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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 2017

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Need for long-term care beds

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

As we all know, nearly 30,000 Islanders are aged 65 or older; a number that will only increase as the baby boomer generation ages, and many will eventually require long-term care.

A question to the Premier: How does your government plan to deal with this growing demographic challenge?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government, and I'm sure is the case for all members in the House and people throughout Prince Edward Island, recognize that indeed we have a growing senior population, one that brings a great deal of promise and makes a great contribution to our communities and indeed that eventually will lead to a need by some seniors for long-term care. I can say that over the past decade the operating budget for senior care in public and private residences – public and private premises – has increased by 75%, and this year the operating budget for those properties is \$93 million, between 7 and 7% of our operating budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

As the manor replacement program limps into its second decade, many Islanders have noted – and I've heard it on the doorsteps, I've heard it on the phone – that the manor replacement program that's currently in

place is simply replacing new beds with old beds.

Again, question to the Premier: Where is your forward-looking vision in replacing manors with the same number of beds when the demand for long-term care is simply growing?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there are, in terms of public manor beds, almost 1,150 in Prince Edward Island. That would be very close to the very top of the rank among provinces on a per capita basis, and reflecting the responsiveness to the need in our province, and indeed that does represent an increase of 15% in terms of the number of manor beds over the past decade.

We recognize that there are further plans to be made and further strategies and collaborations to be worked out, but we are, indeed, responding to, and attentive to and mindful of that need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Bed number replacement for Riverview Manor

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

After eight years of delays work has finally begun to replace the Riverview Manor, but only after federal government agreed to put the majority of the money forward.

Question to the Premier: Did you, or do you have designs made for a manor with more beds in case that you did get these federal dollars, or are you simply going to replace it with the same amount of beds as you've done in the past?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposition is raising a valid question regarding our demands and plans for long-term care.

I'll tell you, what we are doing is we have assimilated a group of individuals that are putting together a long-term care strategy for Islanders as we move forward and that's led by Dr. Michael Corman. I have mentioned it many times at Legislative hearings, and I'm looking forward to the outcome of that.

We're engaging Islanders to make sure that they're putting the needs of Islanders first when it comes to long-term care, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The driving consideration behind the delays was to pinch pennies, not meet the demand. Again, we could only assume that this is because there is no forward-looking leadership from this government.

Licenses for long-term care beds

Again, question to the Premier: How many licenses have been granted for private long-term care beds since you became Premier?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: What kind of action (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, we have, at the moment, 1,141 long-term care bed licenses that are – individual bed out there within the system. In fact, we've added 145 beds since 2007. I think I'd challenge the other side to say: how many did they –

An Hon. Member: None.

Mr. Henderson: – put together in the –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: None.

Mr. Henderson: – years previous to that –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) 1996.

Mr. Henderson: – don't think too many.

We are meeting the needs of Islanders –

Mr. Myers: How far (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: – we've seen our numbers decline and those that are awaiting long-term care. We are also putting some significant investments into home care and with our nurse practitioners and all those primary service providers out there to meet those needs, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I thought my last question was fairly straightforward and I'm sorry that the Premier didn't see fit to stand up and answer it. It was simply asking him: Since he became Premier, how many licenses has he granted through his government for private long-term care beds?

We actually know that no private bed licenses were issued under this Premier's leadership. There is interest in the private sector, but your government is stopped on a study treadmill.

Question to the Premier: Why do you keep commissioning studies when the private sector is willing to invest their own money in long-term care beds?

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) great question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as was noted earlier, there were 145 new beds added in the public system –

Mr. Trivers: Since 2007.

Premier MacLauchlan: – over the past decade. Indeed, to correct the Leader of the Opposition, we have recently granted six private licenses.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'd ask the members in the House that just finished clapping their desks for the announcement that the Premier just made, that since he became Premier, he's added six long-term care beds. When, in fact, we know that any given day there are well over 100 seniors occupying acute care beds in our hospitals that are waiting for long-term care beds.

Mr. Myers: Shameful.

Leader of the Opposition: So, if you want to applaud for that, go ahead.

Ms. Biggar: Is there a question?

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker –

Mr. Myers: Are you the Speaker?

Leader of the Opposition: – at this rate, we will have kids that are in school today that will need long-term care beds before this Premier hops off his study treadmill.

