



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island**

**Responses to Questions and
Oral Question Period**

(Preliminary Proceedings)

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No. 9

The Honourable Sidney MacEwen, Speaker

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[1:39 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.

Much has been said about this government's bizarre priorities, but nothing is more out of touch than its \$10 million deal with the NHL.

While Islanders struggle with affordability, this Premier and his government have had no problem sinking public money into fancy trips, private parties, hockey games, and a few scattered rink board ads. The minister insists that this deal is worth it, and constantly points to the Tourism Industry Association of Prince Edward Island as his biggest cheerleader.

[1:40 p.m.]

Tourism contract with NHL (further)

Question to the Minister of Tourism: How many members make up TIAPEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

Hon. Z. Bell: Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? That's a question I don't know the full answer to. I do know that there is the TIAPEI board, and I do know that there are 4,500 operators, and there is a full-time equivalency of 8,900 employees in the province through tourism. But if you actually broke that down, it's probably close to about 35,000 people that work in tourism here in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The actual answer of how many members are in TIAPEI is approximately 500.

The industry association isn't even unified behind this absurd deal. More and more operators and businesses owners and experts are speaking out, and the message is clear. This money could have been far better spent promoting Island tourism and not slapping a PEI logo on rink boards.

Question to the same minister: Will you table the communications between your office and TIAPEI that prove, as you claimed yesterday, that TIAPEI brought this deal to you?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will bring that back. Corryn Clemence was on *Compass* the other night and said that that was in fact how this came to be, that the NHL had approached TIAPEI. TIAPEI said, "You know what? This is something that – we should be talking with the Tourism department in PEI and try to see if we can bring this to light."

I do want to kind of make a note, too, because it was brought to my attention where you said the operators that are against this. I encourage any operator that has ideas to try to help promote PEI in any light – I ask them to bring that. One thing, hon. member – I hear you every day saying how bad this contract is. I have yet to hear a solution on how you think that we should be bringing more people here.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, this minister stands every day, and he boasts about the numbers. He says it's not because of the tourism operators and the product and the marketing that they do, it's because of the NHL deal. But I can tell this minister right now that our neighbouring provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have also had an increase to tourism, and they didn't spend \$10 million on an NHL deal.

Just last week, one of PEI's leading tourism marketing experts, Harvey Sawler, penned a letter in the *Eastern Graphic* titled: "PEI is a pipsqueak to the NHL."

[Interjections]

Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is trying to ask a question.

[Interjections]

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker....

[Interjections]

Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor; he's trying to ask a question.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, this is someone who has held senior roles across the region: Tourism PEI, ACOA, New Brunswick tourism, and director of marketing for the Confederation Centre.

To the same minister: Is Mr. Sawler a member of the Tourism Industry Association of PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There was a lot in that preamble. There was a lot in the question. I will get to your question in one second.

Now, as the Tourism minister, I do speak with the ministers from other provinces, and it's not something that you do want to brag about, and it's not something you want everybody.... Because what's good for the region in the Maritimes and Atlantic Canada is good for PEI. I've heard that so many times: when you talk to people who have no idea what Prince Edward Island is, and they say, "Oh, you're near Nova Scotia. Yes." If we can get them to know what Nova Scotia is, then the hope is that that way, they will find out what PEI is.

So, where you mentioned that other provinces – I tabled this, the visitor volume. Nova Scotia was at 88 percent of 2019, which was the record. Newfoundland and Labrador was at 93 percent for visitor volume. In 2019, we were at 105 percent. So, our province is doing well.

I apologize for the longwindedness, Mr. Speaker, but yes, to your question, Mr. Sawler is a member of TIAPEI.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, this minister didn't boost tourism. All he did was boost his air miles.

Mr. Sawler has national-level experience and credibility, so you'd think that the minister or the Premier might take his criticism seriously, but instead, they're plowing ahead, ignoring the outrage from Islanders and brushing off expert advice.

[1:45 p.m.]

To the same minister: If a respected TIAPEI member like Mr. Sawler is opposed to the NHL deal, how many other members feel the same? Did you even ask, or are you simply hiding behind a CEO because they're a convenient buffer?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

Hon. Z. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I mentioned this earlier in my response. Mr. Sawler went the way he did. He did an op-ed in the *Graphic* newspaper.

