



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of Prince Edward Island**

**Responses to Questions and
Oral Question Period**

(Preliminary Proceedings)

Second Session of the 67th General Assembly

Tuesday, 15 April 2025

No. 12

The Honourable Sidney MacEwen, Speaker

Published by Order of the Legislature

[1:24 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.

The news of Holland College cutting programs is very troubling, but let's be honest, it's not shocking. Blaming it all on a drop in international students is a convenient excuse, but it doesn't hold up.

[1:25 p.m.]

Holland College

Question to the Minister of Workforce: What immediate support will you offer to the employees now facing layoffs?

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 the question.

Certainly, we are disappointed any time programs get suspended in our post-secondary institutions. It is certainly very disappointing.

We are working with industries and the college and, of course, our university as well and Collège de l'Île to ensure that we are able to respond to the needs of the sectors. We'll continue and are committed to doing that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

In the CBC article – and I'll table that a little bit later – the minister said PEI's international student cap was set at 2,000. Now, that's an increase from the previous year.

Question to the minister: The same article says Holland College typically had 500 international students, but just last week, the college said it used to have nearly 800. Which is it?

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

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

I don't speak on behalf of Holland College while in here, but what I would say is that we work hard to ensure that there are opportunities for international students there.

We have met with IRCC, which is Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, and have spoken about our concerns. When the federal government made decisions to put caps on international students, they did it very quickly. We expressed our concerns and the impacts that it had on not just Holland College, UPEI, and Collège de l'Île, but also on a small province like Prince Edward Island.

We will continue to advocate to support where it's needed in our sectors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Minister, you are the minister responsible for post-secondary. Holland College is a post-secondary institution. This is a big issue, and you should be up on that file.

Even with the new cap, Holland College could still accept 710 students, but they only brought in 140. Now, that's not a cap issue. That's a recruitment failure.

Question to the same minister: Do you care to venture a thought as to why Holland College cannot attract even a fraction of the international students it's allowed to?

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

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

Again, these are really important questions. Recruitment is something that I have done in my past life, and I'm certainly very passionate about

it. Holland College was a place that I did call my workplace home for a long time.

What I would say is they're working very hard to gain student access here. The other challenges are through the perimeters that have been in place by our federal government. We are working through them. They deem the programs that are going to receive permits in order to study here and to work here.

We are working hard to get those industries that are on PEI recognized as priority, and we'll continue to advocate for that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

This government – and to some extent, the institutions – have dropped the ball. Blaming Ottawa won't fix it. When students can't afford a place to live near a campus, they'll go elsewhere. Charlottetown has seen virtually no new student housing.

Final question to this minister: Will you finally step up and invest in student housing, or push our colleges and universities to do the same, or are you just going to keep pointing fingers?

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

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

Certainly, in the upcoming budget – we'll see when we're on the floor, too – we have increased the core and the operating budget by 6.5 percent for this coming school year.

We'll continue to work with Holland College. We stay in communications on a regular basis to discuss things like housing, for sure, food security, study opportunities, and funding and supports, and we'll continue to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Question to the Premier: Last Friday, the Premier brought in the *Interprovincial Trade and Mobility Act*. In what seemed like a strange decision, government issued a press release with the top quote provided to a Premier from another province.

Interprovincial Trade and Mobility Act

Will the Premier please tell this House how many trade restrictions will be affected by this legislation?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I look forward to bringing the bill back to the floor for second reading this afternoon.

We understand that this bill was in response to a bill that was brought by Nova Scotia that's been held up across the country as an example of a quick way we can move towards dropping interprovincial trade barriers. The approach is a system of mutual recognition where what's good for another province is good for Prince Edward Island.

I look forward to debating the bill on the floor here this afternoon.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

[1:30 p.m.]

I'm not sure what this Premier's goal is. So, Premier: What is your goal? How many trade restrictions do you want to get rid of? Again, I'm going to ask the same question. How many trade restrictions will be affected by this legislation?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I envision this bill really enabling better mobility of labour and mobility across provincial borders. Frankly, citizens of Canada have been really surprised to learn of the kinds of interprovincial trade barriers we have in this country and there's a lot of momentum across the country. When I speak to my provincial colleagues, the other Premiers of provinces and territories, there's a

real motivation now, considering the trade war that we're engaged in with the U.S., to move forward with removing some of these barriers.