Addition of new long-term care beds to private sector

Again, question to the Premier: Islanders need action on long-term care, will you commit today to having a competitive process to assign new long-term care beds to the private sector?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important to note here that the hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned there was over 100 people awaiting long-term care that are in our acute care beds. That's not accurate. The number is actually 74.

Once again, I think it's very important that when we're dealing with a continuum of care, it's very important to note that there is all levels of providing services to seniors. Whether that's independent living supports, whether that's community care, whether that's long-term care and whether it's home care; and the delivery of home care and the supports that they require.

We are looking at the right investments for the right time for situations that are coming forward to us. I'm looking forward to the outcome of the review that the long-term care strategy is going to recommend.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This Premier and his government do not believe in action. The Premier is a thinker, not a doer.

Critical situation of seniors' care in province

How does the health minister justify the inaction and the critical situation that has been caused for seniors' care in this province?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Myers: Think about it.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, we have. We've been putting together a manor replacement program. We've got the Montague manor and Riverview Manor in Montague, and the Stewart Memorial Manor

in Tyne Valley well under construction. I've had the opportunity to tour those facilities.

We're looking forward to those beds being open in 2019, probably by summer, mid-summer in that range.

Mr. Trivers: No progress.

Mr. Henderson: – that's an investment–

Mr. Trivers: Zero progress.

Mr. Henderson: – of \$23.4 million in those replacements.

Then, when it comes to designating more long-term care beds, there are a lot of valid questions that have to be asked here. There has to be the investments in home care. How that interacts with the long-term care.

Islanders, we know, want to be their homes as long as they possibly can. We need to make sure we're providing those supports before we're automatically institutionalizing Islanders before they're ready to go there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to talk about replacing two manors with the same number of beds that are already there. We know the need is growing; 30,000 Island seniors and this number will continue to grow.

The minister's director told the standing committee on health three weeks ago: I think we have a long way to go yet, in terms of catching up the demographic surge that's coming.

Minister: Why has no action been taken to address the critical situation in long-term care on PEI?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, we have been taking action. That's why we have added more long-term care beds into the system. That's why we have increased our investments into home care.

We've increased staff at home care to provide services to Islanders. It's a myriad of services. It can be residential supports. It can be respite care. We've also added respite care beds to our long-term care facilities to meet the demands of Islanders.

Once again, we've already implemented a plan. We're engaging Islanders through our continuum of care committee and they're going to be looking at those key questions on; if we were to add more long-term care beds, where would they be at? How many would you –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: – add? We have to make sure that we're also –

Mr. Trivers: Less talk more action.

Mr. Henderson: – making sure our spending in long-term – or in community care and in home care are up to the standards that we would expect too, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier is not a doer and the minister is refusing to acknowledge reality. On a daily basis his staff gets the count of Island seniors who are parked in hospital beds, medically discharged, and awaiting a long-term care bed.

Minister: Why are you parking our Island seniors in hospital beds across PEI?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, once again, as we look at – we're seeing those numbers

of those awaiting long-term care is declining and it's because of those investments in providing home care supports, to make sure that we're meeting the needs of Islanders. As well as, even issues around our advanced care paramedics that are investing in dealing with palliative care in the home, that's another investment that we placed to do that.

Once again, as we continue to look at where the needs of Islanders are going to be, we'll be well prepared to make the proper investments at the proper time, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The QEH, the PCH, Kings County Memorial, the Western Hospital, Community Hospital, Souris Hospital and even the Hillsborough Hospital; every single facility has seniors parked in acute beds because there are no long-term care beds available.

Minister: Are you not able to see that this bottlenecks increasing wait times, not only for seniors, but also for Islanders waiting for in-care in a hospital?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Once again, Mr. Speaker, we have seen those numbers of those awaiting long-term care in our acute-care facilities has been declining. It's been declining for the last couple of years. We now are down to a situation of approximately 70 people awaiting long-term care.

I must commend the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, I was down to tour the Gillis Lodge, a wonderful facility. There's an individual that has made some significant investments, providing great care. In fact, we are adding six more long-term care beds to that facility to provide and continue with that care.

Once again, we'll see where we look at future investments.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Cost of hospital beds versus long-term care beds

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very proud of the facility we have in our community. It provides a need, but there's a need across the Island. Over 100 seniors – you can say 74, that's 74 families that are in desperate need of placing their family member somewhere other than a hospital. Because we know the care in a hospital is not the care you get in a senior's facility or a long-term care facility.

