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of Prince Edward Island**

**Responses to Questions and
Oral Question Period**

(Preliminary Proceedings)

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No. 26

The Honourable Sidney MacEwen, Speaker

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[1:22 p.m.]

[Hon. S. MacEwen in the chair]

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

A question to the Minister of Education.

For a couple of weeks now, we've been trying very hard to determine the willingness of this government to accept responsibility for actions that took place in our school system, and unfortunately, we continue to hit a series of brick walls.

Again and again, the Minister of Education, the Premier, and the Minister of Social Development all avoid their responsibility to answer questions and provide clarity on extremely serious matters. Instead, both the Premier and the Minister of Education have resorted to accusations of politics and witch hunt. It's pitiful, pathetic, and shameful.

I will open again with a question that I have asked multiple times before, and I hope the minister has reflected on his responses over the last few days.

Safety of children in schools (further)

My question to the minister: What did the minister know, when did he know it, and why is he doing nothing?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly have reflected on a lot of what has gone on in this House in the last couple of weeks. Look, member, we allowed the police investigation to occur without interference. We advised PSB to ensure any and all incidents were reported immediately.

Once the investigation concluded, a statement of facts was presented, and a guilty plea entered, we immediately ordered a third-party review

completely independent of government, led by a highly regarded leader within this province. We're going to continue to work with our education authorities to get to the bottom of this, and I look forward to the results of the third-party review.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, thanks to the hard work of Nicola MacLeod, we found out that a parent at West Kent reported an incident. The parent assumed, as I believe many parents would assume, that this complaint would be forwarded to the police.

Minister, why did the Public Schools Branch neglect to pass on the parent's concerns to the police?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly can't really comment on that particular question; that would be perhaps a question for the PSB and the local police authority.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

But this minister does not know his responsibility. He is responsible for the PSB, and they are responsible to report to him. This is a very troubling matter. We have crimes being reported to responsible authorities, and those authorities decided to do absolutely nothing.

Where does the Public Schools Branch get the expertise to investigate and determine whether a crime against children has been committed, minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

[1:25 p.m.]

Hon. R. Croucher: You know what? That's finally a good question, member. That is exactly why we have initiated a third-party review: to answer some of those questions.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

But all of these have been good questions. These are questions that are put to us from parents who are out there, who are concerned because no one over there will respond to them.

According to public documents, the parent went to the school to report the crime. That same day, the principal contacted the Public Schools Branch. That same day, the Public Schools Branch provided questions to be asked to the parent and the child. Now, that direction advice came from a human resources official at the Public Schools Branch.

Will the minister please tell the House what qualifications the human resources official had to provide guidance on allegations of crime from a distance?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think that – well, first of all, I just want to say again that I am happy that we have gotten to the point that justice has been served in this case, and I hope that the offender spends a very long time behind bars. We're now at the point where we can move forward and get answers to many of the questions that have been asked in here. I, too, have many questions, and I have faith in the process that we've undertaken, that we will get answers to some of them. Some of the answers we receive may be very difficult.

I know that the department continues to engage with Canadian Centre for Child Protection. That has been ongoing since these original charges were laid back last summer. I know there have been some very productive discussions and I know that they are very well versed in best practices in these types of incidents. We're moving in that direction, taking advice and consultation from that group, and I hope that we can get to the point where parents in this province can have confidence that our number

one priority is the safety of children in our schools.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, with the responses that we're getting from that side of the House, parents will not have faith for some time.

It looks like the principal sent notes to the Public Schools Branch the very same day as the interview with the parent and the child about this crime.

Minister, were those notes reviewed only by the human resources official, or were those notes provided to other officials in the Public Schools Branch?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Again, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many more times I can say this to the Leader of the Opposition, but that's exactly why we have initiated a third-party review. All of those facts will be determined in that review and will be tabled here with full transparency to this House.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

But again, we don't know what the questions are and how these will be determined. We don't know what the mandate is that's given for this review.

Back to that very same day, the principal advised the parent of the victim to report the crime to the police if he felt it was best. In other words, the school system and the Public Schools Branch washed their hands of the entire matter. They left the whole crime in the hands of the victim and neglected their obvious responsibility to protect a child.

Has the minister been able to find out whether this is normal procedure, and has he figured out whether similar events may have taken place?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Mr. Speaker, it's really, really hard to respond to these questions without frustration because they continue to ask the same questions.

