



Session:	2/65
Date:	18 November 2016
No:	27

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF  
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2016



Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

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

**New school zone maps (further)**

**Mr. Currie:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I am responding today to questions from the Leader of the Opposition around his raising of maps, and I have some clarification on that.

But I want to acknowledge the good, healthy discussion on the importance of the school change policy.

This morning when I woke up on CBC I heard the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters refer to the process as a sham. As a former educator, one of my favourite subjects that I taught was spelling. What I'm going to do is I'm going to add an 'e' to sham for shame on the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters for disrespecting all learning for all children in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

Questions by Members

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

**Infrastructure summit**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last fall our PC caucus suggested that the government should hold an infrastructure summit with Island communities and industrial stakeholders from across the Island to develop a common plan for the infrastructure priorities in this province. This government rejected the idea.

Question to the Premier: Are you still opposed to the idea of an infrastructure summit that develops a common plan for our infrastructure priorities across this province?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, within the next short while we'll be presenting a Capital Budget and it will be an opportunity for all sides of this House to consider our infrastructure priorities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With that, we've seen the result of rejecting an infrastructure summit. Manor replacements in both Tyne Valley and Montague again have been postponed. Projects like the \$65 million Cornwall bypass have been fast-tracked out of the blue.

**Cornwall bypass public consultation**

Question to the Premier: Why did you fast-track a \$65 million Cornwall bypass without any public consultation first?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, our infrastructure plans emerged in response to the federal Building Canada program that was unveiled in the mid to late spring of 2015.

Indeed, one of the things that we were able to achieve there was the collector roads program which enabled us to get going on the first phase of the Cornwall bypass, and the further phases will be here for consideration as part of our Capital Budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to keep things in secret from Islanders. I guess that Island Coastal, they don't build manors.

We know that the government used a non-binding municipal plebiscite held by the town of Cornwall back in 2003, on a

different route, as the reason for this rushed project.

Question to the Premier: With everything going on with the electoral reform front, does the Premier see the irony in rushing a \$65 million unbudgeted project loosely based on a 13-year old non-binding municipal plebiscite?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition should have gone back further in history.

There's a 1979 study that recommended this bypass. There was a government with the former minister, Mike Currie, that announced that the project was going ahead in the last 1990s at a cost probably double of what's going to be involved in this project.

This has been well know, it's been on the agenda, it's been a priority for the people in Cornwall, and it's an opportunity for this province and for the Cornwall area to grow, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

### **TIE minister and IE committee**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Energy tried for months to get a briefing on this project before shovels went in the ground and bulldozers started moving. The transportation minister ordered her staff to stall the committee. She finally appeared at committee with her staff weeks after construction was underway.

Question to the transport minister: What was so sensitive about the Cornwall bypass project that you felt it necessary to stonewall an all-party committee of MLAs for months?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I did have the pleasure to appear before the standing committee for 3.5 hours and explain the project.

We were requested to go earlier in the process, but when we made the announcement in June to the people of Cornwall that this was going forward one of the commitments we made is that before we did anything we would consult with them.

I had no intention of going before the standing committee at that time before we discussed the proposals and had meetings with those residents. That's why, at the time I went into standing committee, that that is where we were.

Keeping my answer as short as I can, I'll have further things to say on that.

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct).

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, you could have given this House the courtesy of some type of briefing on it and you failed to do that.

MLAs on the standing committee had questions about the concerns of the \$65 million Cornwall bypass, about the public consultations, about the traffic plans, and other details of this project. Many of those concerns became apparent as this project moved forward, which caused major traffic issues.

### **Cornwall bypass traffic**

Question to the transport minister: Did rushing this project lead to some of the traffic chaos motorists have experienced over the last two months and we have seen?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The impact of this particular project goes well beyond the roads themselves and the construction. This is about building sustained prosperity and economic growth

for the community of Cornwall, and especially within the province.

