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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF  
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 1 DECEMBER 2017



Questions by Members

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

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

I know and understand the challenges PEI and the world are facing around climate change and the rising of our sea level.

**Climate change and carbon tax**

However, I find it difficult to agree with the current federal plan around carbon tax.

Question to the Premier: Premier, why have you been so silent on this issue for so long?

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I concur with the Leader of the Opposition in saying that Islanders are, indeed, concerned about climate change; the various ways it affects us, whether it's through the weather, through erosion, through the ways that our seasons are changing.

I don't know about the silence part. Prince Edward Island is a party to the Pan-Canadian framework on clean environment and climate change. It was signed by all the provinces, territories, and the federal government in earlier December of last year and I made a statement in the House shortly after the framework was agreed to.

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

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Mr. Speaker, Islanders have always been stewards of the environment. When it comes to emissions and footprint, PEI has a tiny sliver of the total national amount.

Again, question to the Premier: Why did you fail to make the case to Ottawa about our unique situation here on Prince Edward Island?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker.

That's something we regularly do with the federal government and with others to recognize that Prince Edward Island does, indeed, have arguably the second lowest emissions per capita among the provinces; that we have made significant steps in renewable energy, notably in wind, but also in biomass and other ways.

Going back, even, to the 1970s, we've been leaders in this and I believe that Prince Edward Islanders want us to continue to be leaders and to do our part and to cooperate with others to ensure that we are looking after the global environment and doing our part.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Mr. Speaker, Summerside has recently put in a brand-new solar farm. The Binns government built windmills and this government has added more.

**PEI green investments compared to other provinces**

Premier: Have Islanders not done more than their fair share when it comes to green investments compared to other provinces?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, the tenor of these question seem to be that we should stop. The environment continues to require stewardship, continues to present opportunities as technologies evolve, as Islanders are smart – as we recognize how the conditions are changing around us and we're proud and we believe Islanders are committed to this – that we will play our part, that we are 152,000 people in a big, global community, but it is in our own interest to be part of this, to contribute, and to look for ways, indeed the Leader of the

Opposition has enumerated some, but the job is not done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier is now on record that there will be no carbon tax announcement this year.

### **Carbon tax for PEI**

Premier: Are you referring to the calendar year; the fiscal year; or, in fact, a different year?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** We are, today, the first day of December and I believe that Islanders will indeed desire to have some process by which they are made aware of any pricing mechanism that is to be brought in and I certainly don't intend to suggest –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct) snakes and ladders.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – that that is going to be done between now and the end of December. This is something that has got to be done in a way that people can see what it is; understand what it is; and it has been mandated, as we all know, by the federal government that there will be a carbon price and it's included in the pan-Canadian framework and we intend to achieve that with a made in PEI approach that will work for Prince Edward Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Great.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier told local media after the throne speech that his government has been busy in discussions with Ottawa and other provinces on how to proceed.

### **Discussions with Ottawa re: carbon tax**

Premier: What has been the substance of these discussions?

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** The number one concern at this stage is that there'd be what I will call regional alignment. That is to say, the Prince Edward Island economy is integrated with Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to the tune of probably half or better than half of our total economy. Our container port is in another province, our major cargo airports are in other provinces, and most of the travelers who come to Prince Edward Island are coming from other provinces and making choices about where they go.

So it's very important that as we finalize, as we get to the right solution, the made in PEI solution, that it's something that we understand is working in the regional and national context.

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

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

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

The Premier told local media at the start of the fall session of the House: PEI currently doesn't have a deadline from Ottawa in terms of when it has to implement a plan.

Again to the Premier: When is your carbon tax now scheduled to come into effect?

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** I think the first part of the question is the answer. This is something that is under consideration, under discussion.

While Prince Edward Island can be rightly proud of what we're doing and have done over now of four decades and more to do our best or to make progress, let me say, in

terms of renewable energy and our carbon footprint, we are in a larger world – both as regards mitigation of carbon and as regards to the economy.

I'm very mindful of our role as a government and I believe our role as legislators on all sides of this House to get the best solution we can that will work in terms of our environmental responsibilities and the continued progress of this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

We do understand what this is going to be. It's going to be a tax – a tax on carbon that will generate a lot of money for your government, taken out of the pockets of Islanders.

#### **Dollar amounts from new carbon tax**

How much of this extra money do you expect to take in from the new tax and how much of that money will be given back to Islanders?

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** In the statement that I made in the House in December of 2016, we indicated that a carbon price in Prince Edward Island would be fiscally neutral and that would comprise a number of initiatives, some of them in terms of revenue; some of them in terms of active mitigation; and overall, they get the best –

**Mr. Myers:** Fiscally neutral means you're just going to spend all the money.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – balanced approach –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct) give it back.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – that is going to work for Prince Edward Island and Prince Edward Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct) all the money. (Indistinct) tax and you're going to blow all the money.

**Speaker:** Hon. Member.

The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

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

Prince Edward Island has the lowest basic personal income tax exemption in Canada. A carbon tax or a carbon price – whatever you want to call it, Premier, will take more money from the least able to afford it.

