actually, nowhere in the PC platform does it mention the word midwifery at all and the only platform with any concrete costed commitment to introduce midwifery comes from the Green Party. That policy minister was drawn from consultations with the birthing community here on the Island and also speaking to mothers, both perspective and actual.

Our commitment was to provide fully integrated and publicly-funded midwifery services into our health care system.

Commitment of midwifery services for Island families

To the minister: Will you commit to fully integrated and publicly-funded midwifery services for Island families?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Once again, I've said it over and over again. This government will be introducing midwifery for the first time here on Prince Edward Island and we're very proud of that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The introduction of midwifery services was also one of the few policies taken from our platform as I've just described; the government claimed that they were putting in the budget in order to secure our support.

As you know, the official opposition was extremely disappointed that we were told a basic income guarantee pilot would be part of the budget, only to discover that it wasn't

actually being considered at all and the Premier was just playing word games.

Now we see that another Green Party priority will not be delivered— excuse the phrase – will not be delivered as expected. Minister, are you familiar with the term bait and switch?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Again, I repeat, this government will be the government that will introduce midwifery here to Prince Edward Island.

An Hon. Member: Good job.

An Hon. Member: That's what we want to hear.

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, sorry if I may – the minister responsible for Social Development and Housing and myself met with the critics from across the floor very early on in our mandate and we sat down and I'm very proud that the critic for health and wellness here on PEI actually brought that forward as one of her top priorities when we had that discussion and we are following up on that commitment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

To be clear, according to Wikipedia, Bait-and-Switch is a form of fraud used in retail sales but also employed in other context.

First, customers are bated by merchants advertising products or services at a low price, but when customers visit the store they discover that the advertised goods are not available, or that the customers are pressured to buy some other – to consider something similar but higher priced items.

When the Green caucus asked for government to make midwifery services available, we meant services that will be

fully integrated into our health care system and paid for with public funds. This is the second time that this government has failed to follow through on a budget speech rhetoric with real meaningful programs and services needed by Islanders. Yet, the Premier has repeatedly said that he wants to collaborate with the other parties using the principle of good faith and no surprises.

Government and empty promises

To the same minister: How can we expect Islanders to maintain confidence in this government when so many of your commitments are turning out to be empty promises?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I guess I would say to the public is: Watch us; it's going to happen.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The front page of today's *Guardian* highlights one aspect of our mental health crisis here on PEI that over 1,000 patients are waiting to see a psychiatrist after referral. In the article the Minister of Health and Wellness states: We all need to roll up our sleeves and work collaboratively together to make sure Islanders are getting the help where they need it, when they need it.

Mental health crisis re: psychiatrist services

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Could you please provide some specifics on who will be involved and what this sleeve-rolling and collaborative process will look like?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I'm very proud to say that the work has already begun. Yes, this headline that was in *The Guardian* today, it was shocking, it was unacceptable. The level of wait times we're at just hasn't happened over the last two months; it's a situation that has slowly been evolving and there's many factors that have contributed to it.

But, I'm very proud to announce here today that I've asked the committee on physician resource planning to look at increasing the complement of psychiatrists here on PEI as much as 5.8. We are doing great work over here on this side of the floor. It's unfortunate and I feel terrible for the families and for the individuals that are waiting to see a psychiatrist, but we're working hard to make that change.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the article the CEO of Health PEI suggests individuals who have been referred to psychiatrists may not have been triaged properly.

Psychiatric referrals and mistriaged

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Is your department tracking the number of psychiatric referrals that have been mistriaged, and if so, will you share this information?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

The frontline as such of health care here on Prince Edward Island would be family physician primary care. What we've instructed the family physicians to do is actually go back and reinterview any referrals that they may have had to psychiatry to see where they're at now, to see if they've actually successfully found

services or psychiatry or otherwise and then to triage them.

We've also hired a specialized nurse in mental health and this individual is also reviewing all of the files that are currently waiting for a referral to psychiatry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One way that government has attempted to manage the psychiatry shortfall in PEI is to fly in locum doctors for short stints; sometimes only a weekend. These psychiatrists will often see a patient only once and some patients have told us these visits that are so short have little commitment to in-depth meaningful mental health care, and in some cases, maybe doing more harm than good.

Fly-in-fly-out locum psychiatrists

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Will you be continuing to utilize fly-in-fly-out locum psychiatrists? If so, how will you evaluate their effectiveness?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, I can't change the past. My focus as minister is to move forward and to get the proper care for the individuals that deserve it.