Cornwall has experienced tremendous growth over the last several decades. It has a lot of residential development, business development, and Cornwall services 11 surrounding communities.

The growth in Cornwall has surpassed the national growth rate –

**Mr. Aylward:** Time.

**Ms. Biggar:** – and it has increased by 10% -

**An Hon. Member:** Time.

**Ms. Biggar:** – since 2007.

Mr. Speaker, I'll respect your timing and if you tell me to sit down, I certainly will sit down.

Thank you.

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

### **Cornwall bypass economic impact study**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad, minister, you opened the door. The minister has said economic growth was the reasoning for rushing this project.

Question to the minister: Did your government do an economical impact study on the Cornwall bypass project before you started construction?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of an economic impact that we are doing, what I can tell you is that we do have the growth numbers for assessments that have occurred in Cornwall compared to what's occurred in Stratford. We're making those comparisons, have made those comparisons.

Speaking with the Cornwall council, they indicated to us that they were restricted from doing any more growth in their community.

We did not rush this project. We did not get word, though, until later in June that the funding under the new agreements were going to be made available to us and that is when we decided to proceed for the best interest of future growth for Cornwall.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, we have emails that show the province wouldn't show the town the proposed route until they agreed to the plan. We have them.

The minister has said economical growth was the reason for rushing the project. If you're going to spend \$65 million you should do an economical study to find out what the actual impact's going to be. You haven't done that.

Question to the minister. You fast-tracked the project of \$65 million, you failed to do an economic impact on what is going to happen with this project. Why did you not do an economical impact prior to ever starting the project?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, we have commissioned an economic assessment study on this particular project, probably the first time there ever has been one done, and MRSB are in the process of completing that for us, and when it is done I will bring it to this House.

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

### **Paving roads**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Mr. Speaker, as previous business owner I would do a business study and an economical plan before I ever put a shovel in the ground.

Why do you feel, minister, that spending \$65 million for a few kilometres of new highway is a better long-term investment in growth than spending that \$65 million to pave 1,000 kilometres of existing Island roads that need it?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This project is not just about paving roads. This project is about development in our province in regard to imports and exports and the best way that we can most efficiently move our traffic and our exports to market. When we talk about this particular project it also has economic impact for Islanders who will be working on this project, construction companies that will be able to –

**Mr. Myers:** The Premier's relatives.

**Ms. Biggar:** – plan over the next four years on what projects they're going to be able to bid on. This is a four-year project. It will show growth right across Prince Edward Island.

There is reference to that 1,000 other roads. Under the criteria of the national highways, this particular money that's being invested in the economy, in the transportation sector, in Islanders, is not eligible for any other types of construction.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Mr. Speaker, we went from feast to famine.

We went and paved 200 kilometers for a soapbox derby and then we spent \$65 million for Cornwall or for that bypass. But you forgot about everything else in rural PEI, the other thousands of kilometres across this Island that need work.

**Ms. Biggar:** You better start looking at your own (Indistinct).

#### **Cornwall bypass business case**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Minister, if you did no economic impact study, what was the

business case for fast-tracking this project other than spending \$65 million to pave a former minister's farm?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the things that we've been able to do as a government since Justin Trudeau came into office is to renegotiate the eligibility of collector roads in Prince Edward Island.

Prior to Justin Trudeau being in government and working collectively with our government, you had to have 10,000 cars a day on a road to be eligible for any kind of funding from the federal government. We now have that down to 1,000 kilometres.

You can look at Georgetown, you can look at Malpeque, you can look at Seven Mile Road down there, you can look at Kinkora, you can look at Tignish, you can look, yes, at Tyne Valley, and right across Prince Edward Island there are roads being paved because of the new agreement that the federal government and our government were able to negotiate!

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Aylward:** Do you have any of those bars left?

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

#### **Premier on water**

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

Water is arguably our Island's most precious resource. It's essential to life itself, and the quality of quantity of our water is critical to our future as an Island and as a province.