This minister is spending up to \$1,200 per person per day for a hospital bed when we could move those seniors to a more appropriate care, improving their situation and reducing health care wait times for everyone.

Minister: Why are you prolonging and worsening the critical situation for Island seniors in our health care system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we certainly acknowledge the fact that we have some people that are awaiting long-term care in our acute care facilities, but we are also providing interventions and supports there to help their situations as well.

We've got some day programming that we allow people to go over to a – I know in the Western Hospital as an example, they go over to Maplewood Manor and get some services there and recreation and promotional health and wellbeing concepts and the things of that nature. We'll continue to look at those types of investments so we reduce that number – which we've been continuing to reduce for the last couple of years. Once we get the feedback from that long-term care strategy that will be developed, we'll then know more accurately

where we'll spend our monies and invest in Islanders.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Not only is this critical situation worse for those seniors needing long-term care, it is an inefficient use of health care resources and it is misplacing costs in our system.

Minister: Is it more cost-effective for our health care system to have Islanders needing long-term care to be parked in a hospital bed that costs \$1,200 a day, or a dedicated long-term care bed which is about a sixth the cost?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: I think the reality here is, Mr. Speaker, it is about trying to provide the appropriate level of care for the appropriate situation in the appropriate location. Yes, we have some people that aren't in the spot that we would like to see them in, but once again, the wait times have been reducing for those locations and we'll continue to work on making sure that we're providing Islanders with the best level of service and to make them as comfortable and to make the experiences successful as they possibly can.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Having hospital beds used by Islanders needing inpatient hospital care: seems like common sense especially when there are always people waiting. However, this is what the directors of Health PEI told the Standing Committee on Health and Wellness: We have looked at this as well. The only way we save that is if the bed is empty. If we could move that long-term care resident out, for example, but the way then

you would save the money is if you actually close the bed because there is always somebody waiting for that bed.

So, we're saving money by housing or warehousing seniors in hospitals when people across the Island are waiting for in-care services in a hospital.

Minister: Have you deliberately created the bottleneck and critical situation of long-term care simply for a budgetary strategy?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: The reality in this is, once again, is that we have made some significant investments in our long-term care. In fact, we've increased our staff – it has increased by 25% in our long-term care facilities. We've seen the addition of 154 new long-term care positions to help deal with the situation. Once again, we don't look at this from a budgetary perspective. We wanted to make sure we're providing the right level of care for the right situation for the appropriate condition.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Parking long-term care residents in hospital beds, closing other hospital beds – like the psychiatric ones in Unit 9 – all this as government dumps millions and millions more into the system, yet the shortages continue, the gaps continue, and the bed closures continue.

Minister: Your director called it a long-term care problem, and then a systemic problem, and then a hospital-based problem. Why have you failed to identify this critical situation and how bad does it have to get before this government will act?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, in fact, things have been getting better in the respect that the wait times for people awaiting long-term care has declined. We've seen the amount of people awaiting long-term care that are in our acute-care facilities – that number has declined. We've put some significant investments in increased staffing; we've increased the budget for long-term care across the province – whether that's with our private deliverers of service or whether it's our long-term care within our own public system. We have 1,141 long-term care beds. We'll do a review of that and we'll determine where and how many beds should be required and where they would be placed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're waiting on strategies. We're waiting on studies. The Premier is not a doer, but Islanders need action and our PC team have a simple solution.

Minister: How can Island seniors and families trust your government given your hand in creating alarming critical situations in our health care system and the inaction and lack of understanding from you and the Premier?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

As far as understanding of the particular subject, I'm well aware of the situation. Actually I tour long-term care facilities pretty well weekly. I have a mother that's in a long-term care facility – at Stewart Memorial Manor. I understand the challenges that those types of aging issues can have on a family and that's why we're doing the investments that we're doing. That's why we need to get the right plan, the right place, and we will be doing that in the near future.

We've got a committee in place. We've got some great experts that are looking at good evidence-based information. It's not about just announcing where you're going to put long-term care beds, you're going to put this number out or that number; you need some evidence and fact bases to make those types of decisions – evidence-based decisions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

This government has talked enthusiastically about promoting rural development on PEI and last year they even created a new ministry of rural and regional development – specifically to support this goal.

