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P. Bevan-
Baker

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 18 APRIL 2018

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, I was asked questions from the Member from West Royalty-Springvale, as well as the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, regarding our capital provincial paving program also known as recap.

We maintain 5,375 kilometres of roads right across PEI. I would like to inform the House that, in fact, 18 districts received additional paving last fall out of that program. Of those, 10 are districts currently held by opposition parties including: District 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 15, 17, 18, 19 and 20.

Each year, my department uses tools such as traffic counts, pavement condition and spring pavement breakup to prioritize our paving program.

I'd also like to point out, our most recent tender from last Thursday, of the nine projects, six are in opposition districts. The total cost of those projects is \$3 million.

I think it's very unfortunate that some of the accusations coming from the member from West Royalty seem to be a case of sour grapes.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I should be clear that I'm rising in my capacity as the minister of justice further to the questions from the hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, yesterday to advise and to clarify that legal aid rates were actually reviewed last year. A subsequent raise of between 10% and 25% depending on the grouping that you would fall within was made.

The maximum amount would now be \$30,000. Again, there's a needs test depending on the seriousness of the matter that's applied beyond that.

I can report, in addition to that, that there was 395 family and civil applications approved last year. Forty-six related to child protection litigation and 47 involved serious domestic violence concerns. And 859 criminal applications, including youth matters.

I hope that clarify things, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

West Prince currently is in a crisis over the lack of access for family physicians. I might add that this is a completely unacceptable situation.

Family doctor vacancies in West Prince

Question to the minister of health: How many family doctor vacancies currently exist in West Prince?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can assure you and the hon. member that when it comes to health care in West Prince, my feet are held firmly to the fire by the minister of transportation, the minister of agriculture and the Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, and the minister of rural development.

Certainly, this is an issue that's been ongoing for some time in the West Prince area. We have developed a plan where we can work with the doctors in the area to aid in our in-patient care within the Alberton hospital system.

We do have two doctors that recently retired. I believe they both retired from the West Prince area. We are out diligently trying to recruit doctors and locums to come to that area to help in needs where highly trained skill professionals are dealing with the health care needs of those in the West

closer to about 18,000. Only 567 West Prince residents are on the patient registry.

Question to the minister of health: Why did you create the patient registry if government is telling thousands of Islanders not to put their name on it?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, when we're out trying to recruit doctors, rural areas of anywhere in Canada are a little bit harder to attract doctors to. You have to get somebody from the rural area, and in particular, if it's somebody from the particular area, makes it that much simpler.

We do know that it's easier to transition full panel sizes to new doctors. We'll continue to work on that. We know this has been the case in that area for some time. We are trying to recruit. It is difficult to recruit to rural areas, but we have a major focus on this and we'll continue to work on it, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's quite clear and quite evident that the patient registry is not working. In fact, I would have to say that it's actually broken. Government has toyed with the idea of using private sector recruitment to fill these vacancies.

Private sector recruiting and doctor vacancies

Question to the minister of health: Isn't it time that we look at new ideas like private sector recruiting to solve problems like doctor vacancies?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Certainly in the department we have a very valuable recruitment team that goes out, identifies – work hard to go out and capture physicians to come to work on Prince Edward Island.

Currently we have, I believe it's the largest compliment of doctors or physicians on Prince Edward Island – currently over 225 province-wide. This is a group of individuals who work diligently in this area, have a major focus and vision of what we need in all areas of our doctor recruitment and they go out to continue to work that. I'm sure there's all kinds of networking that is done and some of it may be privately, I'm not sure, but certainly this is a team that has this focus of health care on Prince Edward Island, has a focus of recruiting doctors and go out and work at it every day.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister and his recruiting department came to standing committee a little while ago to talk about the struggles with recruitment and a few successes as well. At that time, they felt that they could do a much better job of recruiting, rather than private sector.

Minister: Do you think we should put that to the test again?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In my discussions with our recruitment team and in discussions they have with other recruitment officers across Canada, they all suffer the same challenges. They're all out trying to recruit the same individual to come to their jurisdictions to do work in their healthcare systems. This is not new, Mr. Speaker. This has been going on for a number of years as physicians try to establish their own work-life balance situations. They want to be in larger, urban areas. These are challenges that all jurisdictions face across Canada and we try to make that point very clear at standing committee –

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

What I neglected to indicate a little bit earlier that to the best of my knowledge there is a locum now in the Tyne Valley area that is assisting as well a nurse practitioner and soon there'll be two new nurse practitioners heading up to that area once they begin their working contracts. We know full-well that Islanders expect very high-quality, professional healthcare professionals taking care of their needs on Prince Edward Island and we work towards making sure that that is the case, not only in Tyne Valley, Alberton, O'Leary, but in all regions of Prince Edward Island and we'll continue to work on that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition alluded to the problems that are happening down at the Kings County Memorial Hospital – about sending people to ER. That's what these patients are being told: Go to the ERs.