Question for the Premier. Mr. Premier, do you consider the Island's water to be a commodity for profit or a resource essential for public well-being and, indeed, survival?

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

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

It is a pleasure for me to stand and speak about a process that's been going on in Prince Edward Island over the past number of months, a process that has been well received by Islanders. It's been referred to me as one of the best processes that have gone on on Prince Edward Island for many years, and indeed has been endorsed by members and politicians from all of the political parties in Prince Edward Island.

The protection of our water is paramount in the view of this government. That's why we've developed this water act process that is ongoing. We're getting ready to begin this second round of consultations on the water act and deal with all the issues that will protect the quality and quantity of our water for many years to come, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Another question. This one is, again, for the Premier: Do you support the idea of commercially exporting Island water for profit, Mr. Premier?

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

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

Over the past several weeks there has been an item that has come to light in regards to water usage on Prince Edward Island, one that wasn't fully discussed in the first round of the water act.

I believe that there is a perfect opportunity as we move forward over the next coming months to have a wide range of discussion on water usage, how we should use it, what levels of extraction should be permitted, and what levels of commercial use of water should be developed on Prince Edward Island.

There's ample opportunity for Islanders to bring forward their ideas and discussion on that, and I know many have indicated to me that they plan on being at the next round of consultations to bring those forward, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I mean, it's refreshing to hear the minister clearly state thresholds prior to proceeding with public consultation.

#### **Watershed water quality data**

This is a question to the environment minister. Now, the minister and I, I believe, agree that the valuable work done by watershed groups across the province, advocated for by the PEI Watershed Alliance, is extremely important and that government needs to better support watershed groups in managing our water.

The question for the minister is: Does the government have comprehensive data on the water quality of all Island watersheds?

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

**Mr. Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our department does a tremendous job of assisting watersheds from one end of the Island of Prince Edward Island to the other. We develop new programs every year to work with them.

Of course a collection of data on all waterways on Prince Edward Island is not in place at the present time, but we're working towards that. We have data that we can collect on many of our waterways and streams and rivers in Prince Edward Island, and the hope is that we can get to every one, but that is a process. We're working on that process, and staff work diligently with these watershed groups in order to achieve this data.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### **Water quantity metrics**

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

Another question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment:

Minister, does your government comprehensively track water quantity metrics in all Island watersheds?

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

**Mr. Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we all know, there is a significant amount of watershed groups in Prince Edward Island and streams and rivers. To have a comprehensive approach is one we're working towards, there's no question about that. We've heard in the first round of discussion on the water act that, water on Prince Edward Island, both groundwater and surface water, is something that we have to be very diligent at to protect and preserve quantities of both of those.

We are working as a province, as a government, as a department, to try and develop as much data, collect as much resource as we can, because that's only going to help and enhance how we deal with this issue moving forward.

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

### **Collection and sharing of water quality and water quantity data**

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

We need to make sure we have movement on this as soon as possible because knowledge of our water quality and water quantity is extremely important. They're extremely important benchmarks that must be known to properly manage our water. They are key parts needed to prepare what has been referred to as a water budget.

Another question for the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment:  
Minister: Will you commit to having your department collect comprehensive information on water quality and water quantity for all Island watersheds and share that information with the public through an open data interface?

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

**Mr. Mitchell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. member knows, it's for reasons as he's bringing forward today that we are in fact looking at developing this new water act. We have been served in the past rather effectively by pieces of policy and other directions to help us aid our water. But when we're working on this new act there will be much discussion – and it's going to be modernized so that we do have control over numbers that tell us quite firmly our extraction levels that we can use in our research to say how much water we have, where there may be issues, where we may know issues will occur in many years.

It's for those very reasons that this new water act is being formulated and that things of that nature will be a part of how we move forward to determine those levels.

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

### **PAC witnesses**

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

As MLAs of this House we deal on a daily basis with a high level of cynicism that many Islanders feel about government and their politicians. Trust and faith in governments is in decline, and I feel that it is the duty of those of us privileged enough to sit in this House to work hard to turn that around.