Last evening in Crapaud, well over 100 people gathered to discuss the imminent loss of their doctor. For rural areas such as the South Shore, maintenance of critical services such as schools, recreational facilities, restaurants, retail outlets, and local access to medical care are crucial to a community's well-being.

Loss of doctor in Crapaud

A question to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness: What will his department do to support the South Shore area in maintaining the pillar of this region's prosperity – which is local access to health care?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: I thought I was getting a break there for a second.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, it's a very good question and I had the opportunity to meet with the hon. member and the hon. MLA for Borden-Kinkora area, as well as councillors just the other day and we discussed the issues and challenges that are faced by the community of Crapaud. We've provided them with numerous options that may be possible to help alleviate the

situation there. It's really about the community coming together and approaching different health care providers out there to see what possible business arrangements could be made.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed the community did come together last evening, Minister, and one of the things that was talked about was setting up a task force to actively – proactively go and look for a doctor themselves.

A question to the minister: If the community is indeed successful in locating and recruiting a suitably qualified and accredited physician, will his department consider issuing a new billing number for the area?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, when we had that discussion the other day, we talked about those options and there is a process that we have to go through when we're talking about adding new members to the complement or new billing numbers, and that there's a clear process to doing that, so if there once again, if there is a physician that that's where they want to particularly practice and there happens to be no vacancies in the billing number in that particular area, we would certainly work with that community to try to go through that process to help add another billing number.

We also discussed a lot about the concept of a nurse practitioner working with another physician in another part of the Island under a fee-for-service model that may work very well too, so there's certainly lots of options and we're certainly willing to commit and work with that community or any other community when it comes to providing primary care to meet their needs, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Primary health services in rural areas

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

The way that primary care delivery health care is being delivered is undergoing profound changes, as I mentioned in my member's statement at the beginning.

The more collaborative approach, known as primary health care, is about creating the conditions that help people to become and stay healthy and well. This model involved more extensive use of nurse practitioners, pharmacists, physiotherapists, and other complementary providers.

Health practitioners in the south shore region developed an innovative proposal that was based on this model a couple of years ago, but government would not support it.

Will the minister reconsider his government's position and work with the local community on this innovative development that would ensure access to rural primary health services?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: That's a good question, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to the issues around nurse practitioners, especially with many nurse practitioners that are in here, we have seen our complement of nurse practitioners increase in this province. I think there are approximately 20 nurse practitioners practicing all over the Island.

We continue to look at possible models and opportunities for nurse practitioners too, but we also have to work with the medical society and that. We have to make sure that we're providing them the right services and supports, and when they're working to provide primary care to Islanders and like I said before, whether it's Crapaud or any other community, if a nurse practitioner model could work, we certainly would look at that, and we've seen cases, I think even in Cornwall, where we've teamed up a nurse practitioner with a doctor to, once again,

meet the panel sizes that the previous position would have carried.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Police checkpoint at Upton Road

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy. The portion of the Trans-Canada Highway realignment between the Malpeque Road and the Upton Road roundabout is a frequent police checkpoint.

Minister, would you consider making this checkpoint more permanent, not unlike weight scale infrastructure we see in neighbouring provinces, for the safety of the travelling public and our law enforcement officers?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, any time that our law enforcements are doing checks along the highway, it's always important that our officers are safe and able to pull off the road safely to do those kind of checks, or anyone else that needs to pull off the road. That particular section of highway already has a two-metre paved edge on it, plus an additional 1.5 clay edge in addition to that.

So, we have looked at those areas, and we feel that it is ample room for any person to pull off on the edge of the road.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, your first supplementary question.

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Being a former officer that did a lot of checkpoints, I believe that traffic separation and lighting at a checkpoint, especially in a frequently used location with additional lighting, would be advantageous.

Would the minister consider traffic separation and additional lighting in that portion of the highway?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, in fact, have taken part in a roadside police check with RCMP officers, and I do know the amount of traffic that they encounter in regard to that. Unless it's an emergency type of road check, they don't normally do those in the dark. But, having participated in it, I know that it's important that everyone has a safe area.

When we look at putting streetlights in, we go by the Canadian standards of installing those. What we have done in that particular area and right across Prince Edward Island is install the reflective markers in the central line, and those do show up, so we'll continue to make sure that that's a safe area.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, your second supplementary question.

