



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
of Prince Edward Island**

**Responses to Questions and  
Oral Question Period**

**(Preliminary Proceedings)**

**Second Session of the 67th General Assembly**

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**No. 28**

**The Honourable Sidney MacEwen, Speaker**

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[1:18 p.m.]

[Hon. S. MacEwen in the chair]

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre**

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

Yesterday, the Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty asked me questions regarding programs at the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre. The questions were directed at me instead of the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, and I was not at all familiar with the issue and I committed to bring back a full response.

Fortunately, the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre issued a statement on this matter, and I would like to share with the House the statement that the centre issued immediately after Question Period yesterday because I believe we need to clear up some factual liberties that may have been taken.

I'm going to read the statement in full, Mr. Speaker, if you'll indulge me.

Organizational Statement from PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre:

"This afternoon during Question Period, a member of the official opposition shared misleading information in the PEI Legislature regarding the status of PEIRSAC's therapeutic programming. We are writing to correct the record and clarify our services.

"PEIRSAC is not pausing services. We have temporarily paused additions to our waitlist, not our services. Survivors currently on our list will continue to receive trauma-informed, no-cost therapy as our clinicians' caseloads allow.

[1:20 p.m.]

"We are not shifting to a private model.... Our counselling services remain free of charge to all survivors of sexual violence. This has not changed, nor will it.

"This is a transformation, not a withdrawal. Our therapeutic program is undergoing a necessary and thoughtful restructuring. This will allow us to reduce a two-year waitlist and better serve our growing community. This shift reflects our ethical responsibility: it is not sustainable or fair to continue adding names when we cannot guarantee timely care.

"We have been in active consultation with our government funders, and other sexual assault centres across the Maritimes and nationally, many of whom have also made the difficult decision to restructure their therapy programs in response to rising demand. This growing pressure on services is not a sign of failure, it is a reflection of a powerful societal shift. More survivors are coming forward. More people are seeking justice, healing, and support. We believe this speaks to a deep and collective bravery, and we are committed to rising to meet it....

"The letter referenced by the opposition member was selectively quoted. In full, it clearly states that any client affected by this transition is welcome to self-refer when our waitlist reopens and reengage with care, including newly expanded services.

"We acknowledge and regret that some current clients learned about this program change through public channels as a direct result of what was stated within the Legislature, instead of directly with care from their clinician. That was not our intent, and we are working to repair that impact with care and integrity."

All current clients "are being supported through a transition period – not immediate closure – with collaborative closure plans guided by their clinicians to ensure each survivor is equipped to continue their healing journey."

"In the meantime, our client navigation team continues to offer vital support, including accompaniment to police, court, and medical appointments; assistance with documentation; and referrals to housing, income, and mental health resources. This pause and restructuring are rooted in our ongoing commitment to provide timely, ethical, and survivor-centred care. Survivors deserve access to healing. That belief has not changed and never will."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

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

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

Question to the Minister of Tourism.

Over the last several weeks, I've sadly neglected the minister and his terrible deal on the NHL. Frankly, there were more pressing matters in this House. Nevertheless, this scandalous waste of money on a vanity project that involved parties, travel, drinking, and free tickets to sports events has to be examined.

**Tourism contract with NHL (further)**

Will the minister please tell this House how much has been paid to the NHL since the beginning of 2025?

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

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Since the beginning of 2005, hon. member....

**Hon. H. Perry:** '25.

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Pardon me?

**Hon. H. Perry:** '25.

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Yeah, 2025. I would have to bring that back to you. I know that this question has been brought up before by the hon. member.

The contract is \$2.5 million per year. We had the 4 Nations Cup included in this year; that contract was \$250,000 with the expenses of \$250,000.

The way that... Because we were debating this yesterday in the budget – the accounting for the NHL doesn't align with our end-of-year. Our end-of-year is the end of March, and the NHL's new fiscal year starts July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

If I asked you before, you should've had a response. You should know exactly what you paid in 2025. I'm not asking for fiscal year; since the beginning of 2025. I will table that document later.