There's a real sense that this will have a profound effect on productivity and efficiency within our economy and improve the GDP of this country. At this time, Mr. Speaker, I just think it's the right thing to do.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Well, the Premier is actually the promoter of this bill, so he should be very aware of all the implications that it may pose. I assume that this government has developed a complete list of trade restrictions which will be affected by this legislation. We will need that information on this side of the House to engage in a proper debate over this legislation. In many ways, this new law could have a profound impact on many sectors of the Island economy, and we will need a real picture of the implications.

Will the Premier commit, now, today, to bringing back a list of all the trade restrictions that will be eliminated as a result of this new law?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we'll bring this bill in a very short time back onto the floor for debate. The members on the other side and on this side, in fact, will have an opportunity to ask all kinds of relevant questions like this one. I'll bring a stranger to the floor who will be able to assist me in answering any questions that our members have.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

So, I'll keep moving on. He hasn't answered one question yet.

It's very easy for the Premier to talk about trade restrictions like alcohol. I think most people understand that alcohol restrictions make no sense, but there's a two-edged sword with the other restrictions. For some people, they're actually barriers; for other people, they protect certain sectors of our economy.

Will the Premier please tell the House which sectors will see an improvement and which sectors will get hurt?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we could have been having this conversation here on the floor if the members on the other side had granted us unanimous consent to start debating the bill then, but we'll have that opportunity today.

The bill itself is an enabling piece of legislation. There will be further consultations with stakeholders to determine what the regulations underneath that bill will be. I look forward to a fulsome debate on the bill this afternoon.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, I'm a little concerned with the lack of consultation on this law. The bill was simply dropped on the House on Friday and the Premier was in a terrible rush to get this bill into debate. Now, that seems like it's a little strange. We know that Nova Scotia is pushing very, very hard for this bill.

Premier, have any other provinces passed this legislation?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I know that other provinces are working hard on similar legislation. As I said, there's a lot of momentum across the country. In my discussions with the federal government as well, they've been very encouraging to provinces to bring forward legislation as quickly as possible to move and to bring down interprovincial trade barriers.

We've heard from experts across the country, stakeholders, economists, that this is the right thing to do. It's the right time to do it. We've been talking in this country for many, many, many years about interprovincial trade barriers. There never seemed to be the motivation to get the job done. It's a difficult job. Much of the discussion in the past has been about trying to harmonize regulations and rules and laws across this country, which is very difficult and time consuming to do.

The approach that we're bringing to the floor here – a mutual recognition of other provinces' regulations – is the best and quickest way to get it done because we still have control about our own priorities and standards within this province but then trusting the standards and rules of other provinces in this country. If it's good enough for other provinces, it should be good enough for us, and that's the approach we're taking.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much.

Not one province was mentioned in that response.

Mr. Speaker, one clause in this act says: "...in the event of a conflict between this Act and another enactment, this Act prevails."

Premier, how many bills will be affected by the power that's included in this act?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

[1:35 p.m.]

I find it strange that the member wants to know what other provinces have come forward. Certainly, if we were the last to come forward, they'd be criticizing us, but we're showing leadership by coming forward. It's a priority in this country. Canadians want to see us dropping interprovincial trade barriers.

This is an enabling piece of legislation. As I said, there'll be further stakeholder consultations after this to apply the regulations that will underlie this bill. There's still work to be done, but the first step is to get it through this Legislature, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: This minister stood up.... This is six questions I've asked him – actually, seven because I had to ask one twice – and he never answered one of those questions.

Mr. Speaker, see, here's the problem. According to the Prince Edward Island exemptions under the Canada Free Trade Agreement, there were upwards to 15 trade restrictions in place. I'll table those restrictions a little bit later. It appears

that close to two dozen Island laws are affected by those restrictions.

Premier, does this new act override all of those other laws?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Again, the Leader of the Opposition referred to me as the minister; I'm, in fact, the Premier...