I will stand by – if you do have a question or a concern on it, I encourage you to talk to me and tell me because like I said, at the end of the day, the member who's sat behind you – and we've had that conversation outside as well. Your job is to try to promote PEI. That has been my job. That has been my role ever since I stepped into this, which is six months ago today. I've tried to do the best job I can to try to promote PEI.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

And my job is to hold government to account for the decisions they make, or they don't make.

This government wants Islanders to believe that the entire tourism industry is behind this deal, but the cracks are showing. Islanders are fed up, and even people in the industry can't understand why you pour millions of dollars into a deal with so little, if any, return on investment.

To the same minister: Which so-called independent consultant did you hire to tell you what you wanted to hear about this deal? Will you table the contract, including how much

you're paying them on top of the \$10 million already handed out to the NHL?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

Hon. Z. Bell: Mr. Speaker, I've gotten up every single day. I've tabled numbers that show that tourism is doing well.

As I mentioned from the onset, we came off an incredibly tough time with COVID. Tourism was almost completely wiped out during that period of time because people weren't allowed to travel.

I've mentioned that bridge traffic is up. We set records for bridge traffic, for ferry traffic, for number of visitors, the visitor spend, et cetera.

Now, as I mentioned before, you never like to jinx anything. You never want to jinx anything, but right now 2025 is on pace to have another great season. Again, this is part of the strategy that Tourism PEI and the Tourism Industry Association came with together.

For Golf PEI, the total vacation package bookings, as of March 31st this year, were \$1.8 million. That same timeframe for 2024 was \$1.4 million, almost a 30 percent increase.

Like I said, it is such a great team that is making this product so great. We have an unbelievable product, we have great operators, and we have a great team that's making it happen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Again, he stands up every day, but he doesn't answer the questions. He did not even answer that question. This is twice I've asked that question.

We all know this deal stinks – \$10 million to an American corporation – and this minister stands up and doesn't understand that actually it was Islanders that built our tourism industry here with grit and creativity, not the minister trying to take credit with a logo on rink plexiglass. There's no way to measure the return. You didn't even talk about the return. There's no way to measure the return.

Luxury parties with secret guest lists, questionable ticket payments, and still no clear confirmation of who paid for what. The entire secret deal is rotten. It's totally offside with Islanders.

To the Premier: Will you finally do the right thing? Third day in a row I'm going to ask you. Will you clear the air and call in the Auditor General to review this deal and the mess surrounding it?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

We all know that Prince Edward Island has built a really significant and world-renowned tourism destination here. As the minister just said, we're leading the region in tourism growth. We're leading Canada as a whole in tourism growth. As the member just said, it's because of the hard work of the people who work in the industry and make a living off the tourism industry here.

Every successive government for generations has invested in the industry's success by supporting their marketing strategy. In this case, we should be celebrating the success of the tourism industry. If tourism was failing in Prince Edward Island, I would fully understand the criticisms from the other side here, but can we not just celebrate the success of this industry?

[1:50 p.m.]

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

A question to the minister responsible for public safety.

Your department launched a fuel station resiliency program. It was announced 45 gas stations will access \$1.5 million and have them operational by the fall of 2024.

Emergency resiliency programs

Minister, have all 45 received funding to install a generator, and if the power was off for any substantial period of time, are those generators operational currently?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for the question. That's one of the programs that I'm quite proud of that our department brought forward after seeing what happened through Fiona. Now we can get fuel from tip to tip across this Island because of generators if there's an Island-wide power outage again. I'll have to go check on those numbers, but a large portion of them are up and running if not all of them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I do agree; this is a good program, and I think it's really important for Islanders to be able to access their fuel so they can go get their groceries and do their essentials in a situation of need. I will identify that the O'Leary Co-op Shell station did get a generator, and it is operational.

In 2023, a program called the reception centre resiliency fund was developed for community halls. How many, minister, have become active as reception centres and have their generators operational in that particular program?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question.

Again, that's one of those programs that came after the Fiona impact across the Island. I'll have to get the numbers on how many are actually up and running, but I know there are four main Island ones across the Island that are up and running at any given moment, that can support Islanders at any time. I'll get the exact numbers on how many warming centres that we do have coming.

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

R. Henderson: I'd appreciate that, minister, and I really emphasize that I'm not here to try to criticize. I think both of those programs are good programs, and I do think it's important that we get them up and operational as quick as they are.

I do know that there are some in my district that are operational.