According to the document, there was a payment made to the NHL in February of this year, and another payment is due this month. Actually, the first of this month.

Is this accurate, minister? Are you obliged to make three payments to the NHL in 2025? How much have, or will, they cost Islanders?

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

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

I do believe I answered the hon. member's question. Again, it is paid out in payments, the contract to the NHL.

I will also say to the hon. member that, again, the question was asked yesterday about the NHL contract and the benefits to the province. Yes, it was asked during debate.

[Interjection]

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Not by you, no. It was asked.

[1:25 p.m.]

The NHL right now – the contract has seen tremendous growth. It's helped. I also mentioned yesterday in budget debate that it is all part of the tourism strategy and the unbelievable job that our tourism operators do every single day. They are starting that and continuing that work into off-peak seasons, which is all part of the strategy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Again and again, they're trying to hide behind the tourism operators, but it is the tourism operators that have put out a really good product and brought visitors here, and they need to be congratulated on the good work they do to continue to bring people to Prince Edward Island.

According to the document that I will table later, which appears to be an NHL payment analysis prepared by Tourism PEI, there is \$2.5 million going to pay for this year's terrible deal, and that's in the current fiscal year. Next year it's a further \$1.95 million.

Minister, is this accurate? Why did you never cancel this awful deal?

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

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Well, I disagree with the preamble to the hon. member's questioning where he continually calls it an awful deal. I mentioned this yesterday on budget debate, that imitation is the best form of flattery. The Liberal government in New Brunswick – you've probably seen some commercials that have been airing on NHL hockey games, if anyone has been watching the NHL playoffs.

So, I think that what the hon. member is trying to say is that it is an awful deal. I completely disagree with him, and maybe he should ask his counterparts in New Brunswick if it is a terrible deal.

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

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

I'll continue to say awful, but Islanders say terrible.

I have another document that I will table a little bit later, and it appears to indicate that the department was involved with the Boston Celtics. Did the minister pay money to the Celtics or to the NBA?

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

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

I will have to confirm that with the department. I do know that through the NHL partnership, we do have a partnership with the Boston Bruins, and I believe it is kind of a thing that they would allow us to advertise at the Celtics games as well.

So, again, I'm going to take this opportunity, as well, to talk about the benefits of this partnership with the NHL.

The NHL allows us – because they have a number of corporate partners that they have as partners. I'm going to give one example. If you have ever used the Tim Hortons app, right now during the playoffs, the top prize is a chance to win a trip to come to Prince Edward Island. We have tried for a long time to be able to partner with Tim Hortons. Because of our relationship with the NHL and their relationship with the NHL, we've finally been able to activate on that sponsorship.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

What started off though – as they were saying – as a \$2.5 million deal has now turned out to be \$10 million-plus and growing every day.

So, question to the Minister of Finance. Your budget passed last night – congratulations – but keep in mind you brought in the largest deficit in provincial history. There are indications right now of difficult economic times ahead, and it's quite possible that transfer payments to the Province may suffer, particularly as a result of problems in Ontario.

Given the fact that we may be headed into difficult times, why did you choose to allow continued payments to a vanity project like the NHL?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. J. Burrridge:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I fully back the NHL deal. It is going to bring absolute value to our province. I think that when you do dig into it – anyone that asks me, I say to watch the committee, where the details and the benefits of the deal come forward. Every time I've given that comment to anyone, they went back and watched the committee, and I've gotten no questions. They understand the value at that point.

So, I back that deal. It's good for our economy. That's why we're so well positioned to take on the deficit that we are doing, to bring forward the services that we have to bring forward for Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

But this minister is responsible for the public purse, and I can tell you Islanders are not happy with this terrible deal, with their taxpayer dollars going out for this.

When we look at the NHL deal, we find hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on travel and entertainment. Certain people, including the Member from Montague-Kilmuir, were having a fine old time with Island resources.

Have you communicated with your colleagues and departments that lavish travel has to be cut back dramatically, Minister of Finance?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

[1:30 p.m.]