[Interjections]

Hon. R. Lantz: ...and I'm proud to be bringing this bill to the floor this afternoon as the first reciprocating province to the legislation in Nova Scotia that's been held up as the gold standard across this country by the Trade minister, by other Premiers in this country. We look forward to showing leadership on this front when the country is asking for this at a time when trade is the paramount issue in this country and with our trading partners. If we are criticizing the United States for being protectionist, how can we defend protectionism between our provinces here in this country?

That's the approach we're taking. We're going to get the job done. We're going to work in partnership with our other provinces to free up trade and have one economy across this country.

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

G. McNeilly: A question to the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Speaker, Island families need access to reliable child care. So do many workers in PEI trying to retain health care workers, tradespeople, and others who are arriving with young families. But instead of solving staffing shortages in our centres, this government is making things worse.

Early childhood educators (further)

Question to the minister: Why did you change the immigration eligibility from child care workers to only level 3 early childhood educators, cutting off level 2 child care assistants from the PR stream?

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 the question.

I know that we have spoken of this a couple of times now in the House, but I know it's complicated and I'm happy to share again.

In January, we did make changes to the Atlantic Immigration Program, one of the programs, one of the streams, which is 20 percent of our allocations due to high volumes of interest. What I'd like to be clear here today is that the number of nominations has not changed, and that the increase – the level 3 – is where we'll go first as the high volume is there to draw from. Those that have the education from Holland College, UPEI, Collège de l'Île will be drawn first, and then we will continue to work through the levels.

Thank you.

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

G. McNeilly: The majority of people affected are level 2s, minister. Why are you going to level 3? That makes zero sense. I know it's 117. The year before you made decisions for 20- and 30-year-olds to leave Prince Edward Island, so this has no water.

You've said the number of PR allocation hasn't changed, but this is cold comfort for the centres now forced to turn workers away.

How do you explain to families in your own district that their child care centres might downsize because of your poor policy and lack of planning?

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

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

Our early years sector is built on three pillars: affordability, accessibility, and quality. I'm going to talk about quality now for a second.

I'm proud to say that our early years sector is the envy of the country. Our wage grid continues to be implemented. Our ECEs are finally being compensated at a rate that they deserve. We want the best and I will make no apologies for accepting only the best in our sector.

[1:40 p.m.]

[Interjections]

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

G. McNeilly: You better clap loud, because – you have the audacity to talk about accessibility? There are 2,200 families without access to child care in our province. This is about getting them child care. This is about retaining the workforce, minister.

Minister of Education, what do you say to health care workers thinking of moving to Prince Edward Island only to learn that there is no space for their children? One doctor – and you'll get the letters later on – one doctor who has 1,600 patients stated: "As you are aware, there is a dire shortage of professionals in the province. It is because of our ability to have our children attend day care that we are able to remain at work at full capacity." He goes on to say he was part of that immigration stream, minister.

Question: How do you defend your decision that actively makes it harder for people to stay and work in this province?

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

Hon. R. Croucher: We need to keep pace with this ever-growing need for child care services and the increase in our population; we know this. There have been significant investments in the strategic growth of this sector. There have been multi-million-dollar investments made in creating new spaces, and member, in fact, 343 new spaces in the last year with another 776 in development currently.

We're working as hard as we can. We'll continue to make the investments where they need to be, and we'll continue to be the envy of the country.

G. McNeilly: You're not....

Speaker: Hon. member, hon. member, just wait until he's done speaking until you stand up.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

G. McNeilly: These parents think otherwise. Parents that can't get access think otherwise, minister.

Question to the Minister of Education and Early Years. Minister, are you fully aware of the staffing crisis your own sector is facing? You are not close to getting to those numbers. I've read these reports. You're not even close to getting there. Nearly 30 percent of child care workers in this province are internationally staffed, and many of them are now cut off from the pathway to permanent residency because of this minister's new policies.

Minister, are you seriously prepared to let almost a third of your sector go?

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

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again.

I know how important this is, and I do know that it's a bit of a hard one to understand how this works. I do know, actually, that there have been letters, and we have talked to industry.