But in this question, I'm going to ask the Minister of Agriculture and Public Safety – note the difference: I have had a couple of grocery outlets in my riding ask if there will be a program for grocery stores. The O'Leary Farmers Co-op and the Ellerslie Rite Stop are telling me that they have to install a generator because they can't take the risk of losing product due to a power outage. As we know in this House, the power outages are happening a little more frequently than they used to.

They have significant investments with food in their freezers and coolers, and the cost of throwing out food should an outage occur over an extended period of time, although it's a loss to the food, it also impacts their insurance.

When will something be done to protect our grocery outlets? If gas is an essential service to get to the groceries, maybe it's a rather logical step that you have the grocery stores open so that you can get those groceries. Minister?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The member raises a good point. I know that that organization did approach us for a generator. They don't sell fuel, so they didn't qualify on that, but this is a unique situation in this member's area that I am willing to look at. Maybe we can partner with rural development or something like that, and the EMO office, to come up with a solution to help that food security during those power outages.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: I appreciate working with them – we have had time to do that – but I actually have two grocery stores in my riding. Both of them don't have fuel stations at their location. The situation is – like I say, it's great to be able to get to the grocery store, but it has to be open. It has to be able to go through the process of commerce in giving me the product.

In one particular case, I've got a grocery store that's basically saying, "We have to go. We can't wait any longer because the losses are too imperative."

Minister, will you make this program retroactive to any grocery store that has to invest in electrical generation since Fiona has occurred, and they can get compensation for that?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. He always is out for his constituents.

I'm not going to answer that question right today, but I will guarantee him we will look at it. We'll open that file again and see if we can help that vital part of your community to ensure that the food stays safe.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:55 p.m.]

We hear a lot from this government about how well things are going, but that's not the reality for many Islanders. Affordability is a daily struggle for most. Islanders are falling behind. More people are living in poverty, more are relying on social assistance and AccessAbility Supports, and more families are turning to food banks and community fridges just to get by.

There's no sign of the system working; there are signs of a system failing.

Poverty and food insecurity

Question to the Minister of Social Development: Minister, the Maytree Foundation released a report just a few weeks ago that paints a troubling picture of affordability, especially here in Prince Edward Island. Can you tell this House what the main findings were, as they relate to our province, in that report?

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Maytree report has indicated that social services here on Prince Edward Island are one of the best across the country, and we're very proud of that, and we should be. This government has increased funding in our social programs by \$40 million since 2019.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: I did not see that in the report, minister. What I saw in the Maytree report – one of the key findings – is that one of the key findings that the number of Islanders accessing social assistance and AccessAbility programs has grown by 6 percent. That's not a small number, minister.

What is driving this sharp increase?

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Again, Mr. Speaker, that is much less than the population growth. We're very pleased with where we are. There's always work to do. We do annual reviews on these programs and on the funding that we do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Well, 6 percent is a big number of people falling into poverty, minister. I don't understand what your last statement....

Minister, how many Islanders are currently receiving social assistance and AccessAbility Supports? Can you provide a breakdown of how many families and how many single, unattached individuals there are on social assistance on Prince Edward Island?

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The amount of Islanders receiving social assistance on Prince Edward Island is 3,500.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: And 2,457 on AccessAbility Supports. That's a large number, minister, and the programs are not.... There's a lot of money going out, for sure, but we are not solving the problem.

What are you doing, minister, to solve those problems when, in your own reports under your strategy and policy section, you underspent last year by \$500,000? How did you underspend on this important area in your department, minister?

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's question, but on food security alone, we have invested over \$7 million just on food alone. That's school food, that's summer food, that's seniors food, that's food banks. We're very proud of the work that we're doing. We're going to continue to look after Islanders. We're going to continue to evaluate the programs every year, and we're going to make sure that Islanders are looked after by this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: But you underspent on your strategy and policy section by \$500,000. People are falling into poverty, minister. They are having to use food banks at a more important rate on Prince Edward Island than we've ever seen before. You are not doing a good job with that.

I know there's some money going in there, but what are you doing in this section and why was it underspent by \$500,000? Because Islanders are hungry under your watch, minister.

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm proud to say that this Department of Social Development and Seniors would never underspend it. We are actually overspent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Concerns regarding availability of child care spaces remain high, with an estimate of over 2,000 Island children currently on waitlists. Aside from the fact that the former Education minister is currently campaigning for a federal party that, until very recently, was hinting at getting rid of the \$10-a-day child care subsidy, there are other challenges to maintaining the system that we have. One is the number of child care workers. We need hundreds more to make those spaces available.