The terms of reference, when they are finalized, will be shared with this House to answer your question in your preamble. To answer your second question, again, all of these details will be fully transparent and presented to this House when that review is completed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much.

Well, he is frustrated because he doesn't want to answer the questions. That's why. Can you only imagine the frustration parents have out there? Just imagine that.

Here's a quick summary: A crime takes place on Tuesday, April 30th, 2024. The next day, the victim and the parent report this crime to the school. That same day, the parent and child subject themselves to an interview with school officials and the information is provided to the Public Schools Branch. Again, the very same day, the parent is advised that it is their decision whether to contact the police. It's up to them: a worried parent and a victimized child. Guess what? The pedophile kept on teaching, and the system takes zero – zero – additional steps to protect children.

Will the minister please explain why no one has been fired over this?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

[1:30 p.m.]

Hon. R. Croucher: Again, it wasn't until a statement of facts came out and a guilty plea was entered that we realized who this individual truly was. As far as disciplinary actions that may or may not occur, I will wait until the review is finalized to make that determination.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, the minister likes to say that he is taking immediate action and acting swiftly.

Quick question: How many days between the guilty plea and the failure of an inquiry into these institutional failures, and how many days between the predator being charged with these crimes in the school and the start of an inquiry?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Failure of inquiry? There is an inquiry that is underway currently. There's no failure on this side of the House.

The Premier – I'll just build upon what he had said about the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. I had a fantastic and very productive meeting with them yesterday, and full praise for the steps that this government has taken in the wake of this horrendous and heinous situation. We're going to continue to go down that same path.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I'll ask the question again because I didn't say it was a failure of the inquiry.

How many days between the guilty plea and the start of an inquiry into these institutional failures, and how many days between the predator being charged with these crimes in the school and the start of an inquiry?

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker...

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: ... (Indistinct) the Opposition the wrong information, so I'll take that back to you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, I've spoken to many, many people about these matters – many parents and many Islanders – and they don't just want some sort of review and policy assessment. Quite frankly, they want to know who failed,

and they want heads to roll. I will tell you this: I want heads to roll as well.

Will the minister assure this House that the inquiry he has promised will determine the answers to this question, right up to and including the current and former Ministers of Education: Who knew what and when?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For as many people as the Leader of the Opposition spoke to, I assure you, I've probably spoken to more. The results of that review, whatever the recommendations are from that, will be taken very seriously and worked on to implement.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much.

But we want to be assured that we find out what happened. How did the system fail? Who failed? That's what we're looking to ask.

In cases like this, it should be a baseline standard to believe victims so that their safety is prioritized and a proper, thorough investigation can begin. That does not limit the presumption of innocence. Believing the victim means that a great deal of effort is made to investigate allegations. It should be an obvious starting principle.

In this case, an investigation opened and shut during business hours on May 1st, 2024 – open and shut.

Question to the minister: Was the pedophile interviewed as part of this so-called investigation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: This so-called investigation – review, inquiry – will determine many of those questions that the member is asking. I don't know how many more times I can say that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'll say it again, too: The frustration level of parents and Islanders is rising day by day with new information coming out. Knowing that this government knew this information, also, makes it even worse. They are required to provide a safe space for children, and they have not done that.

Like I said, believing victims is the first step in assuring that they are protected and that serious allegations are investigated. In this case, we're talking about elementary school-aged children.

To the same minister: Parents want to know about the 2023 incident at West Kent. Was the pedophile interviewed as part of this so-called investigation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: I understand that parents want a safe and secure environment for their students. I do believe that the educators and the staff in our system are providing just that.

Again, our review is going to bring to light a lot of these questions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Since I can't get any answers, I'm going to have to rely on some hypotheticals. If this minister wishes to confirm or deny, that's up to him, I suppose.

If the pedophile was interviewed, that means that his version of events took precedence over the victim. Surely the minister would agree that taking the word of an accused predator over a child and their parent is a complete violation of justice, correct?

[1:35 p.m.]

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Leader of the Opposition is making some pretty wild statements over there. I don't even know how to answer that, Mr. Speaker. We are continuing to work towards making our system as safe and secure for our children as possible.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: I'm getting nowhere with this minister with any answers.

A question to the Minister of Social Development: Who should take precedence in a case like this, a parent and a child reporting the crime or the word of a predator?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, we're getting a lot of questions that we don't have the answers to, a lot of hypothetical questions.