So, just to clear up some misconceptions here:

When the concerns were brought to the attention of our department by the hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty – who also received a letter back and who has also met and spoken with staff, and if there are more questions, you are welcome to come and sit – on March 17th, we met with the Early Childhood Development Association and many operators who were invited to receive and hear information on the immigration pathways.

During this meeting, we heard the operators were pleased with the sector, would continue to remain priority (Indistinct) nominations (Indistinct), and that has not changed. There are many in the pool that are looking for positions here, that are meeting the levels and requirements that we are suggesting. Even with our decrease and 36 percent less allocations from the impacts of the federal government's immigration level plan, we have committed another 117 nominations for the early years and child care sector for 2025. The number has not changed and will not change.

Yes, we have changed the level; the demand and inventory of people that are very interested has

grown exponentially. We have to decide, at some point, how to get people in the system.

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

Hon. J. Redmond: Thank you.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Minister of Fisheries.

Minister, I appreciate you and your staff coming to the shellfish processors and public fishers in the riding of O'Leary-Inverness yesterday. You had the opportunity to see firsthand the many challenges that these buyers are facing from the threats of MSX and Dermo. Processors have said it's going to be a big risk buying oysters and holding them to be sold months later.

The public fishery opens, I might identify, May 1st. That's two weeks away. We've had a case of MSX here over nine months. Without buyers, PEI has no fishery.

Oyster industry (further)

Question: What is your department offering for support before the season commences so these buyers can purchase oysters?

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

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

I do thank the hon. member; it was nice to get up and see firsthand the uncertainty – and the fear, I think, too – in a lot of the industry, of course with the processors as well as the fishers.

As I have stated many times, we are continuing to evaluate this. I said this on Friday, hon. member, that it is going to be something that is going to be a case-by-case basis. We had a great meeting with someone in your riding yesterday who brought up some very good points. I brought a lot of those good points back to my staff, and we're currently discussing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:45 p.m.]

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

R. Henderson: Well, that won’t give a whole lot of assurances to our buyers out there, who need to be knowing what’s going on by May 1st, I might add.

Minister, I made a member’s statement a couple of weeks ago warning about the bringing in of other breeds of oysters to PEI waters.

Question to the minister: Have you or will you bring in other oyster breeds to PEI waters?

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

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

That is something that was talked about at the Aquaculture Alliance AGM. There was a presenter from Maine who presented on that exact same topic.

It’s a very delicate situation to handle because there are some in the industry who would say that yes, this might be a great thing to try, but of course, at the end of the day too, there are a lot of others in the industry that are saying that this could bring in some new pathogens or new diseases for our Island oysters that we’re not aware of.

Another thing is.... Of course, the hon. member has an oyster, I believe, as his lapel pin today. The Malpeque oyster – the Island oyster – is, we would argue, the best oyster. We don’t want to hurt our own oysters by bringing in new species, but it is something that we are looking at, and we will follow the science.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government recently announced that Islanders could expect a \$17 per hour minimum wage based on the recommendations of the minimum wage review, but the devil’s in the details.

While there will be an increase to \$17, it will not happen in October, like was recommended by the Employment Standards Board. In fact, it

won’t be happening until the start of the next fiscal year.

Minimum wage

Question to the Minister of Workforce: At a time when Islanders are struggling with the cost of living, why are you delaying such an important wage increase to Islanders?

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 the question.

We certainly know the importance of this topic, for sure, in the time of uncertainty with businesses and organizations.

There will be an increase of 50 cents on October 1, 2025, and another increase of 50 cents on April 1, 2026. We’ve had to do a balanced approach, ensuring that employers can keep employees employed should there be a massive change if tariffs do come into play.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A balanced approach? Well, that’s very interesting because, of course, as required by law, the Employment Standards Board conducts a thorough consultation process to determine how to balance competing employer and employee interests in raising the minimum wage. Their review provides considerable insight into their thinking process, yet the same cannot be said for Cabinet.

Question to the same minister: What are the government’s reasons for taking money out of Islanders’ pockets by ignoring the recommendation to have a \$17 minimum wage this year?