**Hon. R. Lantz:** Mr. Speaker, while I've got the opportunity, while we're being lectured by the Leader of the Opposition about fiscal responsibility, I would be remiss if I didn't point out that the office of the opposition – a three-member caucus – is allotted a budget of hundreds of thousands of dollars, and they could not stay within the budget. They overspent their own office budget by almost 50 percent.

If this government spent like that office does, we'd have a deficit of \$1.5 billion. So, I won't be lectured about fiscal responsibility by a Leader of the Opposition who can't stay within the budget of his tiny opposition office.

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

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

Actually, we will be back in here tomorrow and there will be an apology made by the Premier on that because that is not true. That is not true.

[Interjections]

**Hon. H. Perry:** It's not true, Mr. Premier.

To the Minister of Education.

In November 2023, the head of the Public Schools Branch wrote a letter to a parent about allegations of an employee in crimes involving minors. In that letter, the director of the Public Schools Branch says the following to the parent:

“Since curriculum rests at the Department of Education, are you comfortable with me sharing your suggestions about educating kids on grooming with the directors there?”

### **Safety of children in schools (further)**

What actions were taken by your department after the director passed on those suggestions about educating kids on grooming?

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

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

He's making his way around the room here. Again, all of those details from 2023, I believe you said, will be dealt with, looked at, investigated, reviewed, or whatever you want to call it, in this third-party review.

Thank you.

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

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

It's the same response every day.

So, now I'm going to go back to an earlier question. I believe the predator, Matthew Craswell, was interviewed in April of 2023 and April of 2024 about sex crimes he had committed. I believe the predator's word was taken over the concerns expressed by children and parents.

Does the minister believe that a predator's alibi should take precedence over a victim's report?

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

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

This member is making some pretty wild accusations. I'm not even going to entertain that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Hon. H. Perry:** I'll ask the question again.

Does the minister believe that a predator's alibi should take precedence over a victim's report?

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

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

The answer to that is: Of course not.

Thank you.

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

**Hon. H. Perry:** We'll see what comes out in the review, Mr. Speaker.

Let me go back. Will the minister confirm that Craswell was interviewed in April 2023 and again in April 2024 about the accusations made against him? Did the Public Schools Branch take the word of a predator over the reports of victims and parents?

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

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

I'm quite confident in the Honourable David Jenkins and his ability and in this review to answer many of those questions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Well, hopefully he can answer the questions because certainly that side of the House doesn't answer any of our questions.

So, we have now gone through questions with three ministers. Deflection, excuses, and the most serious is the Minister of Education – he keeps saying this information will be available someday. Surely this minister knows certain facts. That's his job to know, but he keeps denying his knowledge to Islanders.

Does it bother the Premier that he has to go home every night with the knowledge that his government is keeping vital information from Islanders?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Hon. R. Lantz:** Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has asserted facts here today that I

don't know to be facts, and that's why we have to embark on a fact-finding mission. There are the facts in the court that were established in the court that put Matthew Craswell behind bars, where he sits right now, but there are facts around what happened in our system that I am unaware of.

The Leader of the Opposition appears to seem that he knows, but those facts need to be established by an independent investigator. That's the process we're embarking on, and that's the response he's received when he's asserted these types of things in the House over the last two weeks.

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

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

[1:35 p.m.]

So, again, this government does not believe the parents. Let me just ask this question to the Premier. There's a lot of people upset out there. There's a lot of worry, there's a lot of concern, and I understand that perfectly.

The way you deal with fear and concern is to be open and frank. Even if you pay a little bit of a price, your honesty and openness will go a long way.

Will the Premier finally agree that a public meeting on these matters must be held in the next 10 days and give parents the opportunity to hear the answers to their questions?

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

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

This government, my department, and myself, if we weren't committed to be completely open and honest and transparent and committed to getting to the bottom of this and answering a lot of these questions that have been asked in this House over the last number of weeks, we would not have ordered a third-party review. We ordered that third-party review; that will be underway shortly. I'm really looking forward to answering some of these questions myself in this House.

Thank you.

