



Session:	3/65
Date:	29 November 2017
No:	9

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 29 NOVEMBER 2017

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Question Period

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Tabling of PNP review

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

Yesterday we talked about immigration and problems that have, once again, emerged and how this government runs the Provincial Nominee Program. We called for a complete top-to-bottom review of the PNP program and the minister said one had been done six to eight months ago.

Question to the immigration minister: Will you table a copy of that top-to-bottom review of the PNP program here today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour to get up again and talk about immigration and how important it is to the Province of Prince Edward Island. A review was done based on our findings in the immigration department and it was done in-house, and it was done for a reason that we felt that we could be doing more, and immigration is playing such an important, integral role in growing the economy in Prince Edward Island.

We felt that if we can take that and make it even better, that's what we're going to do and that's exactly what we did, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Same question to the same minister: Will you table that report in this House?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we've openly conducted a transparent assessment of it when we included the expression of interest that we've just – we published it. The hon. member sitting across the floor – we've taken in the opposition in front of staff and we explained exactly what the immigration portfolio contains and what it does, and how we work with it. We've made several changes to the program that are going to make the program much better, including 12 new intermediaries and we're very fortunate the way immigration is working in Prince Edward Island –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – and we'll hope it continues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: Working together.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Newcomers concerned with PNP

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

The government may not like the questions being asked, but we're not the only ones asking. In fact, representatives of the Chinese Canadian association have also spoken out. In fact, the president of the association said this: I feel that the government wants the Chinese people to come here to pay money and they are not really interested in if the business is successful.

Question to the minister: Why does there seem to be such a disconnect between what you are saying here and what newcomers are seeing in practice.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: I can assure the hon. member that we're taking action on every aspect of the immigration file – and interesting enough, I saw the interview and I opened Facebook today and on Kijiji or (Indistinct) it's called, the only Chinese newspaper printed on Prince Edward Island, and the Facebook page was actually a picture of the hon. member that's asking the question.

In that article, they talk about how good immigration is on Prince Edward Island, so there is a disconnect but –

Mr. Myers: You read Chinese?

Mr. MacDonald: – you know what? We're working with these associations. We're working with newcomers.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: We're working with everybody right across PEI from one end to the other and we're improving immigration as we go.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Yes, I am in favour of immigration. I am in favour of immigration when it's done properly above board. Yesterday I asked about the deposits system that this government is profiting from. As I noted, a growing number of provinces have moved away from this model finding it problematic.

Review of changes to deposit system

Question to the immigration minister: What did your PNP review say should be changed about the deposit system now in place?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The deposit system and the default system has been in place for a number of years and we're building on that. That's why we went out and we have 12 intermediaries now. We went to 13 communities. We have them engaged in a process to develop more immigration in rural PEI.

Also, part of the Atlantic Growth Strategy, part of that growth strategy, if you read *The Chronicle Herald* today, if Jamie Baillie was sitting across the House from me today, he'd be in agreement with what Prince Edward Island is doing.

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 also raised the issue of residency requirements for newcomers who start new businesses here. Currently, they're only required to operate for one year.

Residency requirements for newcomers

Again, question to the minister: What did your PNP review say should be changed around residency requirements for newcomers starting their own businesses?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, there's many different entities that they have to go through when they arrive here on Prince Edward Island. The first one is, the first stop, is the immigration office on Prince Edward Island. Then, they invest \$150,000, which we've talked about openly. Then they have to incur a minimum of \$75,000.

Also, IIDI requires proof of applicant lived in the province while operating the business. Proof includes, but not limited to; tax returns that were filed on PEI, lease or proof of purchase of a resident, utility bills, bank and credit card statements, and copies of passports.

We're doing our due diligence on these individuals, but we'll keep improving the system.

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.

Due diligence on this side of the House when it's only 20% of the time in place, I don't think that's a very good practice.

Most new business start-ups need three years to become viable. Right now, we only require these businesses to be open for 365 days to reach their threshold.

Question to the minister: Why do your residency rules run counter to most normal business cycles?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's actually two years. If we're talking about a business going forward, if you read the latest issues on *Forbes Magazine*, over 90% of businesses fail.

Let's not put all – we have a very successful immigration program here. We're leading in population growth right across Canada at –

Mr. Myers: Filling your pockets.

Mr. MacDonald: – 1.7%. We're leading in –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – retail sales. We're leading in housing starts. We'll continue to grow the immigration program. We have checks and balances in place.