Again, that's what this government is focusing on. That's what the department of health is focusing on – is to put real measures in place. Will there be times that locums are required? Yes. It's a necessary part of the health care system.

We, as I said, are looking at increasing the complement of psychiatrists here on Prince Edward Island by as many as 5.8 FTEs. That will be a sizeable measure to provide psychiatric services here to Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to repeat the last part of my question there, which we didn't get to, so how will you evaluate the effectiveness of these locums? How will you check in to see if they are causing more harm than good?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

We do have health records. We do analysis on those. Those are audited as well.

I'm extremely proud of the staff that we do have that are working in mental health and addictions here in PEI right from tip-to-tip. They are dedicated, professional employees that care for Islanders.

We have an unfortunate situation that evolved over a period of time. We're not looking at the past. What we're looking at is how to best service those individuals and we're going to take every measure that's possible and required to ensure that Islanders are safe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to take this opportunity to highlight that there are other immediate steps that government can take today to help those living with addictions and mental illness. For example, Lennon House is a community-based initiative that has been borne out of a grieving mother's desire to support those struggling with addiction and mental health.

The mission of Lennon Recovery House is to provide a temporary home in a caring, healing community for persons recovering from addictions and co-occurring mental health disorders, to foster a culture of self-respect in caring for each other in an atmosphere of compassion, responsibility

and accountability to engage clients, staff, volunteers and the local community in a holistic plan for healthy living.

The building itself has been donated and renovations have been ongoing with the help of not-for-profits and community members. The opening of Lennon House will have a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of so many who are struggling. All they are waiting for at this point is government.

Funding and support to Lennon Recovery House

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Will this government provide funding to support Lennon House to open its doors and if so, when?

Some Hon. Members:

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Well, I'm very familiar with Lennon House. Actually, I'm a very good friend of Dianne Young's, the person that has created Lennon House, and the concept around it is very noble and I do support it.

However, opening Lennon House is not going to help with our psychiatry issue because Lennon House will not be employing psychiatrists.

Our department, as well as several departments of government, are in constant negotiations and discussions with Lennon House, and hopefully down the road we will get to an agreement.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we heard in the House a few days ago, government will invest \$225,000 to develop a PEI secure income pilot, which will provide 400 people with additional funds over a three-month period from January to

March 2020. This will provide an average of \$187 per person per month.

Those who are on social assistance will not have existing supports clawed back because there's now a policy in place to prevent that from happening after we raised it as an issue here in the House last spring.

Selecting of people for secure income pilot program

A question for the Minister of Social Development and Housing: As there are approximately 5,300 people on social assistance, and at least another 15,000 people who are working poor, how will you select the 400 people for this pilot?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

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

I do thank the hon. member for the question.

As the hon. member is aware, this is a pilot program, a secure income pilot program, and our department, the ones in my department, are working on just what the parameters of the pilot program are going to be.

As I have mentioned before to the hon. member, and the hon. members across the way, any suggestions that they do have, I am more than happy at any point in time to take them under consideration.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think I would start with suggesting poverty is not a lottery.

Poverty measurement tools re: pilot project

A question for the hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing: What poverty measurement tools do you think are the right ones to decide who gets this money and who will you consult with to determine the best measures?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If I did hear the hon. member correctly, she did state that poverty is not a lottery? I agree a hundred percent, it is not a lottery. We have a department that is dedicated completely to helping the most vulnerable on this great Island of ours. This program that we are putting forward, this pilot project, is one, to take it to that next step to identify shortfalls, to identify opportunities that we as a government, that we as a department, can come forward with to make sure that the most vulnerable in this province are taken care of and are provided for.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will repeat my previous question as I didn't get an answer. A question for the hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing: What poverty measurement tools do you think are the right ones to decide who gets the money and who will you consult with to determine these measures?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

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

In my answer to the first question that the hon. member put forward, I did indicate that our department are working on the parameters, what the delivery mechanisms, what will be looked at under this pilot program will entail.

The hon. member also asked who is going to be consulted with. We have a poverty reduction action plan that consulted with numerous ones across this province and I also put it out in my response to the hon. member's first question, that yes, at any point in time, I would be happy to meet with her, anybody across on the far side of the House, whether its third party members or

opposition members to receive their input, their suggestions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The point of doing a pilot project is to collect data to better inform future, long-term policy decisions.

Time line for informed decisions

A question for the hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing: Do you think a three-month period is a sufficient period of time to collect data to make informed decisions for the next phase, or is there a next phase at all?