Construction of on-ramp onto TCH near Lower Malpeque Road

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My constituents would like access to the Trans-Canada Highway from the Lower Malpeque Road.

Minister: Would your department examine the possibility of constructing an on-ramp onto the Trans-Canada Highway realignment from the Lower Malpeque Road?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very familiar with that section of the highway, as I travel that on my way into Charlottetown every day, pretty well.

The member and I have had this discussion previously, and I have had the department

look at that particular area, and our review has indicated that there is not ample land in that particular area to be able to construct a ramp on –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) just take it –

An Hon. Member: Just expropriate it.

Ms. Biggar: – so we're not able to do that, Mr. Speaker.

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

Funding to Tignish cooperative health centre

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now that the health minister had a few minutes for a breather, I'm going to get him back up on his feet.

An Hon. Member: It never stops.

Mr. Perry: Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, the Tignish cooperative health centre has been operating for close to 45 years now, and since its conception it has been financially funded by volunteers within the community, and they have been fundraising, whether it's selling fudge or used clothing or what have you.

But, as time goes by they find it increasingly difficult to meet the demands. So, to alleviate some of this pressure on the volunteers, the government in 2012 – our government – has given them a yearly operational funding, and I was wondering if this funding will be available again for the 2017 year.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Yeah, now that I've got my second wind, we're ready to roll.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to rural health centres, the Tignish Health Centre is at an unbelievably fantastic model. Many volunteers have a very professional concept, and they do a really good collaborative care model when it comes to physicians, physiotherapists, public health nurses, and

the list goes on – pharmacies – and the list goes on.

We have received a request from the Tignish Health Centre for funding again this year, and we're putting together the Treasury Board memo to make that happen as soon as possible, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We certainly do appreciate the support that has come from your department in the past, and we look forward to receiving that again. You did mention that in the near future it will be here, but I'm going to put you on the spot a little bit more here, because in order for them to budget, they need to have a timely response to this.

So, do you know specifically when they may be able to receive this funding?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, as the Member from Tignish-Palmer Road has been an extremely ardent advocate for the Tignish Health Centre, and he's been contacting me quite frequently about wondering about the possibilities about the funding, and like I said before, we will put together a Treasury Board memo. We would be hopeful that – to do that through that process will see the funding be granted, and hopefully that funding will be commenced at least by year-end, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

New policies and regulations re: irrigation ponds

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, thanks to my colleague from Kensington-Malpeque, we learned that there

are no rules in place around the construction of large industrial irrigation ponds.

Now, the environment minister has the power to put policy in place at any time. When the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment introduces legislation, he always ensures he has the ultimate power to have the final say, with the trend of relying on the regulations to exert important controls.

A question to the environment minister: Minister, when you saw this trend of many large irrigation ponds being dug, did it ever occur to you that you might need to introduce new policy and regulations?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

As I stated yesterday, the holding ponds that are across Prince Edward Island are being run by farmers in a very effective manner. There is no permitting. There are no regulations, currently. But, the new Water Act, which will hopefully be laid in the very near future will allow the process of permitting for those wells that will be used to supply holding ponds. The purpose of the holding ponds, of course, is to catch natural runoff, natural snow melt – that is the primary purpose of those and occasionally, farmers need to top them up by some water supply, which they have in place, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A question to the environment minister: Minister, do you think it's a coincidence that these ponds started springing up when the Water Act was being delayed?

Mr. Myers: Oh, good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, the line of questioning today is similar to yesterday's questions and: No, I believe the farming industry – they're not criminals. They're not trying to skirt legislation. They're not trying to find loopholes. The farming industry was well present at all consultation meetings that we held in regards to the Water Act. They are good stewards of the land. They want to do the right things when it comes to the farming practices, and they are fully aware that permitting will be required on those low-capacity wells moving into the future, which some of them are currently feeding those holding ponds.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister knows that Islanders care passionately about their water. It's a very high priority for them. It's our job to hold you to account. We want to make sure that you have the regulations and policies in place to protect the water, and you have that power. Perhaps the only bill that has been delayed more times than the Water Act is the lobbyist act.

New Water Act

Question to the environment minister: Do you think that's a coincidence as well?