If I get another question, I'll get up and offer you what we do, actually, to help the immigrants when they arrive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

An Hon. Member: Ask the (Indistinct)

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

It's clear and evident that our retention rate in newcomers beyond one year is very low. In fact, it's as low as 20%.

The way this government has set-up the PNP program that may be contributing to it, and they seem fine with it.

Retention percentage for economic immigrants

Question to the Premier: Why is 20% retention for economic immigrants fine, but 37% turnout for a plebiscite not good enough?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure where the 20% is coming from. One year retention in 2014, we're at about 63%. It's not hard, if you take a drive around the Island and, especially, in the Charlottetown area, you're going to see that immigration is growing –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) after one year.

Mr. MacDonald: – here are some of the things in the previous question. Here are some of the things that we've as a settlement of Office of Immigration.

During 2017 calendar year, we did 174 site visits to businesses. We did eight internal education sessions at 185 attendees. Four external education sessions estimated at 200 attendees and the PEI connectors did 15 educational sessions during the year, estimated at 250 attendees.

We're getting the job done, Mr. Speaker, and it shows.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It certainly shows in \$27 million in default escrow deposits over a two-year period.

There is a theme emerging in government's response to these issues. Namely, as long as newcomers are spending money here for at least one year, that's fine, because you only need one year to make a footprint in our population figures.

Increased federal transfers dollars

Question to the Premier: Premier, how much does PEI stand to make in increased federal transfers due to inflated population figures?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada is a reliable organization. They produce, on an annual basis for 2016-2017 the population in this province; the population of the other nine provinces and three territories. I believe those to be highly reliable and I'm proud of the progress that Prince Edward Island is making. We've already surpassed our target of 150,000 to 152,000; highest ever population. We believe that to be correct and we're proud of it.

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 think we can start to see where this government has such an incentive to maintain the status quo: the money is too good. In fact, many would say it's addictive. Failure to address these structural issues puts PEI's brand reputation at risk and will make successful long-term immigration that much harder into the future.

Review of Provincial Nominee Program (further)

Again, question to the Premier: Premier, will you launch a full and complete top-to-bottom review of the Provincial Nominee Program that looks at structural issues with deposits, residency requirements and questionable business practices?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is the second day that I've talked about the changes that we have made in this program, and the model that we're following.

We've met with the director general of immigration. We're in consultation with their department. We met with the secretary of immigration. We reviewed everything that we're doing and they're looking at us, saying: good job, you guys. Keep going. You're doing a good job.

What bothers me is we're dealing with a new program. We're –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – dealing with new entries. We're dealing with 13 communities that want this program across Prince Edward Island.

We used to do first-in-first-out and we said no to the intermediaries. We're not doing that anymore. We want to be more particular on who comes in to Prince Edward Island. That's part of the new model. There are all kinds of new issues that we're dealing with,

but there's all kinds of benefits that we're dealing with, as well, Mr. Speaker.

Thank You.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: You'd have to go back to Jason Kenney to (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the Capital Budget speech government said that PEI Energy Corporation will build a fibre backbone to support high-speed Internet at a cost of \$30 million.

PEI Energy Corp build of fibre backbone

Question to the energy minister: How long will it take to complete this project?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. LaVie: You're hot today.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, we have been hearing from residents and as long as I have been a minister in this portfolio, I've been hearing about Internet and I've been hearing about the issues and we've been trying to this battle this issue because it is a broad issue.

Speaking of broadband, but there are things that we are trying to do as a government to build a foundation to create sustainability right across Prince Edward Island for generations to come.

This is one that we should be all proud of because we're likely the only province in Canada that's able to do it, first of all, but the only province that was willing to do it.

What we're doing with broadband right across PEI is positive for everybody and every business and every home, every

student. Whether you're using it for anything, Mr. Speaker, it's going to advance our province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Simple question: When would the project be complete? Simple question; never got an answer. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During Capital Estimates we got a couple of different stories about this project. The finance minister said this would be a three-year project, but the next day the economic development minister said it would only take two years.

Real high-speed Internet access on PEI

Question to the energy minister: When will all Islanders be able to plug-in and see real high-speed Internet access in their homes?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The government-owned fibre backbone will cover approximately 1,500 kilometres. It's a big project. The RFP went out. I talked about that the other day, for final project design, high-level design is four to six months. We should have that ready to go in January. We'll make ready build within 18-24 months that we'll be pushing this out.

The total project time should be between 24 and 30 months, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

After this backbone is complete Internet service providers will still need to do work to connect it to homes and businesses. I've

heard suggestions that it might be as long as five years before residents and businesses see any improvements in services.