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

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

The report that’s done by the Employment Standards Board that encompasses employers and employees begins actually a year out from

when the actual increases or recommendations are made for minimum wage. So, when the report was done, these times were not the ones that we are living in now. What we are living in now had to be considered to ensure that we keep employees working within the businesses.

We'll continue to work together to try to make a balanced approach to help Islanders the best we can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Keep Islanders working at what cost? They can't afford anything.

Instead of \$17 in October, this government is going to \$16.50. While a 50-cent difference might not sound like much, a full-time minimum wage worker will miss out on \$480 in income, thanks to this government's decision.

It is becoming abundantly clear this government is not with you. They are not for you.

Question to the minister: You are well aware that the cost of living is becoming more and more of a challenge for many Islanders. You can see it in the record number of visits to the food bank and community fridges year after year.

Why do you refuse to support hardworking Islanders by giving them the minimum pay they deserve?

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

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

Again, we certainly take into all kinds of factors when it comes into play for minimum wage.

What I would say right now: we are currently one of the highest minimum wage rates in the country, certainly in the region.

We will continue as a government to commit to review those recommendations and continue to work with the Employment Standards Board who makes them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:50 p.m.]

This government's tune towards privatization has certainly changed in just one short year.

For its first five years, this government has heard strong advocacy from every corner of the public health care system for increased funding and respect, none of which came, but in one short year, a Toronto consulting firm has convinced this government to dive head-first into privatizing our health care system.

Health care privatization (further)

To the Minister of Health: Last year, you were committed to decreasing our reliance on travel nurses, minister, which you unquestionably failed to do. What tangible actions, if any, did you take to retain and respect our public nurses over the past year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

We've talked about this issue at length. The hon. member would realize that about 35 percent of our travel nurses are at the PCH. I think we have another 25 percent at two long-term care homes in various ends of the Island that we have trouble staffing. We want to maintain those services.

We've increased the nursing seats at UPEI a couple of years ago. We have our largest cohort of nurses at UPEI, and the internationally educated nurses has 74 – 59 have completed that TRNC programming, and another 25. So, we're trying to address the nursing issue.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, on March 14th of last year, the Minister of Health said, regarding travel nurses, "We are trying to address this issue. We do not want to use travel nurses."

But just last Friday, the Minister of Health boasted about the 33 travel nurses keeping the PCH neonatal ICU open, and that NICU used to

operate with public nurses until this government drove them away. In just four years, this government went from spending less than \$30,000 on travel nurses to now spending over \$20 million.

Question to the Minister of Health: Your government's approach is unsustainable and is stealing from our public nurses. The health care system being kept alive on life support with travel nurses is a failure of your government. Why are you throwing in the towel and auctioning off our health care system to the highest bidder?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I'm not sure who's writing the questions, but gosh, they're awful similar each time the hon. member stands up and asks the questions.

We've made nursing investments in the workforce at UPEI. We have the internationally educated nurses that are starting to grow our workforce. If the hon. member has any suggestions, I'm all ears.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: I might have a few suggestions, Mr. Speaker; I'm happy to share.

On March 19th of last year during budget debate, it was explained to us that the funding for travel nurses actually comes directly from the line item for our public nurses. So, this government is taking money that is budgeted to pay our nurses and instead funnelling it to the private organizations.

A health care worker at the PCH told me that some critical care nurses are actually leaving Health PEI and taking up positions as travel nurses, and I can't say I blame them after all the years of being ignored by this government.

My question is to the same minister. The problem is going to require a Team Canada approach. Will you commit, minister, to working with your Canadian health minister counterparts to put an end to the increasing reliance on travel

nurses by implementing parameters and regulations regarding their use nationally?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

First of all, we do have regulations that no travel nurse can actually live on Prince Edward Island and practice here. That was put in about a year, a year and a half ago. So, we are trying to limit that use.

We talk about my federal counterparts. Immigration continues to be a challenge; the speed of immigration and how we move our internationally educated nurses through our workforce, even from our physician perspective and hiring in the U.S.