I've already stated that we are seeking the answers to these questions as much as those on the opposite side of this room. We are undertaking a process to seek the answers. They are not all available to us now. We're getting very detailed questions that we simply cannot answer at this time.

We're embarking on a process to get those answers, and the minister has committed to providing the answers to this House when we have them.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, this process should have been taking place not only a year ago, but now we're finding out it should have started two years ago. Two years ago.

A question to the Premier. There are so many questions, and parents have so, so many concerns. Parents want to provide input publicly, and they want answers publicly. Will the Premier assure this House that the Jenkins review is public, and that Islanders will have the opportunity to hear their questions and concerns heard in a public forum?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, he's asking very specifically about the review process. I believe

we're finalizing the terms of reference, what that looks like. I don't know what type of public engagement, if any, occurs throughout the review.

There were questions here last week about the Public Schools Branch engaging with the school community. I think that that's a reasonable request as well. We'll engage with the public to give them that sense of confidence that they deserve that we are providing a safe environment for children in schools.

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

G. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, the public trust has been deeply shaken, and rightfully so. Four separate incidents of grave misconduct in our public schools went unreported to police – four. People are appalled at what has come to light.

Question to the Premier.

The director of the Public Schools Branch says the person responsible is Mr. Craswell. Of course he is. That's being dealt with in the courts, but what about the system that failed to report these incidents?

Safety of children in schools (further)

Does the Premier believe his government and the PSB bear no responsibility for failing to notify police or Child Protection?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: I think in this case, with the hindsight that we have that this offender had malicious intent, the system obviously failed the victims, and I've apologized in this House for that.

I think moving forward, we're trying to strengthen the safeguards in the system. That can only be done through methodical review of exactly what took place. Whether it was human failure, system failure, a combination of all of these things, that's what we're setting out to correct, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, we know now that three of those incidents happened in 2023, and still, no one called the police. In fact, one parent

was led to believe the matter had been reported, only to find out 14 months later that it had not.

Question to the Premier: How can parents trust this system when even the most basic legal duty to report is being ignored? Is there a systemic issue here that's making teachers and staff feel that they can't fulfill their legal duty to report?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's a lot of speculation for me to stand up and answer some of these questions, but I can only speculate – based on what I know now – that people in the system may not have been equipped to make the kinds of determinations that they needed to in this case.

I've said there may have been system failure; there may have been human error, misjudgments.... These are the kinds of answers we're seeking with the review that we've undertaken, and we've committed to share those answers with the House.

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

G. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, there's growing fear amongst parents that the system protects itself over students.

[1:40 p.m.]

Question to the Premier: As the Minister of Education just said, the terms of reference will be shared in this House. Will those terms of reference for an external review include a full investigation into whether there is institutional bias in our education system that prioritizes protecting adults over children?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think that Justice Jenkins is the perfect person to make that type of determination. He's been on the bench for many years in this province and has had to adjudicate many difficult cases. I think that we'll get an honest review and assessment of what took place, and I'm looking forward to the results of that review.

I want answers to many of the questions that have been asked in this House, just as everyone

on this side, and I look forward to that process unfolding, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, I asked this, and I'll ask again today. I'll ask it to you, Mr. Premier.

Parents are calling for a public meeting. They have said this, and they had a date last week that they were hoping to get an answer by. They deserve answers.

Will you commit to holding a public meeting, Mr. Premier?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, I am not opposed to public engagement to give the school community a sense that this is being dealt with. I'm not sure, at this point in the process, what would actually take place at a public meeting, but I would certainly encourage the Public Schools Branch to establish a robust communication strategy throughout this whole process, whether it involves holding public meetings or just regular updates at intervals throughout this process.

I am absolutely in favour of open and honest communication throughout this whole process, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: I'm not sure that's a definite answer for the parents, but that's what they're asking us for.

Parents don't want internal cover-ups, they want real accountability.

Question to the Premier – this is something that you can do pretty quickly: Will you order school authorities to stop conducting internal investigations and direct them to report any future allegations directly to police or Child Protection immediately and without delay?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's presumptive and unfair to describe this as internal cover-ups. That's why we're embarking on a process to discover the facts of what occurred here in this case.