Speaker: The Hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

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

That is an excellent question from the hon. member as she had referenced in her first question, \$225,000 in this fiscal year with the program, the pilot program coming into effect January of 2020. That will be for a three-month period of this fiscal year.

On a go forward basis as with any pilot, we will be monitoring it, we will be reviewing it, and yes, I am optimistic that as we move forward that we will be able to build upon that program.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any additional money for those in poverty is good news and \$187 could really make a difference for individuals and families who are struggling.

Poverty measurement tools re: pilot project (further)

A question for the Minister of Social Development and Housing: What things do you think they will have to give up when the pilot is done and you take that money away?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

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

I would say that the hon. member is possibly jumping to conclusions here. Nobody has talked anything about taking money away from people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

A question today for the Minister of Finance. We know the minister is one of the more experienced members on that side of the House. I assume that the minister was very involved in both the preparation of the Conservative election platform and of course, the budget.

We also know that there is a real crisis on Prince Edward Island right now in terms of shelter and affordability. In the Conservative platform, a promise is made to offer and I quote again: Immediate action to help Islanders with rental cost: I will be pleased to table that a little later today.

Neglect of rental assistance program in budget

So why did the minister neglect to include the immediate 4.9 million rental assistance program in the budget that was promised in the provincial election?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you for the question.

We know the third party is very well versed in our platform, and thank you very much for bringing that to my attention.

As Minister of Finance, I will tell you we met with every department. We've consulted with both the opposition and the third party about what the priorities were and we took

that back and looked at that versus what the departments thought were their priorities.

We committed to balance the budget, which we did, and moving forward we'll continue to look at all suggestions offered by both the opposition and the third party moving forward including that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party your (Indistinct).

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't recall specific discussions on the cut to housing in Prince Edward Island.

Again to the Minister of Finance, I assume the minister was involved in the preparation of that Conservative election platform. The minister has been on record over the last year talking about this housing crisis.

Was the minister involved in promising a \$5 million rental assistance program as part of that Conservative platform?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you again for that question.

As the members across the floor there in the third party realize, some of this budget was brought forward by yourselves. At the time of the election, we look at the asks, we look at the money that has to be spent in every department, and we need to look at that.

We were late into the game as far as the budget. We did what we could with the money we had. We said we were going to commit to having a surplus, which we did. We will take all of those election promises, and, moving forward, they will be implemented.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mitchell: The minister was so concerned with housing that last year she proposed a rental freeze across Prince Edward Island and as a response to

increasing costs at that time. I will table those quotes later.

Supports for tenants in rental assistance plan

Given that concern, did the minister fail to fight on behalf of tenants when the rental assistance plan was discussed during their recent budget preparation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Well as we well know, the third party across the floor got 12 years to fulfill their promises and there a number of them that we are working on now that were part of what you wanted to do, part of what the opposition party wants to do.

We will continue with all of the promises, and look at them on a need basis there.

The Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank is quite well aware after being finance minister that every department comes to you and everything – the member from O’Leary every department comes to you –

Mr. Henderson: It’s not easy.

Ms. Compton: – they’re all wonderful, wonderful suggestions. They’re all wants and asks that are all good.

We will continue to look at every ask, every want, from all the departments: the opposition and the third party going forward.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A question for the Minister of Finance: Fewer than 10 months ago, the minister demanded that the former government order IRAC to cancel a rent increase.

Mr. Henderson: Demanded?

Mr. McNeilly: At the time, she said that allowing the increase to go ahead made the suffering worse for many Islanders.

Order to IRAC re: rent increase and rent freeze

Question: Has the minister taken steps to arrange a rent freeze before any further increase takes place?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question.

As I’ve stated earlier, there are a number of issues coming forward. We know housing is at a crisis. Government is partnering with both municipalities, with the federal government, with private partners to try and rectify that problem.

It will not happen overnight. There is a huge demand on construction right now. There is a huge demand on just getting the work done.

We will continue to work with our partners across government and across the private sector to ensure that the rental freeze that is there if it needs to happen it will happen – we need to move forward from where we’re at now.

Tomorrow we could use 2,000 new houses or new accommodations. We do not have them right now, but we are working towards that.

Thank you.

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

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. McNeilly: I want to follow-up on a question raised earlier.

In a September 25th, 2018, press release, the minister called the rent increase allowed by IRAC a ‘flawed process.’ She also said a quote: Enough is enough. Cancel this rent hike.

I will table this later.