I do want to correct the news story that was on CBC last that said B.C., Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick allow U.S. licensure; they forgot Prince Edward Island. We've allowed U.S. licensure from physicians since November 2nd, 2023, so I've asked my communications staff to reach out to CBC for correction.

Immigration and that pathway to PEI is one of our biggest challenges.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In committee, in this House, and elsewhere, we have heard many times how long-term care beds will reduce the dependency of people on our health care system.

Long-term care (further)

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: How many long-term care patients across the Island are in the hospital waiting for a manor bed?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. We have a lot of discussions about long-term care in his area, and I appreciate those discussions.

[1:55 p.m.]

We talk about KPMG and what they've done, and – I like to use analogies in this House – I call them the architects. Basically, we're trying to transform our system. We hire architects to build and design buildings for us, so they're the architects of some of the changes that we're trying to do.

One of the things they worked on is our patient bed flow. I do know that our ALC occupancy rate has actually decreased from about 27 percent to 19 percent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last fall, I asked questions to the Minister of Health regarding the capital budget investment announcement to open more long-term care beds in Tyne Valley at the Stewart Memorial Home. The facility currently has 24 beds, which is the same amount it had for the last capital budget.

Minister, everything is in place. The building has been ready for the beds. What's the wait?

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: I will ask the same question I asked in November: When will Stewart Memorial see their promised bed expansion?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

We've kind of earmarked Colville Manor in Souris and Stewart Memorial, obviously, in Tyne Valley to be expanded based on their footprint and their current design. We have about \$11 million in the capital budget to do so. There's about \$250,000, I believe, in planning to do it this fiscal year.

We have a lot of capital projects on the go in Health. That is no excuse, but it is a priority for us to expand those two homes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

H. MacLennan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last fall when I asked the questions, you said the facility is well staffed, no reliance on travel nurses, and that you were exploring the addition of a new wing with more beds.

Stewart Memorial Home has only increased by two beds since 2018. The positive impact that a new wing of beds would have on the patients waiting in the hospital is incredible, let alone also people from West Prince that are waiting for a bed close to their area.

To the Minister of Health and Wellness: The Speech from the Throne committed 50 new public long-term care beds and 175 private long-term care beds. Can you make it clear how many beds you will commit to opening at Stewart Memorial Home in Tyne Valley?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Kudos, too; when they built this facility, they built it with expansion in mind. I believe that's what some of the planning money will do, is determine how much we can expand that facility, but I believe the plan is for 24 beds. It may be 20, 22 depending on the requirements that we have with the HVAC and so on in that building. But it's a beautiful building. We'd love to expand it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Transitional housing is a key part of our government's housing strategy, and Lennon House, located in Rustico, houses 27 residents and has proven success supporting people as they move from crisis to stability. It offers a supportive, substance-free recovery environment for people struggling with addictions and co-occurring mental health issues away from the triggers found in large centres like Charlottetown and Summerside.

It's not just effective, it's community-backed. Local organizations like the Cymbria Lions Club and businesses like Blue Bay Farms have stepped up with donations and land.

Without Lennon House, many of its residents would remain stuck in the cycle of addiction, ending up in shelters, hospital beds, or even jail cells.

Lennon House

Question to the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: Does the minister believe that Lennon House deserves adequate baseline funding to ensure it can continue playing its critical role in achieving government's mental health and housing goals?

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

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

I don't know if that type of funding would fall directly under me, but I know that there's definitely a gap where we do transitional housing. That's something that I've talked about in the House here a number of times. That's something that I think now that we have our sheltering services down there and our wraparound services kind of working, we really have to focus heavily on that transitional housing so we don't get people stuck in a gap where they should be moving on and up.

I'd be more than happy to sit down and discuss funding for Lennon House. I certainly am supportive of the work that they do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's one of the points I'm trying to make here, is that in order to support organizations like Lennon Island, it has to be a multi-department effort. For example, they're applying right now for energy efficiency funding through the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

They do incredible work, but unfortunately, it's at its breaking point. The executive director is currently doing double duty trying to run the organization while also managing residential services. That's not safe and it's not sustainable.

In November, Lennon House submitted a proposal for a director of resident services, a

position designed to help provide professional oversight and continuity of care. This was a budget request.