Last fall the Premier told this House that all Islanders would have the best high-speed Internet access in Canada by the end of 2017.

Mr. Fox: Yeah.

Mr. MacKay: Clearly, this hasn't happened.

An Hon. Member: What day (Indistinct)

Mr. MacKay: Question to the energy minister: What happened to this promise?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. MacKay: Duck, duck, goose today. (Indistinct) pointing fingers.

Premier MacLauchlan: I'm pretty sure that if the hon. Member would go back he'd see that what I said was the most complete Internet service relative to the population –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – and to the geography of the province and that work is well underway. There are towers being built as we proceed through the year and what has been proposed with the new backbone will see an enhancement on that level of service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Not a great sign when the lead ministers aren't on the same page about how long it may take Islanders to get any benefit out of this.

Dollars split between Island taxpayers and Ottawa

Question to the energy minister: How will that \$30 million cost be split between Island taxpayers and Ottawa?

Mr. Fox: Yes.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct).

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as I explained in the course of Capital Estimates, there have been initial discussions with Ottawa about how the federal and provincial governments could approach this – there are a couple of programs under consideration.

If I can remind the opposition of the discussions that took place here and before the government changed about the electricity cables under the Northumberland Strait – our government is committed to working cooperatively with the federal government and to getting the best possible deal –

Mr. Myers: For Maritime Electric.

Premier MacLauchlan: – for rate payers and for taxpayers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During the review of the Capital Budget, government spoke about cost-sharing this project with the federal government – trips to Ottawa and meetings with ministers.

Proposal and funding applications for project

Question to the energy minister: Will you table copies of the proposal or funding applications that were submitted to the federal government for this project?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the opposition knows, anytime you're going to go out to RFP, you're not going to just start exposing contracts because you want the best bang for your buck.

An Hon. Member: You would know.

Mr. MacDonald: So, Mr. Speaker, this is a project and it's funny because all we hear is the opposition about going back, going back. In 2006, let's not forget, the province under the Binns government paid itself \$4.3 million to construct a fibre line up the middle of Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Myers: Where is that? Where is it?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: Under that agreement, Exetel owned the line, the province maintained it. The province maintained the right to use the agreement up until 2028 and we're very fortunate for that, but you know what? That fiber is at a capacity. What we're doing – and when we announced this and I spoke about it at the cultural event that paid \$3.5 million over three years for – or five years – they all got excited. Why? Because they all work out of their homes; they want to grow their businesses and they need Internet to grow their businesses, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When we heard the Capital Budget speech this \$30 million project was mentioned. When we checked the five-year Capital Estimates, there was no line item for the project and we were told the project would be off-book in a Crown corporation.

Announcement of capital project

Question to the energy minister: Is it normal to announce a \$30 million Capital project with so little preparation work done first?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Mr. MacKay: Tag, you're it.

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

When we entered into a similar agreement under the PEI Energy Corporation to do the cable, that particular funding was 50/50, but we only had \$50 million of that initially from the federal government back in 2006. We went back to Gail Shea and she wouldn't put any more money in. When Justin Trudeau became minister, we were able to acquire another \$20 million towards that project and that is \$70 million that Islanders do not have to pay back on their rates.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, any time we can get an opportunity to cost-share these types of infrastructure projects that we are investing in Islanders for the future, that's the way we will continue to explore.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No wonder why people are confused. The project was announced in Capital Budget speech, but it isn't in the five-year Capital Budget; government says Ottawa will cost-share, but there hasn't been any funding proposal submitted yet; then one minister says it'll be a two-year project, the other says a three-year project; now we learn that completing this backbone still won't provide high-speed Internet to Island homes and businesses direct.

Question to the energy minister: Shouldn't some of these basic details have been nailed down before announcing this project?

Mr. Fox: Yes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're taking concrete steps to establish a backbone right across Prince Edward Island that the ISPs can interchangeably use, where they can access that point of contact and expand out even further into rural Prince Edward Island and it's needed.

There's 12 strands mainly on what we get to use right now on the Bell Aliant fibre that's there, there's 48 in total. We're at capacity – we hear it all the time, the opposition hears it.

Brad Trivers, if I could quote him: –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: We need the government to take the lead and go, community by community to issue an RFP to the Internet service providers – get back the gap in cost and that it's going to take for them to put the Internet access in and we need the provincial and federal governments to step up.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: Ah, you can't even get on the same page over there. You can't even get on the same page.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Trivers: Good work. Good work.