But based on our engagement with the Centre for Child Protection and what they know about best practices – what they've been advocating for across this country for several years now – we are moving in the direction of those best practices whereby I envision an independent body where these types of incidents are reported and investigated.

I think that we do know, based on our conversations with this group, that that is best practice, and we're committed to implementing best practices, but we have a process that can take place. Those best practices can be implemented, I believe, as we undertake this review.

We're moving to strengthen our safeguards in the school system and give confidence to families who send their children to school every day.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is not the first time I've advocated for improved transparency and accountability when it comes to allegations of sexual misconduct in Island schools. Back in 2020, after another teacher was charged with offences against their students, I proposed legislative changes that I will again be proposing tomorrow to government.

The Premier and the minister at the time went through the motions of drafting the changes and consulting stakeholders, but ultimately chose not to enact changes, through legislation or directive, that would have improved transparency and accountability with respect to sexual misconduct in schools.

Safety of children in schools (further)

Question to the Premier: Will your government be different and support my amendments to the *Education Act* this sitting that will legislate annual reporting of the number of allegations of sexual misconduct in public schools, the required response to those allegations, and what supports are available for students?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the member: I did review your bill that's coming tomorrow. I can't change what was done in the past, but we can move forward, and absolutely, I think we can support your bill.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, minister.

[1:45 p.m.]

The amendment legislates the requirement for a sexual misconduct policy that would establish a clear response to allegations of sexual misconduct. Through conversations with teachers and staff over the past few weeks, they tell me there is a need for clear, consistent response to these types of allegations.

This need is clearly highlighted by the new information reported by CBC yesterday that parents of the student who reported an incident against Craswell in 2023 assumed that police were notified; however, they were not.

Question to the Premier: Transparency is key to ensuring that no child falls through the cracks of uncertainty. Do you commit to legislating changes this sitting to increase this transparency?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: We're nearing the end of this session, so I'm assuming that the member is inquiring about supporting her bill that she's bringing to the floor. The Minister of Education has indicated that he agrees with her bill and that he can support, and I think that we'll have that support on this side of the House.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was asking if your government will be bringing anything forward. A third party with limited resources can make something happen, so I was hoping government might have something to bring too.

The amendment that I will be tabling additionally requires that the number of allegations of sexual misconduct made in Island schools be reported by the PSB annually. This not only improves transparency but also promotes accountability by ensuring that PSB receives information on every allegation made within our public schools and allows them to request any additional information necessary to ensure a situation like the Craswell case never happens again.

Question to the Premier: This is a good step in the right direction, but it should not be the only change we see. Do you commit to introducing further legislative or policy changes to improve the PSB's response to sexual misconduct allegations from students?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a good question. It's a very dense question; a lot of information in there. But let me say, when I learned about the member's bill, my first question was: Is it going to preempt or conflict in any way with the direction we're moving with the advice of the Centre for Child Protection towards these best practices for reporting an investigation?

The initial response I received was no, and that would be my concern with government bringing any further legislation now. I would like legislation to be informed by the process that we're undertaking right now.

I don't believe, based on what I've discovered, that your bill would preempt that in any way, but I'm cautious, bringing legislation before I understand all of the facts and get advice on how we should proceed from here. So, I'll take that approach and I'm looking forward to seeing the bill on the floor.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Housing, Land and Communities and many other members of this government have, for years, heard allegations of violations of the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* occurring in and around the municipality of Three Rivers. The minister finally, on February 4th, directed IRAC to conduct an investigation

into the matter; however, this was after much conflict and division was allowed to happen in the community.

LPA violation investigation

My question is to the Minister of Land. It's been over three months, minister, since you ordered the investigation. Would you please tell Islanders what the status of the investigation is, and when did IRAC say it will be done?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, it's with IRAC, which is a quasi-judicial body that we don't direct. I mean, I'm able to send them a letter as a minister – or through Cabinet; we're able to send a letter – asking them to do an investigation. At this point, there's been no indication of when it will be complete, but there's been indication that work is being done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: The minister's letter, Mr. Speaker, to IRAC only references GWBI and GEBIS. The letter fails to include the various other Buddhist-controlled organizations on PEI such as Moonlight International Foundation that owns hundreds of acres of land. The minister's letter also fails to make reference to the various individual directors of these organizations who also own significant amounts of land on PEI and have connections across the multiple organizations operating on PEI.