[2:00 p.m.]

Question to the Minister of Finance: Minister, is government funding for this proposed director of resident services position in the budget that was just tabled?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I will take this question. I am familiar with the Lennon House file. My understanding – I believe in August of last year, we committed to a three-year funding agreement with Lennon House, which has some incrementals that move up throughout those three years of programming.

We do support non-profits. The Green Party doesn't want us to support non-profits and help in the community, so we'll continue to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks to the minister for that three-year agreement, but it's simply not enough. They're running a deficit. I think it's around \$160,000.

They're trying everything at Lennon House to make ends meet. They're housing individuals on social assistance but not receiving the shelter portion directly. They're navigating multiple departments – from Health to Housing to energy efficiency – trying to find support. Despite all this, they continue to deliver results, evolve programming, and meet the needs of vulnerable Islanders.

A question to the Premier: Will the Premier commit to considering funding for Lennon House at the Executive Council level – both around the Cabinet table and at the deputy ministers' table – to ensure that it has included an essential partner in delivering government's mental health and housing strategies?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I'd like to answer this question. I think you've identified a gap with Lennon House in their funding. They do phenomenal work; the four phases of stay that they implement there, where you have to apply to move to the second phase of that stay program.

I think it's a conversation between Housing and ourselves in order to support this group. We know with the budget that we have lots of needs. We've seen how aggressive our budget has been to try to serve the needs of those communities.

We will do our best. We'll talk with Housing. We'll talk with our mental health supports. And again, energy efficiency – anything we can help to make them run their operations is a great move as well.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I want to commend the Minister of Fisheries there on his eloquent response to a previous question about the value of the Malpeque oyster, but minister, in your government's budget highlights brochure – which I will be tabling later today – your government has pictures of the Pacific oyster, which not only is a different breed of oyster, it's a different species of oyster in your promotion of the PEI budget.

Minister, I know you're learning, and I know you don't necessarily have a background in shellfish, but you'd think you'd know the difference between what a Malpeque oyster looks like and a Pacific oyster.

Oyster industry (further)

Question to the Minister of Fisheries: Why has your government promoted Pacific oysters as a product of PEI in your budget promotions and not the world famous Malpeque oyster?

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

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

I didn't think that that would get by the hon. member who is wearing his oyster lapel pin.

[Interjections]

Hon. Z. Bell: And you know what? That was brought to me, and I can't believe it. I didn't myself know the difference. On the tail-end of the picture, it is shaped a little bit differently.

I do apologize to our hardworking Island oyster growers, the shellfish fishers, and the industry for not using the PEI oyster in the picture.

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

R. Henderson: I appreciate your empathy, minister, on the floor of this Legislature, but minister, do you understand how disrespectful and insulting, and shows a lack of understanding of the hardworking people who try to grow Malpeque oysters, as well as harvest Malpeque oysters?

Minister, could you explain: How did this happen?

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

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

How a brochure is put together, obviously.... I don't know the exact way it's done, but a lot of times, it would be – there's a picture of an oyster, there's a picture of PEI potatoes, there's a picture of a field, et cetera.

My assumption is that when the final review was going over, the person reviewing it didn't have the most intimate knowledge of the look of the oyster, in comparison to a Pacific oyster and the Malpeque oyster.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We heard a lot today about children and child care. It's not a good situation for our little ones and families. We're 2,200 people in the negative about child care spaces, 1,400 infant spaces, and we're talking about 117 people, being the same numbers as they were last time.

I'm done. We need a lot more than that. Thirty percent of our industry is foreign-born. They need to be brought into the system and kept here more regularly.

[2:05 p.m.]

Early childhood educators (further)

Question to the Minister of Workforce: Go back and allow the ECAs to stay in Prince Edward Island and approve their immigration applications. Will you do that?

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

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

I know we've had some conversations on this, as he has met with staff and our staff have met with the industry. They have met with ECDA, and we'll continue to have those conversations. As they are aware, when the federal government cut 36 percent of our allocations down to 1,025, that is exactly what we have to help support the entire workforce sectors across Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]