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

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

They sat on their hands for two years before the media brought it to your attention and before we, as opposition, brought it to this House.

Question, finally, to the Premier: Has anyone been fired? The other day, the Member from New Haven-Rocky Point spoke very eloquently about ministerial responsibility. Will the Premier hold his current Minister of Education, as well as those in the past, accountable for these terrible events? Will anybody on those benches over there pay the appropriate price for doing absolutely nothing?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

Again, a question we've already answered in this House. Accountability is an important part of this process, but the member would like to be the sheriff in town here and hold people accountable before we know exactly what the facts are in this case, what took place, where our safeguards failed, whether it was systemic failure, human failure, poor decisions, or just simply lack of training and misunderstandings.

I don't know what the facts are. We will establish those facts, and if someone needs to be held accountable, they will.

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

**G. McNeilly:** We just talked about no meeting with parents. You talked about open and transparent. Well, just please answer this question for the third time I'm going to ask it. This is now the third time I've asked this question to the Minister of Education for basic information and still, nothing has been provided to this Legislature.

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, and again last week, I asked for a clear timeline of when the current and former ministers were first briefed on the incident at two Island schools. I asked for that by May 8<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Safety of children in schools (further)**

To the minister: Where is it? Will you be providing that request for information today?

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

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

Yes, this is the third time that the member has asked for that. It's funny, after listening to the Premier in his response to questions taken as notice here this morning, the member should know that bringing forward factual information in this House and doing the due diligence to provide factual information should always be followed.

We are following that. Our department is preparing that as we speak. I don't have it here to table in the House, but it will be tabled as soon as I can responsibly do so.

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

**G. McNeilly:** These are important topics, like the letter I tabled was factual, like the information I'm asking for is factual, and it's already there. It is already there within the power of your government. It's been done. I'm just asking you to release it to the public and you're refusing every time.

I also asked for all briefing materials and talking points prepared for the current and former minister since May 1<sup>st</sup>.

To the minister: Do you have them today? If not, what exactly is the holdup?

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

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

It's interesting fielding questions. This department has been working extremely hard on dealing with this issue; it's a big issue. As things come in – I just want to give credit to the Leader of the Third Party. She introduced a bill that was passed unanimously here in the House, Bill 101 – a very, very important piece of legislation. We had some involvement in that. We met with the Leader of the Third Party. These are the things that we focus on as well, day to day.

Member, as soon as that information is ready to be tabled, it will be tabled.

Thank you.



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

[1:40 p.m.]

**G. McNeilly:** You're the minister. You could go back and demand that information. Something is being stalled here. We're done here pretty soon, minister, without the information, and that's not good.

Mr. Speaker, just yesterday in Question Period, the Premier said that the terms of reference for the third-party review were written up, which was a different response than the minister gave.

Is the Premier correct? Where are they? To the minister: Will you publish these terms of reference today so Islanders can see the full scope of your planned review?

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

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

I apologize if I led the House or this member astray.

The terms of that third-party review are being finalized. They will be tabled.

[Interjection]

**Hon. R. Croucher:** Again, did I not just apologize? I did.

When they're ready to table, I've committed to that a number of times here in this House. I am fully committed to openness and transparency throughout this process, and I will commit to bringing that forward.

Thank you.

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

**R. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, at last week's budget presentations, it was identified that three-phase power was funded for a farm in the Newton area for irrigation purposes.

### Three-phase power

Question to the Minister of Energy: Is this three-phase funding available to other farmers to

install irrigation on their farms on Prince Edward Island?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

**Hon. G. Arsenault:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Three-phase power has been a very interesting topic. If I was Santa Claus, I would be able to get three-phase power to every household on PEI, every farm, every business, but we do know there is limited budget that we're working with.

In this case that we're talking about here, we also have an involvement with the *Water Act* which legislates minimum river flow. We're talking about the Dunk River. We made a conscious decision to make investments there to be able to protect the environment on that front.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**R. Henderson:** Well, like I said before, you're doing three-phase power one farm at a time, it would seem, but when you talk about the watersheds in that particular case, you have to give us a little more explanation because there's a whole lot of watersheds across Prince Edward Island. There's a whole lot of farms that are out there requesting high-capacity wells on their land.