Mr. Myers: Oh, good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The opportunity to talk to the upcoming Water Act is a very valuable one. The upfront investments that we made, and spending time and effort to go out and consult with public, will make this the very best act that we've ever probably laid on the

floor of the Legislature here. It will reflect full public input in regards to all things regarding our water quality; our water quantity; where it's used; when it's used; what it's used for; and that will be fully reflected so that it's a very transparent and open process online for all Islanders to see.

This is as a direct result of going out and talking to Islanders to hear their concerns of how this should be protected. I think it will be very well reflected in the act and I think people will see it very positive.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Large scale irrigation ponds (further)

Mr. Trivers: Question for the environment minister: How many times have you been personally lobbied, as minister, on the issue of irrigation ponds by corporations such as Cavendish Farms or their subsidiaries like Indian River Farms?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said yesterday, our department is fully aware of these ponds that are being developed across the Island. We are working with the department of agriculture to come up with a recommendation of how these ponds should be built so that they are as efficient as they can for those in the agriculture sector. Farmers are fully aware of what the process will be moving forward once the new Water Act comes into place.

Mr. Myers: Have you been lobbied?

Mr. Mitchell: They are very interested in being good stewards of the land and –

Mr. Myers: Seems strange you wouldn't answer that.

Mr. Mitchell: – we will continue to work with them on that –

Mr. Myers: If the answer was no (Indistinct)

Mr. Mitchell: – and I have never met with any farm on a holding pond, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: We all know the answer is 'yes'.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister may not appreciate these questions, and perhaps that's why he's failing to give an answer. But in the absence of a Water Act or a lobbyist act, they do need to be asked. So, this is what we have found out on this side of the House: The environment minister has no rules in place and really no plans to put any policy or regulations in place, and we also found out that the agriculture minister has had staff providing technical support on the development of these irrigation ponds.

Question to the agriculture minister: Can you confirm that officials from your department have been coaching these companies on how to exploit any existing or future legal loopholes?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

Very glad to get the question, and to refer back to the questions yesterday from Member from Kensington-Malpeque, as well as the hon. member today: First and foremost let's look at what our farmers are doing. In our department is working with CLE, we have a stewardship program that's looking at keeping –

Mr. Myers: Oh, so another yes –

Mr. McIsaac: – our soil in place that's –

Mr. Myers: – disguised as a soliloquy.

Mr. McIsaac: – what the idea is behind.

Our departments worked on 165 projects of keeping our soil (Indistinct) because when we get a deluge of water or even an easy rain we want it to go down through a grass waterway; held off from washing soil out –

Mr. Myers: If it was a no, he'd say no.

Mr. McIsaac: – by a berm or whatever that may be. There is a lot of water that comes off the land. If can go into a pond, that's terrific; we can recycle that back up. This is very, very important to do that. We need to work with the farmers. They are the number one industry in the province. We need to keep that going.

We do that in a very, very important way that we put the policies in place and we'll continue to do that. Water is precious and land is very precious. Our farmers are certainly very precious.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: As long as you ask (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, your final question.

Agriculture coaching farmers re: irrigation ponds

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Here in the official opposition we talk to farmers. We believe in farmers.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) trustworthy.

Mr. Trivers: We know that there is at least 30 wells that are being used to fill these holding ponds. It's not run-off that's happening. It's not about grass waterways.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: This is about holding ponds that are being filled with no policy and no regulation being put in place. The job of the government is to make sure that the interests of Islanders are looked after. We are here to

hold you to account and we want to make sure that happens.

Question to the agriculture minister: Will you admit that your own deputy minister has been directly involved and, indeed, has been coaching these companies on how to exploit both current and future legal loopholes?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

I would love to take you out to the Kensington north –

Some Hon. Members: Oh! Oh!

Mr. McIsaac: – watershed group and see what –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) your loophole (Indistinct)

Mr. McIsaac: – the Kensington north watershed group is doing. It's right in your own home territory –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. McIsaac: – the things they're doing working with our farmers to make sure we maintain our soil. The dollars that are –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) but watersheds (Indistinct)

Mr. McIsaac: – being put into stewardship of our land –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) working (Indistinct)

Mr. McIsaac: – it is absolutely crucial. We are working with them. We have a whole department there with regards to the stewardship, but a lot of dollars into that. I think we need to stand in this House and give credit to our farmers, who are working to very, very, properly look after the land that is so crucial to our province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]