Question to the same minister: IRAC's operating grant for this coming year does not include any additional funding beyond what government gave last year. Given the complexity of the investigation, minister, without additional funding or resources, how will IRAC be able to conduct a full and proper investigation that will put this issue to rest?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When we talked to them, we said if you need extra resources, we'll give it to you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

[1:50 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, we all know that the issue is not how much land GEBIS and GWBI own; it is clear on paper that these two corporations alone are in compliance with our land limits. The issue is the amount of land owned by those who are affiliated with these and other organizations who may hold direct control or a beneficial ownership interest over those lands. If this investigation does not turn over all the necessary stones, it's not going to get to the root of the issue of whether our land laws were broken.

Question to the same minister: This investigation could take some time to get done, and get done correctly. We don't have a timeline as of yet. You've already indicated, minister, that the report will be released to the public when it's done, but will you commit, minister, to providing updates and information to the public as the investigation progresses so that tensions don't, once again, arise in the community?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think I have this under control. That's the area that I live in. While my reputation might not be good to the Green Party, it is in the district that I represent with 70 percent of the vote.

I will say that since I've taken action on this, the issue has died down. People do believe that we are taking action. People do believe that I'm serious when I say I'm concerned. People do believe that we will get to the root of this.

That said, we're trying to engage this with as much transparency as possible, which is why I said I'd make the report public. Again, I will note – and you should know this; you're a lawyer but obviously, probably not a very good one – that IRAC doesn't answer to me. IRAC is an independent body. I am not going to order them to give you weekly reports, or weekly reports to this Legislative Assembly. We've

asked them for a report. They are a legal entity, a quasi-judicial body, and they need to have their own independence to make this move forward. I'm not going to meddle in their independence.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Community Economic Development Business – or the CEDB – program has great potential to empower Islanders to invest in our economy by supporting locally owned businesses, more important now than ever. But most businesses and Islanders are still unsure of how the program works and how it can benefit them.

CEDB program

Question to the Minister of Finance: Can the minister clarify how many businesses are currently registered for the CEDB program, what the benefits are for the investors, and whether these investments are eligible to be held in things like individuals' RRSPs and TFSA's?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. J. Burrige: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I can tell you is this program has been in existence since 2014. There were some adjustments made to kind of open it up in 2021, trying to encourage more investment and more businesses to take this up.

So far in 2025, there's been \$3.3 million in investments made by 237 individuals under two companies. That's just this year, so that's exciting.

I think you can claim – as an individual, you can receive a CEDB tax credit for up to \$20,000 annually.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

It is a great program. I've participated in the CEED program to help install my PV solar panels. I think that we really need to get the details out there. I think Islanders need to know and businesses need to know so that there is a greater uptake. It's not clear what the benefits are sometimes and how an individual investing there can get more than just the 35 percent equity tax credit.

In the recent Speech from the Throne, government signalled its intent to review and improve the CEED program to help investment dollars stay on Prince Edward Island. This is welcome news, but Islanders want to know what changes are being considered and when they can expect action.

Question to the Minister of Finance: When will the review of the CEED program take place, and what specific improvements are being considered to enhance accessibility and uptake by both investors and businesses?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. J. Burrige: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Absolutely. The review is going to happen over the next few months. Our work will be trying to figure out how we can get more Island investors in this, as well as more businesses. We need to figure out what barriers businesses look at to open up their business to this type of investment. What stops them from doing that?

Also, on the PEI investor side is: How do they decide how to invest their money?

We want to be able to engage stakeholders and try to figure out the answers to those questions, which should actually help us to improve the barriers to getting into this.

[1:55 p.m.]

I will say, like I said before, there were adjustments made to open it up further in 2021. We did see an improvement, so we hope to improve again here with a quick review here over the next few months.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I look forward to it. Hopefully, there's a public input piece to that because I think there's a lot of people who have a great input.

Programs like the sustainable communities initiative, through the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action, encourage community-led projects that support things like clean energy, local food, and long-term sustainability, exactly the kind of initiatives that could benefit from access to community-based investment.

Also, the community renewable energy generation fund is set up to advance six to ten local community-driven projects to generate cleaner and greener power annually.

The CEED program could provide a powerful financing tool, supporting these initiatives if properly aligned, especially for generating local energy. I think there's a huge opportunity for hydro with all the dams that exist across the Island.