Mr. MacKay: Islanders who don't have access to high-speed Internet are at a distinct disadvantage. Children can't do their homework, entrepreneurs can't grow their business, and the list goes on. For once in all, we need you to be honest with Islanders.

Timeline for completion of project

Question to the minister: Given that we don't have a timeline, nor funding lined up for this project, when will it be realistic for this project to be complete?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Fox: Yes.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think I did give the actual time and I also said that the initial RFP has already gone out and is due back. So, I guess the project's in motion and we're looking forward to it and I know every Islander's looking forward to it and it's something extremely important to us.

You know, if we increase the Internet service based on what we want to do, it could add 1% to the economy and to the GDP overall. That's how important it is and being the minister of economic development, I'm on board for this and I hope we expedite it as soon as possible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

There's been a lot of talk both yesterday and today in this House about a review of the PN Program that was completed earlier this year. Given the issues that have recently emerged about this program, I'm wondering – many others are wondering too – what this review said about the efficacy of the program in achieving its intended outcomes.

Review of rate of performance on outcomes of PNP

A question to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: What are the key outcomes of the PN Program and how did the review rate the program's performance on these outcomes?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a good question. What we're trying to do is we're trying to build an immigration

portfolio that is strong and sustainable for a number of years and I think we're getting there. We've changed how we deal with the intermediaries –

Mr. Trivers: If only people would stay.

Mr. MacDonald: – and some of those intermediaries may not even like it because they used to have an allocation that they were given and it would be first in-first-out on the applications. What we're saying to them right now is: Look, we're going to evaluate every application you put in and we're not necessarily taking your application. I think that, in a start itself, is allowing us to choose better applicants to fulfill different positions right across the Island – whether it be new businesses, or labour, or whatever it may be. Let me note to the House that not all immigrants that have start-ups on PEI –

Speaker: That's good. Thank you, Minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Third Party, your first supplementary.

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

We still don't know what the outcomes were in this review, indeed if there were any or how they were rated. Government has said that the PNP recipients must submit business plans as part of their application and that they generally receive help from consultants. Concern has been raised about the quality of this consultancy work – whether applicants are receiving good advice and about government's role in advising applicants.

Monitoring of quality of business plans for success

A question to the minister: How does the Office of Immigration monitor the quality of the business plans and advice that applicants receive to ensure that the proposed businesses have the greatest chance of success?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Another good question, hon. member. The consultant is basically a chartered accountant. We receive a business plan from the chartered accountant on behalf of the immigrant and we look at their financial analysis. They already have their market research done through that business plan.

It puts our department in a tough spot for us to say: Yes, you can open this business or no you can't open this business. I think at some point in time, government needs to take a lead and that's exactly what we're doing, but at some point in time government, for all kinds of reasons, needs to get out of the way and at that point I think we have to take –

Mr. Myers: You're picking winners and losers all the time.

Mr. MacDonald: – the information provided by the chartered accountant and say whether that's a good business or a bad business; will be up to the individual.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Tabling of PNP review (further)

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

I have to wonder about the scope and the quality of this internal review of the PN Program and whether a more thorough audit might be in order. The only way we can determine that is if we have all the information, and in the spirit of collaboration and support of the Leader of the opposition's earlier request this afternoon: Could the minister table the internal review as well as the performance monitoring information relating to the PN Program?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are many facets to this immigration program from settlement services through the federal government, from Island Connectors, from Island Advance, from the chamber of commerce, from our own department. Now, there are private consultants doing some of this work. I was about to say, before my time was up, all immigrants that come to Prince Edward Island don't necessarily go through the immigration office; don't necessarily go through the business side, the economic stream.

We have 600 labour positions that we fulfilled over the past year, part of that economic strain. We're shining a light on individuals and businesses that I don't think it's fair to paint them all with the same brush. We have some extremely good immigration businesses that opened up and are contributing to the economy on PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Replacing stop signs with yield signs in safe locations

Mr. Dumville: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Our transportation methods are a leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions; starting, stopping and idling have been proven to increase greenhouse gas emissions. Minister: Will the government replace stop signs with yield signs where roads meet with clear and safe sightlines?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First and foremost, our department is concerned with the safety of the travelling public and that's our top priority. The guidelines that we use when determining where a stop sign should be take into account the traffic count in that area, the sightlines, other factors such as speed and

stop signs are used for that particular reason, to control that kind of traffic.