Question to the Premier. You came into office promising to do things differently and to restore Islanders' faith in politics and politicians. Can you explain to this House how having members of your caucus vote in a block to prevent witnesses from being called before the Public Accounts Committee is helping to restore Islanders faith in politics?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, the members of the Public Accounts Committee operate as MLAs to hold the government to account.

The Chair is a member of the official opposition, the vice-chair is a member of the Liberal caucus. The members of that committee determine what is relevant and

what is to be discussed at the committee as issues arise.

I always appreciate the work of the Public Accounts Committee. I think the members – and you're a member of the committee – are there to deliberate and determine what's the most important thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party, your first supplementary.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the work that we do on Public Accounts and all standing committees also, as long as we're allowed to do so.

I think everybody who follows politics is aware that, to a certain degree, Question Period can be theatrical. This is theatre rather than substantive debate. But we are always told – as the Premier just said – that the real work of politics happens in committees.

As I mentioned, the Premier's caucus has recently been whipped in order to block witnesses from appearing before the committee, preventing that committee from doing its work.

Can the Premier explain how he expects committees to do their work with this kind of obstructionism?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I respect the work of the committees, as does everyone in this House, and the committee members make their own decisions as to who they'll call, what they need to know, and how they intend to pursue things.

I know I've gotten inquiries myself from Public Accounts asking for information that I've gladly provided exactly in that spirit. I look forward to the work of the Public Accounts Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party, your second supplementary question.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some questionable rationale has been offered when it comes to preventing currently serving public servants from being called, but none has been offered for refusing to allow former elected officials now out of office from attending.

A question to the Premier: What is the rationale for Liberal members of the Public Accounts Committee voting against Wes Sheridan and Robert Ghiz from being called as witnesses?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, I don't have the rationale because the members make their own decisions.

But I'll say that when a member opposite appears in the public media and accuses other members of cowardice or accuses other members of filibustering when they're offering an honest and decent opinion, that's when you start bringing this House into disrepute.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

### **Summerside Regional Development Corporation replacement**

**Mr. Palmer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A government-commissioned review of the Summerside Regional Development Corporation has led the province to announce it will take steps to assume total control of the organization.

Can the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism please provide some clarity as to what will be replacing the existing corporation?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member.

We see this as an opportunity to take a look at the existing mandates of SRDC, and CADC in Charlottetown. We're starting to see some changes relevant to population growth, we're starting to see some changes relevant to innovation and manufacturing. We feel that the mandate that existed since the inception of these organizations, especially CADC in 1974, we feel that it's not necessarily fitting with the economic growth that we want to see from one end of the Island to the other as opposed to only the urban centres.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, your first supplementary question.

### **Delivery of economic development**

**Mr. Palmer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Can the minister address how the function of economic development will be delivered to help grow the economy?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

**Mr. MacDonald:** We have to realize, Mr. Speaker, that the geography right now – when I mentioned population, I meant basically there's growth outside the urban centres and we have to pay attention to that.

We have to be focused on rural development as well as urban development, and we're not necessarily in a position, by looking at the mandate of the existing CADC and SRDC, that that's actually happening. We feel that they require a new mandate.

But we will work with the community organizations, we will work with a central development – as one, Souris Harbour Authority – to talk to them and see what their initiatives and what their expertise could play in this whole format going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

### **Lobster carapace size and LFA 25**

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

My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries. Minister, I've heard a lot of concerns this past spring from fishers in my area about the federal government's announcement in LFA 25 to increase the lobster carapace size, and it would be increasing by 5 millimetres over the next three years.

What has your department done to represent the fishers in LFA 25 in this matter?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

It's an important question. The discussion on carapace size in LFA 25 – which is an area on the strait between Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and PEI, running from Victoria about to the north point – in that area we have, I think, 17 fishers from Nova Scotia, 218 from PEI, and I think it's 481 from New Brunswick.