[2:00 p.m.]

Early childhood educators (further)

To the Minister of Education and Early Years: Holland College graduates 40-or-so ECEs – early childhood educators – each year, which is great, but that alone would take decades to fill the gap we have. Where else do we attract early childhood educators to our system in order to keep all of the spaces we do have open?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question.

Yeah, we do need to continue to grow in this area and attract more people to the profession. We are working with our education authorities, UPEI, and Holland College. We're working to upskill staff that are already in the system. We are recruiting as hard as we can.

We know that the need is there. We have all kinds of great early years expansion grants that are out there to try and grow the sector. We'll continue to work on that. It is a challenge. It's a challenge across all sectors, not just early years, but we are certainly feeling it and we're working as hard as we can on it.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In some Island daycares, almost half of their current employees arrive here through one of the immigration programs, the Atlantic Immigration

Program or Provincial Nominee Program, for example. All of these valued new Islanders are trained in Canada to meet national licensing requirements, exactly like the Holland College graduates.

To the same minister: what new restrictions have been placed on Island daycares in sponsoring employees through current immigration programs?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for her question.

It is really important that we're able to get up and talk about the programs that we do have. In relation to immigration, our AIP – Atlantic Immigration Program – there was a change on how that program is being distributed.

There has been no decrease in our early childhood educators being selected through our immigration programs. We did 117 last year, and we are earmarked to do 117 again this year. We'll continue to support the sectors that are needed here on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: There hasn't been a change in number, but there's been a change in the level of certification that they need.

There are three that I'm aware of:

Firstly, the federal government has reduced the total number of places available for all sectors.

Secondly, PEI, unlike our Atlantic neighbours, has removed the designation of early childhood educator as a critical worker.

Thirdly, the new requirements under the PNP are for level 3 certification, when almost all of the internationally educated ECEs train to level 2, thus making them ineligible for the program. That's where the problem is.

To the same minister, Minister of Education: All of this is causing great distress for workers, daycare operators, and families. We've been talking about this for weeks now, and still

nothing. When are you going to make the changes needed to keep these dedicated and much-loved employees working on PEI?

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

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

As it's no secret, there was a federal reduction in our allocations. That did impact the numbers that we have here. We do have to adjust to ensure that we can help support. We did meet with our early childhood industry and sector and talked about pathways. Most had great conversation and great understanding of how we were going to help.

We are continuing to invest from our department in upskilling and reskilling. We will continue to help with recruiting initiatives to ensure they have the people.

When it comes to immigration, we are given what the federal government has decided on their reductions. We are working through those numbers as best we can to fill the gaps in PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last September, in response to the RFP for the Borden-Carleton fabrication yard, we were told that government received five proposals. The RFP had a February 12th deadline to have an agreement signed with the successful proponent, and we are now almost two full months behind that RFP deadline.

We can't expect private developers to wait around indefinitely for confirmation of their proposals and still be available to proceed whenever government decides it is ready.

Borden fabrication yard

Question to the Minister of Economic Development: The mishandling of the 2021 expression of interest process resulted in potential developers taking their projects elsewhere. What is the reason for the delays at this time, minister, and what is the status of these five proposals?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Trade.

Hon. D. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, the process is taking longer than we proposed it would, but I can assure you we're working with the Town of Borden. We want to ensure that the choices that are made are done by the Town, and the Province will support those choices.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

[2:05 p.m.]

M. MacFarlane: Well, Mr. Speaker, at the town hall that I hosted back in September at the Borden Legion, the residents made it very clear that they, in fact, do want a say in the project as it goes forward.

The previous Minister of Economic Development – I think there have been three in the last year – has committed to releasing a summary of all five proposals to the public, and indicated – he did, at the time – that he would support a public meeting where all proposals would be discussed by the residents.

Question to the same minister: In the spirit of transparency, do you still commit to holding a public town meeting where the residents will have a chance to provide feedback on all five proposals, and if so, when can we expect that meeting to take place?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Trade.

Hon. D. Compton: Hon. member, the mandate is to be open and transparent, and that is what we are doing. You can FOIPP all the correspondence back and forth with the Town of Borden. We are in lockstep with the Town, and we'll take direction from them as to how they want to proceed forward.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Well, minister, the previous minister said we were going to have all five proposals and a summary of the five released to the public, so I'm looking forward to that happening.