In regard to greenhouse gas emissions, we have installed seven roundabouts since 2015 and in the past – and that's replaced 15 stop lights across PEI, but we will continue to review areas where stop signs or yield signs are in place.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Dumville: Minister: Has your department ever done a study to determine if a certain percentage of stop signs should be converted to yield signs?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, as I noted when we get a request for, whether, it's a stop sign installation, which we have in some communities – they want us to go to four-way stops or three-way stops in certain areas.

We take into account, again, the movement of traffic and how it increases safety. Islanders are used to the way that our stop signs are installed. We have a lot of travelling visitors on Prince Edward Island and we have to, first and foremost, keep that in mind. We have not done a traffic study, but again, as I said, every time a request comes in there are many factors that are studied.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Dumville: Minister: Will you commit today to have your department research this initiative?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Every time we plan to do work in an area, whether it's a roundabout or a road construction that we're doing right across Prince Edward Island, we take all those factors into account already. We are ongoing studying traffic flows in communities, and I don't know what exactly the member would else like us to do, but if it's a specific study, we study that every day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Supply and market re: blueberry producers

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we all know, West Prince produces some of the best food in Prince Edward Island. Our lobsters, potatoes, crabs, oysters, and mussels are enjoyed around the world and in my district, blueberries are another important crop. Last season, blueberry prices took a deep dive and this season wasn't any better.

Can the minister inform the House on the current supply and market situation for our blueberry producers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question.

This is a concern, not just in the Tignish area but across the Island, across the Maritimes and across North America. Just for an example of the size of the production, in 2013, I think on PEI we garnered about 16 million pounds. Three years later in 2016, we had 34 million pounds. This year was a little bit off. We're down to 23.5, but the stocks are high thus the prices are down. I know we saw the price go down to 30 cents; not finalized yet, but it may be lower this year as well.

There is grave concern there, but we do find that the stocks in the States and the stocks

overall, and talking to Wyman's and Bragg, the stocks are coming down so it may bode well better for the years ahead.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Buyers of Island blueberries

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The situation is definitely troubling for producers in my area, and for me as their MLA, as well as other Island producers. The government needs to help find a market for Island growers.

Minister: Has your department made any efforts to help seek a buyer for Island blueberries?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

We are always looking at that sort of thing. In fact, I've met with my counterparts in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick specifically on this blueberry issue because it is a concern, not just our province but to theirs as well. We do need to find a further processor and help with that, but with the stocks going down and we think with the interest that is there – because it's a very valuable crop not only to the producers, but also to the consumers – that we can see some rise in that. We'll get the stocks balanced out and work with some new processors. I think we can turn things around in that commodity.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Promoting Island blueberries through events

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

More and more people are following diets of natural healthy foods. Prince Edward Island wild blueberries are not only delicious, but also nutritious. Various food sectors have had great success through promotions like Burger Love and Love our Lobster.

Minister: Will your department consider promoting Island blueberries as a super food through a similar promotional event?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

Great question and we saw the success with Burger Love and Porktoberfest and Love our Lobster. Those things have really worked well and they've worked through our Growing Forward 2 program and we see that extended now for five years with the Canadian agriculture partnership; 37 million in the non-business risk and 129 million in the business risk part of it.

So, there are dollars going forward. We have the SIGI program for strategic initiatives that we can work with as well, and their staff are working with our producers and will continue to work with producers to get us over this hump and get us onto success and a commodity going forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, the PEI Home Renovation Program is now closed to applications until next spring.

PEI Home Renovation Program

A question to the Minister of Family and Human Services: Do you not recognize the need out in our communities for this need?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, indeed, we do. It was our government that increased that very valuable program by an additional \$400,000 once we were elected. We see the difference that it's making in Islanders' lives and we're very proud of it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Waiting list for home renovation programs

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a vital program: assist Islanders in making major structural renovations to their homes.

Question to the Minister of Family and Human Services: Minister, how many Islanders are left sitting on your home renovation waiting list during these cold winter months?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have other programs that help low-income Islanders to cover their costs with their basic needs. We are committed to looking at new and innovative ways to helping Islanders to live successful rewarding lives. That is a valuable program, and a valuable program that we will continue to look at and we will continue to offer to Islanders, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister won't let the people know how many are on the waiting list. There is a waiting list. The Seniors Home Repair Program is now unofficially closed until sometime in the New Year.

Minister: How many Islanders are left sitting on your Seniors Home Repair Program waiting list during these cold winter months?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we're talking about a couple of different programs. For one, we have a PEI Home Renovation Program. We also have a Seniors Home Repair Program, and we have a Seniors Safe @ Home Program.