Is this not going to just exasperate the problem that's going on in Summerside and Alberton at the ERs if we just keep telling them to go? Are we going to go down the same road as Kings County?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

When it comes to the situation in Kings County Memorial Hospital, we find ourselves in a situation that we haven't been into for a number of – I'll say years. We now have a full complement of doctors in the Kings County region, so we do have the complement now to provide that ER service and other services: acute care, primary care, all those other aspects of service that we were not fully able to provide in that region for some time.

This is very beneficial for the region of Kings County Memorial Hospital and we will continue to work in other areas of Prince Edward Island to try to provide that same and equal, sustainable service in all regions of our province.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The reason that we're asking these questions today is because we've had a number of people coming to us from the West Prince area wondering. They're just finding this information out. When we have ER closures in other places, we get it out to the public. It seems to be with this government that: We've got to shelter that. We've got to hide that. Let's be a lot more open with the people when this stuff happens again. Yes, we're going to have shortages. Yes, we're going to have some problems. You talk about retirements, but why do we need to – when we call for an appointment, that's when you find out that it's not going to be for six weeks.

Communication strategy for West Prince

What's going to be the communication strategy for the good people of West Prince the next time this happens?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to ERs at all hospitals across Prince Edward Island, we do, I'll say, a very wonderful job of getting that word out to those residents in that area that a situation has occurred, it's out of our control, and the remedy will be for you to go to a different ER. The problem in West Prince, it's not the ER, hon. member; the ER functions fully and wonderfully in that area. This is about inpatient care in Alberton hospital – which we do have a gap there that we're trying to mitigate and actually, through the help of the members that I alluded to earlier with other medical professionals there, we're looking to resolve. Actually, if it takes stepping out of the box and looking at the big picture, that's what's going on today and will continue to.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, with more generic drugs two things are happening. Two things are happening. Government drug costs are falling. Revenue to pharmacies are falling, and that could impact the service they provide to Islanders.

Reduced services at pharmacies

Question to the health minister: What are you doing to make sure that our Islanders don't end up paying the price with reduced services from the pharmacies?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know that the member across the floor is very in tune with his constituents. The cost of drug reduction when generic drugs are put into place saved his constituents, his residents a lot of money so that they are able to stay in their own homes. They are able to provide very workable lives with low-cost drugs.

This is not about pharmacies' bottom lines; this is about constituents of his and mine, and all members of this floor, and all Islanders, being able to afford drug programs on Prince Edward Island and the generic program was a very valuable program that provided low-cost drugs to families, seniors, and those that cannot afford them.

Some Hon. Members: Affordable.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Pharmacies give flu shots. They verify prescriptions. They advise patients of a better management of health to their system. A lot of these value-added services for Islanders are being provided now out of the pockets of pharmacies. They're paying for it out of their own pocket. The pharmacies are no longer able to provide these extra health services.

Providing of extra health services

Who is going to be there for these patients?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member when it comes to affordable drug programs for our children, our youth, our families and our seniors, this government will be there for your constituents, hon. member.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

There has been a lot of discussion in this House recently about rural governance and amalgamation, and rightly so, as it is a complicated issue that has provoked strong feelings and much debate all across the Island.

Oftentimes, the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment has, in response to questions on the process, referred to the fact that the Three Rivers proposal is currently in the hands of IRAC and that we all need to wait until their deliberations are complete before we pre-suppose what the next steps will be.

Public consultations and IRAC

Question to the minister: Has IRAC any experience in handling an issue as complex as this, and do you feel that they have the capacity to carry out the public consultations which are mandated in the act?

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

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

IRAC provides an excellent service to Islanders from one end to the other. IRAC handles all the land-use permits that are going through their authority, so they know rural communities because they see the land transactions going through for non-residents, corporations and things like that. I think that IRAC has the capacity and the expertise to adjudicate this procedure, Mr. Speaker.

the state of that infrastructure, and it's readiness to provide the education we need to Prince Edward Island students.

I am aware that they are aware that Montague school is aging infrastructure and needs to be looked at in the medium-term with an eye to its ability to continue on in that capacity.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, your first supplementary.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I thank the minister for that.

Can the minister advise us if he has visited Montague Consolidated School and had a firsthand look at the school and the dated layout that is needed to be replaced as has been the case across the Island in other communities?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. member would be aware, it's a couple of years since I've been to that school. We have made attempts to get together, actually, and go down and take a look at that school of late. For one conflict or another, haven't been able to do that immediately. I do have some level of awareness of it.