Minister, can you explain to this Legislature the rationale in paying \$85,000 to one farm to irrigate a field?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

**Hon. G. Arsenault:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, we did invest with one farmer, and we will continue. We're working with three other farmers at this stage. We're looking at making sure that we do abide by the *Water Act*. We want to make sure that the environment is looked after. There is regulation in the *Water Act* that we need to abide by, and we will continue to work with farmers to make sure that they can have deepwater wells to do the irrigation they need to do with their farming business.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**K. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the House supported mandating that each educational authority develop and implement a sexual misconduct policy, and that each authority report the number of allegations of sexual misconduct made annually.

**Safety of children in schools (further)**

Question to the Minister of Education: There are five schools on PEI that are not covered under the *Education Act*, but rather, the *Private Schools Act*. Do you have any plans to implement similar requirements through a directive or regulations for these schools to ensure all Island students have similar protections?

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

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

It is something that we are looking at and getting some advice on, some advisement. I believe that that is a very good question. I believe that they should be under the same level of scrutiny, but I will have to bring back the answer to that.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**K. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are very few requirements under the *Private Schools Act* compared with the *Education Act* overall. As I said yesterday, and I'll say again today, this is not about fear; it's about foresight.

Question to the minister: Will you commit to implementing any policies recommended by the third-party review in private schools as well as public schools?

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

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

Yes, I'm absolutely committed to implementing any recommendation that is deemed necessary

by the third party and that I can legally do so. I don't have a legal mind, but I am committed to taking any and all of those recommendations that I can implement and making the system stronger, better, and safer.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

**K. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:45 p.m.]

Three of the Island private schools are boarding schools, or offer boarding options where students live on the grounds full-time. This only increases the opportunity for sexual misconduct or other wrongdoing to potentially occur and justifies more – not less – protections for those students. Furthermore, two of the private boarding schools offer education to students whose first language is often not English.

Question to the minister: What is your department doing to ensure that these students with increased risk are included in your work to close the gaps in student protection?

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

**Hon. R. Croucher:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I absolutely appreciate good, thoughtful questions from the Leader of the Third Party here on this, and I mean that with all sincerity.

Staff are looking at each and all of those, and member, when we get this House closed and we can catch our breath, I look forward to sitting down and chatting more about that.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**M. MacFarlane:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A new inpatient mental health hospital to replace the aging and outdated Hillsborough Hospital is perhaps the most infamous political promise of this government. The new hospital was first announced by the Liberals, in fact, in 2018, with a projected completion date of 2024.

Premier King promised in his 2019 election campaign that if elected, construction would

begin immediately on day one. Unfortunately for Islanders, that promise was not kept. Instead, the latest projected completion date is 2027, and even possibly 2028.

### **Mental health hospital**

Question to the Minister of Health: The goalposts keep moving on this critical infrastructure, minister. Can you provide us with an updated timeline on when the hospital will be complete and operational?

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

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

The mental health campus that we have created over close to the QEH is state-of-the-art. We've made the conscious decision to build some of the smaller buildings first to ensure that we have the right-size acute care centre that's built there. Tenders have been issued, and the work has begun on that facility. It will be the last and the flagship for that mental health campus on PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**M. MacFarlane:** The last public update on the new hospital was in fact September of last year, when we were told that construction contract had been awarded. Finally, we were going to see the long-awaited shovels in the ground. Unfortunately, however, this government's inaction and delay has come at a high cost to Island taxpayers. Since it was first announced, the cost of building the new hospital has doubled from \$100 million to \$200 million.

Question to the same minister: With the RFP now awarded, can you confirm the final estimated cost to build this long-awaited new hospital, and are there any additional capital costs resulting from the U.S. tariffs?

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

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

I have regular conversations with our Minister of Finance and monitor all our capital projects. There's no doubt there are pressures on our schools that we're building, the mental health

campus, and other facilities that we need too. So, we are watching it extremely close. We have a great project management team with some extensive experience over at the mental health campus and they do a great job.