In the throne speech, there is a mention of a new shipping port. The new shipping port caught my attention because the Borden fabrication yard just happens to be at a location with a deep-water port. I'd be very disappointed if this government has committed to something at the fabrication yard outside of the RFP process and prior to getting feedback from this promised town meeting.

Question to the minister: Can you confirm if the Borden fabrication yard is being considered as a location for this new shipping port?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Trade.

Hon. D. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, we are working with the Town. Their vision and goals include economic growth, job creation, increasing the town population, and maintaining their green space. Those are the priorities that were put forward by the Town.

As far as a port, that is not something that is in the purview right now. Depending on the tendering process and what comes out of that, I guess it could be a possibility, but again, we would work with the Town of Borden to ensure that that is what they want.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One in six women are affected with fertility, according to the World Health Organization. In order to maintain population growth, we need 2.1 children for every woman in childbearing years. In Prince Edward Island, our birth rate is 1.16. In PEI there is funding, up to \$10,000 based on income, to receive treatment. It is said that IVF can cost somewhere between \$20,000 and \$40,000 per cycle, depending on where you need to travel for service.

Fertility treatment

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness:
How much funding has been utilized from the fertility treatment program?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for bringing this important topic to the floor. Very proud that this government, in 2021, stood up this program. Since then, I think about 265 participants have accessed this program, which, again, is very emotional. It's a great program.

What is the cost? It's about \$1.1 million, I think. I'm just kind of guessing the total cost of what we spent on IVF and IUI treatments on PEI. It's important to note that you can actually apply up to three times – three 12-month terms – in order to participate, because it's not always successful.

I think this is a good time for me actually to stand up as well.... Most of the programs in health – this is a message to the public, and we've talked about it at the staff level – you need pre-approval for many of our programs. So, anyone listening who's considering some health treatments that may be off-Island or may require out-of-province travel, ensure that you get pre-approval first.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On the fertility treatment brochure it states that any testing or procedure that is available on PEI is covered by provincial health care.

Question to the same minister: Can you explain what testing or procedures can take place on PEI for anyone having difficulties getting pregnant?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure how well I will describe all of the procedures involved in IVF or IUI, but we don't have the population size on PEI to support a fertility clinic. On an annual basis, it's probably

60 people per year that participate in the program.

[2:10 p.m.]

So, to stand up a fertility clinic to support 60 is probably not something that we can do, but we do support out-of-province for medical workups, bloodwork, diagnostic tests such as HSG, semen analysis, and similar processes that we do. We also have mental health support through our SHORS clinic because this can be very trying for families that participate in this program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

S. Dillon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I understand that sometimes it can become very costly for families if they have to go off-Island for the analysis before they even enter into the program.

It was exciting to see that other provinces in Atlantic Canada have recently made significant new investments in fertility treatments. Newfoundland and Labrador recently announced a one-time funding increase up to \$20,000 for IVF, while New Brunswick has committed more than \$1.9 million to fund one round of IVF per household.

Question to the same minister: Will you look into finding ways to strengthen our funding or create ways to provide more services to support IVF here on PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question.

The short answer is yes. Obviously, we want to support those who are trying to have a family. My wife is a pharmacist and she supports some of these people. It's very emotional and a rollercoaster ride as they embark on this journey.

We have done a review of the program in late winter. I'm not sure if it's complete yet, but it's something we should look at. There are new technologies and new science that helps people be more successful in these treatments, and we

will certainly look at all avenues to support Islanders in their journey to become parents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The federal government is rolling out a new Canada disability benefit this summer, but some provinces have already announced that those in their province won't see the additional money if they already qualify for provincial disability programs. Even with the new benefit, people with disabilities are still living far below the poverty line. So, I think it would be inhumane to even think about clawing back this small additional amount of money.

Disability benefits

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Seniors: Will PEI be clawing back the federal benefit from Islanders who would be eligible for it?

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, member, for that question – it's a great question, actually – and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government, myself, and the Department of Social Development are totally committed to those with disabilities – in the past, and we will be in the future.