I will reiterate –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – again, that it doesn't matter what level of awareness I have. It's up to the Public Schools Branch to determine what they feel is appropriate in relation –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – to that school and to put a recommendation forward to our office.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, your second supplementary.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will the minister work with the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy to complete a replacement assessment for the Montague Consolidated School this spring, and direct staff in both departments to complete a replacement assessment of this school that accommodate current and future students' needs and confirm this replacement is included and funded in the fall budget of 2018 for immediate replacement?

Mr. LaVie: I can guarantee you (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: You got your two news schools. Be quiet.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That does demonstrate just why we need to have an organization like the Public Schools Branch that is charged with this. What I will commit to do is go back to the Public Schools Branch and to ensure, as I know that they are, as I have had this conversation with them already, that they are aware of the reported state of Montague Consolidated School –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – their facility staff do have an eye on that school.

I'm sure that they are looking at that as they are with many of our schools, which are beginning to show their age with an eye to determining when they may need some capital investment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford.

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

attaches it through to the district of Lyndale, has a lot of farmers on that road.

Even if we could get the bridge repaired to the point where we could get cars and trucks to follow it, and we would agree to keep the heavy equipment off it.

Settlement Road in Lyndale

Could the minister report back that that might be a possibility to get that passage open, at least to that extent ASAP?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you –

Mr. LaVie: A walking bridge.

Ms. Biggar: – Mr. Speaker.

Our infrastructure program is investing in connectors for Island farmers, Island fishers right across PEI. We were able to open up new criteria for road construction. We've invested over \$218 million in road construction, including bridges right across PEI, for those farmers in that member's district to get their products to market. We will continue to work on that objective.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Recently, Facebook has been in the news because of personal data being shared for political purposes without those people's consent.

A number of Islanders have approached us from District 11 and told us that during the Charlottetown-Parkdale election Green Party staff and volunteers who were out campaigning door-to-door began the conversation by saying that someone in the household supported proportional representation.

PR coalition campaign data

Does the minister of justice know how the Green Party of PEI would have been in

possession of this PR coalition campaign data?

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

Mr. J. Brown: No, Mr. Speaker, I don't nor would I know how that might happen, I guess.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Green Party President, Anna Keenan, serves as campaign director for the PR coalition. She registered and administers the database website for the PR coalition campaign. This website that she administers contains the data on collected donations and stored personal information on thousands of Islanders. It appears this data is now in the possession of the Green Party.

Personal information in possession of third party

Minister, are you concerned with the passing of personal information, collected under different pretenses to the Green Party of PEI?

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

Mr. J. Brown: Mr. Speaker, yes, is the answer to that question. This is a very serious allegation –

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – it is the reason why we would have freedom of information and protection of privacy. We'd focus on the first part of that more frequently than the second.

Information in this province, and as the hon. member indicated, it has more recently come to light in the context of US political goings on and certainly I would hope that it's not appearing here in the province.

Be that as it is, I take the hon. member's indications very seriously, and would commit to working with you to looking further into them.

certainly as I have committed already, I will reinforce my commitment to the hon. member and to this House to take this back to my department and to look further into it. I will be back here to provide an update as to what I've been able to find out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Senior Green Party officials are still soliciting donations and information from Islanders through their PR website front. They are pushing monthly donations through this database website and I will table a screenshot of that in the House later. I'm calling for these actions to be suspended until a further investigation can be completed.

Government action and sharing of data

What action will government take to stop the data collection, the soliciting of donations, and the sharing of data with the Green Party of PEI, and to investigate what has already taken place?

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

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Again as I had indicated previously and will reiterate, I would encourage the hon. member to report this to the Chief Electoral Officer and the Information and Privacy Commissioner and certainly I'll take this back to my department and commit to determining what, if any, help we might be able to provide in relation to this – what seems to be a very serious complaint.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, your final question.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The only organized lobby group active during the recent plebiscite, who had the president of the Green Party of PEI serving

as campaign director, finally admitted publicly to receiving approximately \$75,000 in funding support. Of this, \$30,000 came from unions and \$20,000 came from political parties.

Minister of justice: Are you concerned about these revelations, and does government have any answers as to how this conflict will be dealt with?

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

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I indicated yesterday when I was on my feet speaking to a motion, I originally had some level of concern particularly with the union donations and perhaps in this context I maybe should have had more concern in relation to the personal donations that were being made.

But, as I indicated, we would take all of this very seriously. They are very serious allegations and again, we would encourage the hon. member to report them to the Chief Electoral Officer and to report them to the freedom of information and privacy commissioner, and I'll take them back to my department and I will commit to connecting with the hon. member if she's interested and available to participate in seeing what we can do to further an investigation in relation to this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]