As of today, there have been no requisitions or requests for additional funds.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**M. MacFarlane:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government's unwillingness to prioritize this project not only means Islanders don't have access to infrastructure they were long ago promised but also means it's going to cost them \$100 million more. This increased price tag also came with the admission from government that the plans for the new hospital would need to be "scaled back." So, after all of government's dithering on this project, Islanders are paying more for less.

Question for the same minister: Notwithstanding how much our population has grown, we've heard that this new hospital will have fewer beds than the old hospital. What data can you share with us that indicates that the current Hillsborough Hospital is operating well below its full capacity, to the point that we can get away with fewer beds?

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

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

A lot of work has been done by our mental health team. Obviously, we want a Community First approach to mental health services on PEI so people can remain in the community. I know our day program is extremely successful there, where people don't have to stay in an institution and the stigma that may arise from a stay. So, again, we have a Community First model on the mental health campus, and it is generating a lot of interest in the community and nationwide.

Actually, we were invited to Texas to present the plan because it was so groundbreaking. We're at the forefront of mental health services on PEI, and we're very proud of what that project is going to look like.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

**B. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Municipalities across PEI continue to raise concerns about the cost of operating recreational facilities that serve residents well beyond their boundaries – it exists across the province, really – and a recent resolution at the Federation of PEI Municipalities AGM called for a province-wide recreational levy to help address this issue.

[1:50 p.m.]

### **Delivery of regional services**

A question to the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: What is the minister's plan to ensure shared infrastructure like arenas and wellness centres are funded in a way that's fair to both municipalities and surrounding communities?

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

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

This is an age-old issue. I was actively involved with minor sports through 20 years of my life, and I know my parents were prior to that. This has always been an issue. In Cardigan, there were the ballfields, but the people who play ball in Cardigan now come from all over Kings County, where when I was younger, it was just Cardigan and the outer ring area. The rinks in Montague and Georgetown are very similar.

I know this is an ongoing issue, but obviously, it's going to take some level of collaboration in the communities. I think when you look at the greater Charlottetown area here, for example, which I would say includes Cornwall and Stratford, there's a lot of intermingling between using the facilities. It probably might be the easiest place to start, to get people to work together on a shared services model, and I think that's what we've seen in Three Rivers where the sports organizations have come together and all of the other issues that seem to come along with amalgamation have suddenly disappeared because if we can get along in sport, we can get along in anything, as you would know.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

**B. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a problem that's been around for many, many years. In fact, it's not specific to the PEI jurisdiction, and it's not just about recreation either. It points to a broader challenge we face in delivering and funding regional services, as the minister suggests.

In New Brunswick, regional service commissions have been tasked with everything from land use planning and solid waste management to economic development and public safety.

A question to the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: Obviously, you're familiar with these sorts of things, but how much work have you done and what have you done to consider a model similar to that here on PEI that might help improve coordination and cost-sharing?

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

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

Really, I haven't done any work on a model like that, but I think it's an interesting concept, and I think that's something that you could see people get behind.

Again, I'll go back to what I've already kind of said: if you can get people to work together in that capacity, then we might be able to get them to work together on policing services and may be able to get them to work together on water and sewer – things that they seem to be so resistant to working together on – if we could get them to work together on sports facilities. I'm all ears; it's an interesting approach to take to it.

I mean, I will say, too, I do think that there are more people open to it, and contrary to what the Leader of the Opposition might think, I talked to Philip Brown twice last week and some of the conversations we have are: How would you guys ever get aligned so that you could share bigger services? But we already know that the sports organizations are doing it in smaller services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

**B. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Prince Edward Island is a province of 180,000 people or so, and we're very small. Anybody who talks to – people who live in unincorporated areas don't want to see amalgamation and annexation because of the impacts, but they want to use the services. But we are a small province.