Question to the Minister of Finance: Will the minister work to ensure that the CEED program is enhanced in a way that enables communities to invest in themselves, especially for local energy generation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. J. Burrige: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, member, for the question.

That's a nice connect that you've made between those two programs. I'll certainly work with my colleague over in Energy and Environment to see what we can do to try to connect those two.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Many students often need extra help outside of school hours to keep up with the coursework or overcome their unique learning challenges. While tutoring can provide that personalized support, it is often expensive and not accessible to everyone. It's important that all students have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their ability to pay for extra help.

Tutor rebate program

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Can the minister outline what supports are currently available to assist students requiring additional academic help outside of regular school hours?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and a great question from the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke highlighting the important work that our tutors do in our schools right across the province. They play a really crucial role in assisting the learning needs of our kids.

I know that the PSB has allocated, I believe, \$50,000 in the 2025-2026 budget. That money is mainly going to go towards increasing the wages for our tutors. I believe they're paid at or near minimum wage, which really is unacceptable. They need to be paid better for the important work that they do.

One of the things that we are doing is trying to get that wage up so that we can attract that talent to our system moving forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the last provincial election, our PC Party committed to providing a \$500 tutor rebate to help families cover the cost of additional academic support for their children. This would make tutoring more accessible to the students who need it the most.

Question to the Minister of Finance: Can the minister provide an update on the status of the \$500 tutor rebate program and inform Islanders when they can expect to see the program roll out?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. J. Burrige: (Indistinct) Finance today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When the platform came out, the tutor tax rebate did sit under my mandate. What we found – and what we were struggling with – is we didn't know much about tutoring within the education

system. So, what we've done is we've kind of handed that over to Education and Early Years because they have boots on the ground and can understand how that would better fit.

What Finance will do is, after that policy work is done in that, we will absolutely administer and facilitate that tax rebate from our end. But really, the people who know that space should be working on the policy behind it, so that's where that sits right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, minister.

Tutoring can be a vital tool to help students succeed, but the high cost often puts it out of reach for many families. Even households with moderate or above-average incomes can find it difficult to afford regular tutoring, especially when supporting multiple children.

If the department moves forward with a rebate program, it's important that the program is designed to support as many students as possible, not just those under a strict income threshold.

Since this has been moved to Education, I'll direct my question to the Minister of Education and Early Years: Will you ensure that, if income eligibility is part of the tutor rebate program, the threshold is set high enough to make the program accessible to a wide range of families who really need it?

[2:00 p.m.]

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Years.

Hon. R. Croucher: Well, Mr. Speaker, some really good questions coming from some members on that side of the House.

As far as income eligibility and thresholds, certainly, we would look at those, member. But I'm going to be completely honest with you, I'm not well enough versed to answer that properly for you. I will bring that back.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, as we know, there are a variety of liquor control regulations and rules from one province to the next, with internal trade barriers now all the talk and tourism season about to commence.

When residents from other provinces come to PEI – especially during the winter months – and are seeking a place to eat with a young family, many of our takeouts and food locations are shut down for the off-season.

Liquor control regulations

Question to the minister responsible for the Liquor Control Commission: Can a family with small children, who are minors, go to a licensed establishment and have a meal?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. J. Burridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think they can. I think there are some factors around how much food is being served, that they’re eating food when they’re there, and then I think that kind of bases whether they can have some alcoholic beverages while they’re there.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness.

R. Henderson: In fact, you’re right, minister; they can. But what happens if it’s in the evening and entertainment commences?

Question to the minister: Can a family with minors, who have ordered a meal previous to the entertainment starting, finish consuming their meal they ordered legally, on PEI, at an establishment, when entertainment starts?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. J. Burridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think there are some timing factors there as well. I don’t think we want to have minors in restaurants past a certain time when.... So, I think there is a timing factor there, but that’s certainly something I can look into and come back with.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness, final question.

R. Henderson: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, actually, the answer is no, they cannot. Although they can in some provinces, PEI does not allow that to happen. In fact, a local brewery was fined and a waitress lost her liquor serving privileges because the entertainment commenced before the family with a minor finished their meal.

Minister, do you think that is fair? Will you change the regulations so that it’s the same in every other province, as we’re supposed to be doing with our internal trade mechanisms?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. J. Burridge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I get your point. I will say that we are working through modernization of our *Liquor Control Act*, so that is something we can absolutely take back and bring into consideration when we’re going through that review.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]