If the hon. member is talking about the Seniors Home Repair Program, we do not have a wait list. That's actually open all year round.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Seniors being rejected from home repair programs

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Auditor General found proof of seniors being deliberately passed over for low-income housing by this government, and never being told the truth.

To the Minister of Family and Human Services: Will you admit if any Islanders have been unfairly passed over for these two programs, as well?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On the contrary; the Auditor General – and we do appreciate the work she did and we take the work that she does and we learn from it. I do take offence to the hon. member saying that people are deliberately passed over. We take pride in matching the units with the individuals.

When individuals come to us they sometimes have a long list of requirements that they need. It is up to our department, and we work very hard, to make sure that we are matching those individuals with the units that are available.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, before you ask your next question, I just want to remind you, and, I guess, all hon. members, you had mentioned that: You're not telling the truth, or somebody is not telling the truth. That is bordering on unparliamentary.

Mr. LaVie: I'll take that into consideration.

Speaker: Go ahead.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. LaVie: To the Minister of Family and Human Services: Those are the words of the Auditor General. They're not my words. She found the proof. Not me.

We recognize a problem. You're not recognizing the problem out there for these seniors. You're not recognizing the problem.

Your minister before you has seen a problem. Senior members coming in the backdoor and passing out these applications, so there is a problem inside your government and you're not recognizing it and you're not telling people –

An Hon. Member: Say it.

Rules changed in housing repair programs

Mr. LaVie: – what they should heard.

We have seniors stuck for years on these waiting lists. And it's true. I have them in

my own district. As this government jigs how many people can make and what renovations are covered from year to year.

To the Minister of Family and Human Services: Why does your department keep changing your rules and denying access to these important programs for seniors?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, we believe that appropriate affordable housing is one of the most important social infrastructure in a community. That goes for seniors housing. That goes for family housing. We, as a government, take it very seriously.

I will reiterate that it was our government that invested an additional \$400,000 in to the PEI Home Renovation Program. We increased our rent supplements. We also brought back the Seniors Home Repair Program –

Some Hon. Members: Yeah.

Ms. Mundy: – which the previous government, the previous Conservative government cancelled, and we introduced the Seniors Safe @ Home Program –

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct)

Ms. Mundy: – these are all valuable programs that help –

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct)

Ms. Mundy: – Islanders in their homes and Islanders that need the help most get the help most.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: You were Conservative back then.

Mr. Fox: You were.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Struggles for Island seniors

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is the government that left \$5 million on the table and never gave it to the seniors. That's what happened to the last minister.

Then, she goes and she says she has upped the ante. Well, you took \$5 million and gave it to the Minister of Finance and then you put \$5 million back. No, you didn't up. No, you didn't. You still have got seniors on a waiting list. You've got seniors turned down year after year. The same people are turned down.

These two programs are the main programs that support Island seniors who are low and modest income to improve their homes and maintain their independence.

Question to the Minister of Family and Human Services: Why are these people's troubles falling on deaf ears when it comes to your Cabinet table?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Maybe the hon. member wasn't in the House on Friday past when this government announced –

Some Hon. Members: Oh!

Ms. Mundy: – a very valuable program that would introduce –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Ms. Mundy: – what we call a Seniors Independence Program. That is going to be invaluable for seniors who want to remain in their homes and live independently. We are going to now help them with light housekeeping, meal preparation, snow removal, heavy lifting. These are all things that senior Islanders have told us that they

need and will help them to stay independent in their home. This government listened. This government took action.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, final question.

Rules changed in housing repair programs (further)

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government can't keep the highways clean. How are you going to clean every senior's driveway across Prince Edward Island? I'd like to know.

There are examples where seniors who applied and were turned down the first time were told not to reapply because they were already in the system. No need to reapply; you're already in the system. Now, last year they found out too late. They had to reapply and missed again.

To the Minister of Family and Human Services: Minister, what are your rules and application processes going to be this year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Successful communities respect their seniors. We respect our seniors –

Mr. LaVie: Show them.

Ms. Mundy: – and we are always looking at ways that we can improve services that will help our seniors, and all Islanders.

The Seniors Safe @ Home Program, Seniors Home Repair Program, PEI Home Repair Program are all valuable, valuable programs that are helping Islanders who need the help most and able to stay in their home with the repairs that they need. We are very proud of that program, as well as, all of the other programs that we have to help seniors stay in their home.

We have the Seniors' Drug Program. We have the property tax referral. We have the income tax changes that were made. We are committed to helping seniors that need the help and we will continue to help them, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]