Some have suggested that instead of creating separate regional service commissions or other models, the provincial government could just take on the full mandate like we see in New Brunswick's RSCs – particularly for unincorporated areas where no local government exists – and negotiate directly with municipalities to fairly compensate them for services that benefit the wider region. The Province can take it on.

Question to the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: Is the minister open to exploring a model where the Province takes on this regional coordination role and negotiates directly with municipalities to fairly support shared services?

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

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

I would certainly be interested in following it to see. I mean, I think I have said, probably rather accurately, that I feel like I have six or seven open fires burning now and I only have the ability to fight about two of them. I don't know if I want to start a new fire and take it on, but I'd be interested to hear more from you on what that might look like.

As you know, we're reviewing the municipalities act now and we're hearing from the public. We're at the point now....

[Interjection]

**Hon. S. Myers:** What's that?

[Interjection]

**Hon. S. Myers:** Well, maybe a committee can hear it, I don't know, but I'm definitely interested in hearing it. I do think we have to do something.

[1:55 p.m.]

I will say, because I do represent a large area of unincorporated areas, you're 100 percent right; there are people who live in unincorporated areas who are perfectly happy to remain in unincorporated areas. So, we have to figure out a way to make it work so that everybody can be happy, but all the burden doesn't rest inside the municipalities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**C. Deagle:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The other day when we were debating the budget in the Committee of the Whole, it came to the opposition's attention that the rural development budget was cut by \$2.3 million. As you know yourself, Mr. Speaker, in a rural riding like yourself, this money funds a lot of projects in rural PEI through municipalities, non-profits – not always municipalities.

#### Rural development budget

My question is to the Minister of Fisheries, Tourism, Sport and Culture: Why was your budget reduced by \$2.3 million?

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

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

I do thank the hon. member for the question. I actually kind of looked at this because it is extremely important to support rural PEI. I'm originally from rural PEI, and I know the hon. member represents a rural PEI district.

This is a number that has fluctuated in years past. I believe in 2015, hon. member, the budget was \$4 million and then was cut down to \$400,000. I will give the hon. member kudos: when he was in this role, that budget did go up, and I know a lot of great things were done in rural parts of PEI.

Where you would see the reductions, hon. member, throughout the department were.... For the places of worship, there was a heat pump program. We're at about 75 percent of places of worship. Also, there was a lot of money invested into reception centres to get those ready in case

of the next Hurricane Fiona or Hurricane Dorian, or an ice storm.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**C. Deagle:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

But it is still a cut of \$2.3 million. I know that in the past, a lot of projects that were funded, we could always kind of move some money around and make things work. I'd just hate to see the number of projects in rural PEI cut. Surely to God we haven't put....

[Interjections]

**C. Deagle:** I'll sign you up later, member.

[Laughter]

**C. Deagle:** Surely, we haven't put heat pumps in all of our community centres, our churches, and retrofitted our reception centres. It is unfortunate to see that reduction in money.

I guess my question would be: How many less projects do you expect to be funded with this cut?

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

**Hon. Z. Bell:** I do want to ensure the hon. member and members who represent rural districts – yourself included, Mr. Speaker – with the reduction specifically to the department, we have made investments in other areas. I do want to highlight, hon. member, that there is a new municipal agreement with all of the municipalities. Basically, this is \$5.5 million per year for two years. This will actually give more money to some communities that hadn't received money before.

Also, I know that the hon. Finance minister talked about this yesterday during her budget debate, but we do have a brand-new municipality infrastructure bank, which communities will be able to apply for.

While I'm on my feet, I do want to say the hon. member's question was about programs not being able to be delivered. I want to give a big, giant kudos to all of the CDOs – the community development officers – across the province.

They work extremely hard with whatever budget they have, and they deliver for Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**C. Deagle:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That is great that we are giving more money to municipalities, but this money wasn't always necessarily accessed by municipalities. A lot of it was non-profits, who might not be with any municipality.

My last question, I wanted to actually pivot to the Roma National Historic Site in Brudenell. When I was minister of this department, we had started the process and actually got the money allocated in the provincial budget – last budget – to bring in the historic site under the PEI Museums and Heritage Foundation. As you can imagine, this still hasn't happened, even though the money was in the last budget, and I believe it's in this budget as well.