This discussion has been going on for over six years. When the discussion came up again – because the Maritime Fishermen's Union in New Brunswick has been pushing to change the carapace size from 72 millimetres to 76. We met with Minister Tootoo when he was in the fisheries chair on three different occasions. The Premier and I met with him at the Boston Seafood Show to discuss with him – as was the position of the PEI Fishermen's Association as well – that the decision should be made on science-based. We pushed that forward, met with him. We also met with Minister LeBlanc.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, your first supplementary question.

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

I want to thank the minister and his department for all they've done to advocate on behalf of the LFA 25 fishers.

They have a very valid concern. They believe that the two millimetre increase in

2017, and then again the two millimetre increase in 2018, is too aggressive and being done too quickly.

My question to the minister is: Will he continue to advocate for our fishers and ask the federal minister to reconsider?

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

Again, that's the position that the PEIFA has and we support them on that. We're hoping that it may be stretched out to one millimetre a year for five years, which would be better.

But we told the minister, if he's going to continue with the one, two, and two, that we will be monitoring it. We watched it this year and told our fishermen that we would. Turned out this year was – I mean, the stocks proved to be very successful in that area. We were up about a million pounds in LFA 25 and about \$14 million in increased profits, which is great.

But going forward, the two and the two, we will definitely be monitoring and meeting again with Minister LeBlanc who has that portfolio at the present, supporting our fishers and the PEIFA as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

### **Ban on water exports, deep-water wells, and fracking**

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

The Minister of Communities, Land and Environment in the water act white paper in July 2015 said, and I quote: "Groundwater on Prince Edward Island supplies Islanders with their drinking water, making this a precious resource. Because of this, it is essential that we protect our water resources to their fullest."

The minister has said today we're going to consider all these things in the next water act

consultations, but we also know this government's track record when it comes to listening to what Islanders tell them.

My question for the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment is: Are you prepared to legislate a ban on all commercial water exports, deep-water wells, and fracking on PEI as recommended by a standing committee of this Legislature?

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

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

Obviously he's turned to a bit of drama, for certain. The hon. member is fully aware that we are in the process of a new act. We have been in the process of discussing with Islanders how they think a new water act should look.

We've talked to over 400 Islanders that came and had face-to-face meetings –

**Mr. Trivers:** But will you listen? That's the question.

**Mr. Mitchell:** – online submissions, and even by fax on some occasions.

We're formulating that. We are bringing back a draft act, currently. It is a draft form to say to Islanders: Does this reflect your wishes? We're going to do that in a very open, transparent process that has received many accolades thus far.

For the hon. member to say: Are you firm and fast on anything?, we have certainly indicated that we are listening. We are bringing it back and we are trying to meet the wishes of Islanders on Prince Edward Island.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

### **HST increase**

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Many Islanders are struggling to shoulder the burden of the HST increase, especially with the winter fast approaching.

Question to the energy minister: Are you at all concerned that your government's HST increase will make it harder for Island families to get by this winter?

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

**Mr. Roach:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When we brought the legislation in and we talked about the 1% increase in HST, we also brought in measures that spoke directly to low-income earners to ensure that we took the burden off them throughout the tax, not only for the upcoming season with oil, but in circumstances of all reasons.

But we focused directly to low-income earners to make sure that they were – things in that that prevented them from suffering under this legislation and under this 1% increase.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

### **Energy strategy protections**

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're told the government will be tabling their energy strategy during this sitting. Some of the biggest causes of greenhouse gases on the Island are transportation and home heating.

Question to the energy minister: What protections will your energy strategy have for Islanders struggling with the high taxes and cost of home energy?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, we will soon be tabling our new energy strategy which we've been working on and consulting with Islanders across Prince Edward Island. But what we have been doing also is helping Islanders through efficiency PEI.

Since 2008, over \$7 million in grants have been given out to 8,000 residential clients to assist them, and we just recently actually

announced also our new energy home audit program to assist people in planning for efficiency in their home. They can have their study done. We cover the cost of that half of that cost.