If the minister was sincere in calling the process flawed, will the minister please

explain the steps taken by government to fix this issue?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In opposition we ask many questions, I will admit that. I expect both the opposition and the third party to continue to question government. I said it before, opposition is here to oppose, to make sure that the decisions that government make are the right ones or the very best ones we can make. I will continue to stand by that in government, as I did in opposition and I appreciate the question.

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

Mr. McNeilly: That's good because I only have one more.

Platform commitment of rental assistance program

In the platform, it says something about launching a mobile rental voucher, \$4.875 million this year. Given the ministers statement 10 months ago and her description of the situation as a crisis, can Islanders expect to see government meet its election province and introduce a rental assistance program as soon as possible?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

We will again, fulfill our platform commitments. That whole list you have over there, we will work towards filling every one of those commitments over the next term of our government. As long as we are here, we will work on that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Climate change is certainly touching us all in PEI and the lobster industry is no exception. Research is critical to ensuring our future generations enjoy the benefits that people are right now.

Research for fishing industry re: climate change

You would know the Atlantic Fisheries Fund is a great resource for research into this type of thing. I have a question today for the minister of fisheries: What is the minister doing to encourage research that helps prepare the lobster fishery for changes relating to our changing climate.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've actually have many briefings on the AFF, also with the PEIFA on this issue. I know the Atlantic Fisheries Fund is basically for PEI to run a \$38 million fund available over seven years. It basically has three pillars in regarding around innovation, sustainability and also infrastructure, which also touches on the science partnership.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What is the minister doing to encourage research into the lobster industry so that the future changes on the industry are integrated?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank you hon. member for his question.

Like I say, I've actually met with industry many times, I encourage people to reach into the AFF and make the applications if they have any type of project that will help the industry. I know that we've been very successful in some projects, like onboard processing and holding capacity, the adding of shelters over top of vessels which also increases quality. There's some other projects that are also being looked at also.

I encourage anybody that has a project to help that industry to put an application in.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh, your second supplementary.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The lobster industry is worth over \$2 billion a year nationally, yet there's no current research chair for lobster science in Canada. Other resource industries like agriculture and fisheries have research chairs to ensure there is scientific research being conducted to support the sector.

Need for lobster industry research chair

A question to the hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities, will you advocate your fellow fishery ministers across the country about the need for a lobster industry research chair to improve environmental and economic health of the lobster industry and will you push them to have that located right here in PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's actually an excellent question and I think that would be great for PEI. I must mention though right now, we have a lobster biologist, Robert McMillan on staff and he's to take care of lobster resource monitoring program and that's in conjunction with DFO and also the PEIFA, but I will lobby and I will move forward on that suggestion.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

If the three most common chronic health conditions in Canada, arthritis is number one, hypertension/high blood pressure is number two and hearing loss is number three. Hearing loss is a chronic condition that can lead to more serious issues and health problems if hearing and accessibility tools are not available or affordable.

Hearing loss serious issue for Islanders

A question to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness: Does government consider hearing loss to be a serious issue for all Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Yes, hearing loss is definitely a concern to this government and that's why we have campaigns in place to help educate people, especially around worksites, to wear the proper ear protection and to our youth as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Indeed, prevention is a very important aspect of this, but later today I will be presenting documents from an organization called Hear PEI, including a petition with over 2,000 signatures calling for government to extend coverage for all Islanders suffering from hearing loss.

Here on PEI, seniors and adults over 65 are not treated equally in access to hearing aid funding. Those under 65 apply through the accessibility supports program and applicants qualify based on their net income, and almost everybody qualifies. Those over 65 have to apply through the income supports program, and applicants qualify based on their assets. Currently, anybody with assets over \$2,500 becomes ineligible.

Accessibility to funding for hearing aids

To the same minister: Why are there two different measures for accessibility to funding for hearing aids?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Mr. Speaker?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

Mr. Hudson: Yes, and I do appreciate the question that the hon. member is bringing forward.

Hearing loss is a challenge for anyone at any age group and is more prevalent in seniors.

Will we look at this? Can we look at this on a go-forward basis? I would say yes, absolutely. Can I give a guarantee or would I give a guarantee today? I'm not in a position to do that for the hon. member or for this House.

At this point in time, Island seniors – the hon. member is correct – Island seniors who are low income do qualify on an annual basis for up to \$1,500 per hearing aid, so which would be, if my information is accurate, would be \$3,000 per individual senior.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

That's true for seniors under 65, but those over 65 it's means tested and if you have \$2,500 in your bank account you qualify for zero dollars.