#### Roma National Historic Site

Minister, what in the name of God is the holdup? When will we finally get Roma Historic National Site under the provincial PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation?

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

**Hon. Z. Bell:** Well, Mr. Speaker, my easy answer is I think they needed the right minister in place to get it over the line.

[Interjections]

[2:00 p.m.]

**Hon. Z. Bell:** But again, I will give credit to the hon. member. I know that he's done a lot of work on this file. I do assure you, hon. member, this was something that I brought up with my deputy earlier this week and said: "Where are we at? Let's get this over the line."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**R. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Energy might have the physique of Santa Claus, but he doesn't have the red suit or the beard.

[Interjections]

**R. Henderson:** But he had stated during those budget presentations that there is no funding for three-phase power under any circumstances, but yet, it did pay \$85,000 to install three-phase power to one farm for irrigating, and now it sounds like he's going to do three more. So, Santa gives three-phase power to some, and a lump of coal to the rest of the farmers out there.

### Three-phase power (further)

Santa, why not implement a fair program so others can access three-phase power – which is an essential component of infrastructure for many businesses in rural PEI – so these businesses have future access to this power, or do landowners have to put a high-capacity well on their property to get funding?

**Speaker:** Member, comparisons to Santa are okay, but let's leave the physical stuff out of it, please.

[Laughter]

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

**Hon. G. Arsenault:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Ho, ho, ho, alright.

[Laughter]

**Hon. G. Arsenault:** Back to the three-phase power, as I've stated before in this House, we would love to be able to have three-phase power throughout the province and to every community. We want to be fiscally responsible; at the same time, to be environmentally friendly.

We will continue. We're looking right now at – the specific project the hon. member is alluding to is one that's in the watershed that's oversubscribed in the Dunk River, so we had to act in doing something in that area. It is also part of a research project that we're moving forward as well. They're aware of what we're doing in that area.

We do have the *Water Act* that we have to abide by, and we will continue to do that. We will meet with any partners that are interested in moving this file forward as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**G. McNeilly:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Access to timely care is important, especially when you're dealing with blood cancers in Prince Edward Island like leukemia, lymphoma, and multiple myeloma. The people suffering with these cancers have a very difficult time, especially with the lack and drop of services in Prince Edward Island over the last little while. They're forced to go off-Island. They're coming to us, and they're very scared. They're very nervous, minister.

### Access to health care (further)

I want to know, what are you doing for people suffering with blood cancers to get physicians in Prince Edward Island so that they can have peace of mind and get the care they deserve right here in Prince Edward Island?

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

**Hon. M. McLane:** Thank you to the hon. member for the question.

Yes, I have actually spent almost a full day at the cancer centre in at the QEH. I had some really good conversations there.

I think it's important to understand the complexity of treating cancers; it has certainly become more complex over the years, but with that, we have increased survival rates.

With our small population and some specialization in blood cancers, we are using the services of, I believe, a New Brunswick hematologist at this time, who's currently on leave but coming back in the spring. We're currently trying to recruit to those positions, but from a numbers perspective, I believe it's less than 30 per year that we need to send off-Island. We have to balance survival rates and that complexity. Those physicians that were trained 20 or 30 years ago might have had 20 or 30

optional treatment plans, but now there are literally hundreds of avenues.

We've talked about out-of-province coordination. It's important. We certainly send patients to Toronto and Ottawa as well, depending on the types of cancers that they have.

We'll continue to build up our cancer centre and use our neighbours to support Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** End of Question Period.

Point of Order

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

**Hon. H. Perry:** Mr. Speaker, I stand on a point of order, and I'll cite rule 34(2).

During today's Question Period, I, as a member, find it deeply offensive that the Premier would make statements about our budget accounting that are inaccurate. If further clarification is needed, please contact the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

I'd like to ask the Premier at this time to retract his statement and apologize.

**Speaker:** I'll take your point of order under advisement, hon. member.

[End of Question Period]