The federal government announced a new Canada disability benefit that will be effective July 2025. The first proposal on how that benefit would roll out would have negative impacts on those living with disabilities on Prince Edward Island. I wanted better for Islanders so I challenged the feds to do better, and we did not accept the first offer. We stayed at the table, continued to negotiate, and were able to get a much better deal for Islanders in the end.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

To date, there are seven other provinces that have agreed to not claw back the money from the program. With the upcoming rollout of the Canada disability benefit, there are growing concerns about how provincial programs will respond.

So, to the same minister: How is PEI planning to align its disability support programs with the goals of the federal benefit, namely to lift people with disabilities out of poverty?

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you again, member, for that question. As I said, this government, the department, and myself are committed to those Islanders with disabilities.

I can confirm that PEI will join with other provinces throughout the country in committing to not claw back the federal Canadian disability, and we will ensure that any new federal benefit will not negatively affect funding or supports that these individuals are already receiving. That was the battle.

Thank you very much.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, minister, for that answer.

[2:15 p.m.]

Islanders are experiencing extreme economic hardship. It's important that we continue to help Islanders with their disabilities access programs such as this one.

Minister, you might have already answered, but will the income from the Canada disability benefit be considered in calculating an individual's eligibility for provincial disability supports?

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No, it won't, but pending the federal action of their *Income Tax Act*, if they don't do anything to change this – and I will give them credit because at Christmastime I did get a letter to say

that they would go along with the provinces. We were all in this together. We were all battling it together.

They did send us a letter that they were going to change the act, but now there's an election called. That being said, that may not happen. If that doesn't happen, we are going to align our legislation to ensure that our people on Prince Edward Island are going to receive the benefit without being taxed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

To continue on with that, minister, last November in the House, you dismissed Statistics Canada data on food insecurity in here. You said, "I went to Ottawa personally, and I talked to them, and said, 'Something has to change. This is unfair. We're getting statistics that are inaccurate.'"

Poverty and food insecurity (further)

Minister, if the federal government data is wrong, then what data are you relying on?

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: Thank you so much for that question, member. Thank you, thank you.

None of this is calculated in the statistics. I want to make that clear. Stats Canada does their job. They have their questions, but they're the same all across the board. There's not one province in this country that does what we do for our food situation.

We supply over \$1 million for summer food alone. Meals on Wheels – we give them \$165,000. Food banks and the Upper Room – over \$200,000. Community fridges – we give them all \$10,000. Seniors food grants – \$170,000. We feed 22,000 children every day that they are in school. That project alone is way over \$5 million.

Those are the things that Stats Canada has no idea about. They don't calculate this. We're well

into almost \$7 million that we do here on Prince Edward Island regarding food.

Thank you very much.

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

G. McNeilly: Why are Islanders still hungry? What are the actual numbers, minister? I don't know where you got the numbers, and that was my question.

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

Hon. B. Ramsay: My goodness. I'm the minister of the department. I know the numbers.

I know in the summertime alone, last summer....

[Interjections]

Hon. B. Ramsay: Yeah, I know the cost of a loaf of bread, sir. You're talking to the wrong minister here.

[Interjections]

Speaker: Hon. members....

[Interjections]

Hon. B. Ramsay: You're talking to the wrong minister here.

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development has the floor.

Hon. B. Ramsay: The reason I know is because I am the minister of that department. I know for sure that we fed 143,000 meals last....

[Interjections]

Hon. B. Ramsay: I didn't hear because he's interrupting.

[Interjections]

Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Social Development has the floor.

Hon. B. Ramsay: Are you finished? Okay.

I know that we fed 143,000 meals last year just during the summer months. We're into well over a million meals that we will serve this year for the school food program.

Look, be proud and say thank you because that is what this government is doing for....

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, final question.

[Interjections]

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, final question.

G. McNeilly: People are still hungry. You still are the minister who ran a failed seniors food program. You fed 16 Islanders, and you underspent by \$205,000 on that program, minister. There's a lot of work to do on this file and I'm just asking you for the data.

Minister, will you come back to the Legislature and provide the data that you just seem to not want to provide to this House? This is an important topic, and I need to see better answers from you.

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

[2:00 p.m.]

Hon. B. Ramsay: Well, thank you for the question.

I should just stand up here and say yes, but what you're talking about is a two-year-old program. We've invested a lot of money in seniors food, and we look forward to doing the same thing again. The applications are out. They're coming back in. People are very happy. Seniors are happy.

Thank you, member, for that question.

[End of Question Period]