Untreated hearing loss has been associated with a number of other conditions, including depression, social isolation, increased risk for falls and accidents, and it often contributed to a misdiagnosis of dementia. All of these result in increased health care expenditures to government, and hearing almost always, of course, deteriorates as we get older, resulting in the demographic most in need of supports being the one where funding is most lacking.

To the same minister, or to the Minister of Health and Wellness, I don't really mind: Why is government prepared to fund the cost of issues that often result from hearing loss, such as depression and dementia, but is not seriously looking at ways to help those

with hearing loss be able to afford hearing aids?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

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

Again, I thank the hon. member for the question.

I think on a go-forward basis, as I had said, hon. member, previously, I'm not in a position to stand here today that I would give any commitment with that. I think that it is a very pertinent question that you have raised – suggestion that you have brought forward and as we move forward as a government, certainly one that I personally would be willing to take under consideration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Gender-based sexual violence is a pervasive issue in Canada, particularly for young Canadian women. 47% of all sexual assault incidents reported in Canada were committed against women aged 15 to 24, with 41% of these cases having been reported by students.

Under reporting is common, and it's been estimated that as many as one in five women will experience some form of sexual assault while attending a university or college.

Last year, the Legislature passed the *Post-Secondary Institution Sexual Violence Policies Act*, which has yet to be proclaimed.

Proclamation of Bill 41 re: protection of students

A question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Will your government proclaim this act to ensure that students have strong supports and protections before they return to school in the fall?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the member for that question. It is a very serious issue and those stats are really incredible with the one in five. It's something that needs to be addressed and it's great that that legislation was brought forward.

I'm meeting with the UPEI Student Union and that's definitely one of their priorities as well. I will get back to the member with a definitive answer, but I'll talk to my department and I don't see a problem with getting that proclaimed.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate that.

Having policies in place to protect students is an important start to addressing sexual violence, however these policies place greater expectations on institutions especially when it comes to investigating reports and disclosures, and providing accommodations and supports to survivors. All of which require dedicated resources.

Financial support for sexual violence policy implementation

A question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: How will your government support these institutions as they implement their policies, and will this include financial support?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Indeed, that's an important consideration. Whenever you make legislative changes and proclaim legislation, you have to consider how it's going to be supported and implemented. That would be part of what we need to consider in the department before we do proclaim the legislation.

I'll get back to the member with some more details on exactly how we would do that, but we have been in discussions with postsecondary institutions. We'll continue those discussions to make sure that if and when we do proclaim that legislation, the supports are there.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During the campaign, the PC Party committed to introducing the third option to make it easier for survivors to make disclosures of sexual violence.

This would allow survivors to go to the hospital after the assault has occurred, get an examination done with the proper evidence taken, then it can be stored for up to a year buying the survivor some time to work through the trauma and decide if they would like to press charges or not.

Access to services for disclosure of sexual violence

A question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: When will Islanders be able to access this service?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the member across, I acknowledge the importance of your question.

Our department is working quite diligently to get this out and I'll get the answer to you right away on the timeline.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When I had a closer look at what the department of environment was spending its roughly \$7.8 million budget on, a few questions arose. This budget is expected to almost double in the coming years to \$13.6 million.

Desired results from grants re: environment

Question to the minister responsible for environment: What are the desired results from the expenditure of funds through grants from this department?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If I understand the funds that the member's talking about related to climate change then there's really two areas we're trying to address. One is adaptation and that's where there's activities that are taking place to help sort of repair the results of climate change and adapt to them.

The second one would be mitigation, which is trying to reduce the amount of carbon emissions.

Perhaps I misunderstood the question, my apologies.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive your final question.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just to clarify for the minister, what I was speaking to was some subsidies that go to – well part of it is for free drivers' license, but the rest of it goes to subsidizing energies.

Subsidizing energy rebates

So I was just wondering if you could comment on what the purpose of those funds and what all of the new expenditures for this year might be?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for the clarification.

Yes, so the portion which are the energy rebates that are given for – partly for electricity.

I believe the idea there was to give people an incentive to move towards devices that use electricity and do a fuel switching.

The idea was if you're – there's a tax on gas, for example, you can move to an electric vehicle where in fact there's a rebate – an energy rebate on the electricity that's used to power that. It would give an incentive.

I should say that the experts in my department have some mixed feelings on this rebate, and we're reviewing that and I look forward to having some discussions with the member in the future as to how best we might continue that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]