But when we table our new energy strategy we'll see that we are taking low-income Islanders into account as well.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

### **Energy strategy tax initiative re: hybrid and electric vehicles**

**Mr. MacKay:** A former PC government brought in a tax rebate for the purchase of hybrid and electric vehicles to lower greenhouse emissions. Your government killed that incentive when you brought the HST in.

Question to the energy minister: Will your new energy strategy restore this tax initiative for Islanders who purchased hybrid and electric vehicles?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of great technologies, including electric cars.

We do have to have infrastructure across Prince Edward Island to support those kinds of initiatives. But we will be very happy to table our energy strategy in the near future, and you will see that there are a lot of great initiatives that are going to be in there to help Islanders.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

### **HST rebate on energy efficient home heating**

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Standing Committee on Education and Economic Development has looked closely into the issues around your government's HST increases. One idea came that came up: extending the HST exemption on home heating to include energy efficient sources.

Question to the energy minister: Will your new strategy include an extension of the HST rebate for home heating to energy efficient forms of home heating?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have looked at a lot of different initiatives, talking to people across PEI a part of our consultation, and Dunsky Consulting have put together – I think there are over 70 recommendations that you'll see have been put together. We will be compiling and revealing a lot of those recommendations that we think are going to make a difference going forward in regard to reducing our emissions on Prince Edward Island, and also helping Islanders to deal with more efficiency ways to save money.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

### **HST rebate removal on home heating fuel**

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Early drafts and media reports on your energy strategy suggested that you plan to remove the HST rebate on home heating altogether, adding another 15% to the cost of furnace oil.

Question to the energy minister: Is this still your plan?

**Speaker:** The Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy

**Ms. Biggar:** Mr. Speaker, thank you.

As I said, we did have Dunsky Consulting do the plan for us, the initial consultations across Prince Edward Island. That's one of the recommendations Dunsky put forward.

You will see when we do our tabling of our new energy strategy just what is in there. It would be premature, certainly, to be talking now about a strategy that hasn't been tabled in this House. We'll have a great discussion on that when it is tabled.

Thank you for the question.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

**Mr. MacKay:** As the MLA for Sour-Elmira would say: No plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In its report tabled this spring, the Standing Committee on Education and Economic Development recommended extending the HST rebate for home heating to energy efficient forms of home heating.

Question to the energy minister: Why would your energy strategy go in the opposite direction of recommendations made by an all-party committee?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Part of our strategy is to look at mitigations that we can provide to help Islanders save in efficiency in their energy, to save when they are doing renovations.

I'm not going to talk now specifically what is in the energy strategy. We will have ample time to have those discussions.

I appreciate the work that the standing committee has done. I do know they do great work. I appreciate the recommendations that they also have put forward. All of those kinds of things have been taken into consideration in part of our strategy.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know the minister won't listen to voters, but now she won't even listen to an all-party committee of MLAs.

Question to the energy minister: Why do you think raising taxes on all forms of home heating energy is a better idea than offering

tax initiatives to chose more energy efficient homes and heating sources?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have looked at a number of different ways as part of our strategy that we can put forward suggestions within the strategy for Islanders to save more money on energy.

We will continue to work with Islanders going forward as we roll out the strategy. There will opportunities there for Islanders in many different levels that they can take advantage of from our new strategy.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, final question.

**Energy strategy environmentally friendly tax initiatives**

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the energy minister: Will you commit today that your new energy plan will offer tax initiatives for environmentally friendly measures like energy efficient home heating sources and vehicles?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Mr. Speaker, we already offer support for Islanders to have alternative sources of heat in their homes.

The highest and most used grant of all that we give out to Islanders – 85% of all the grants that we give out to Islanders – are for air-sourced heating programs. That helps them covert away from oil. We encourage that kind of a conversion program.

We'll continue to support those kinds of programs within our new strategy. You will see that we do have other things that we will offer Islanders.

Thank you.

[End of Question Period]