#### **Basic income tax exemption and carbon tax**

Will the basic personal income tax exemption be increase to help Islanders to absorb the cost of the carbon price or carbon tax?

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, let me pick up on this point about the basic exemption. The people who profit, or the people who will get the benefit of changes to basic exemption are not the most vulnerable Islanders –

**An Hon. Member:** You're right.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – economically, it's the people who pay the most tax. So, I think the opposition might want to tame its appetite around the basic exemption –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct).

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – if the concern is about poor Islanders. But let me be very clear, as we were in the statement that we made last year, that anything that happens with our carbon price will be first and foremost –

**Mr. Myers:** You didn't take accounting in university, did you?

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – sensitive to the impact on Prince Edward Islanders who are in the most vulnerable situation economically.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**Mr. Myers:** You've got (Indistinct)

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

Premier, all Islanders would benefit from a basic personal income tax exemption increase. The most vulnerable will take that money and will spend it again. It will be good for the province, it will be good for them, but, like the HST, a carbon tax will be another tax applied broadly to goods and services used by Islanders.

### Lowering of HST

Will the HST be lowered with the new revenue the carbon tax will bring?

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, this started out as being about carbon pricing. The opposition seems to be determined to call it a tax and further, to get pretty deep into tax policy.

But let me say, there are 28,000 Prince Edward Islanders who don't pay income tax. We're concerned about those 28,000 Prince Edward Islanders first, when we get to the point of deciding what will be the revenue aspect of anything that happens in conjunction with a carbon price.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

### Carbon price and balanced budget

**Premier:** Will the money that Islanders pay in a new carbon price be used as a cushion to balance the budget?

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, there are no cushions when it comes to the stewardship or the finances of this province, but I'm proud to say that through hard work and through the efforts of Prince Edward Islanders to grow the economy, to do well, through efforts in government to manage the affairs well, that the budget – the fiscal situation of this province is balanced.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Great.

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

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

It's yet to be determined whether the budget is balanced; we'll see that come next October.

**Mr. Myers:** Fake balance.

**Ms. Compton:** Fake balance.

Mr. Speaker, vulnerable Islanders like seniors and low-income households will be hardest hit by the carbon price.

**Premier:** Why are those who have the least going to be the ones to pay the most with a new carbon price?

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I've said in a few different ways, but let me say it again: Anything that is done in a carbon price in Prince Edward Island will be tailored to meet our circumstances. It will be defined and shaped, and it'll be agreed to and brought forward in this House in a way that is going to best meet the circumstances of Prince Edward Island. When we say

fiscally neutral, we start with the proposition that it is not going to be a revenue burden on the most vulnerable Prince Edward Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

### **NB Power analysis on cost of carbon tax**

One year ago, NB Power publicly released the analysis to run the cost of their utility under the Liberal carbon tax.

Question to the minister: Have you reviewed these documents?

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

**Speaker:** The hon. minister –

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

**Speaker:** Whoa!

The hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

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

When we speak about our climate change file, there's been a significant amount of work gone on that file over the past couple of years. As alluded to by the Premier earlier, we are part of the Pan-Canadian framework. PEI has a part to play, but there's significant other work going on. Carbon pricing is just one tool in the toolbox.

Currently, we are working on our mitigation strategy and our adaptation strategy, with Dunsky consulting on the mitigation piece, with UPEI climate change on our adaptation piece, to blend together what will be a climate change action plan come next year that will take the best interest for PEI at heart.

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

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

**Mr. Fox:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm actually shocked that the minister didn't answer this.

Minister, NB Power believes the carbon tax would cost their company up to 1.3 billion more over the next decade.

Question to the minister of energy: What does this mean for PEI?

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

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

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

The rates for Islanders are locked in with NB Power until the end of March 2019. We are presently in discussions on what our new agreements are going to be going forward. We, first and foremost, will keep in mind the rates in regard to that agreement. We are presently looking at other alternatives for energy in this province and how we can mitigate the costs associated with power use in Prince Edward Island, and we are continuing to do that so that anything that we put forward as part of our energy strategy will help reduce our reliance on NB Power.

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

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

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

**Mr. Fox:** Mr. Speaker, that almost sounds like to me that they know there's a rate increase coming.

Government purchases all of its off-Island power from NB Power who think the carbon tax will require substantial higher-rate increases than previously announced.

### **Power purchase agreement and cost to PEI ratepayers**

Minister: Will these costs be passed onto PEI ratepayers in our next power purchase agreement?

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

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

**Mr. LaVie:** (Indistinct)

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Mr. Speaker, the member across is incorrect –

**Mr. R. Brown:** Give them the facts.

**Ms. Biggar:** – when he says we purchase all our power from NB Power. That is totally incorrect; 25% of our power on Prince Edward Island is from wind energy.

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

**Ms. Biggar:** We just installed our new cables, which has increased our capacity from 200 megawatts up to 560 megawatts. Those cables are going to allow us to produce more wind energy so that we can mitigate costs associated with retaining extra power from other sources.

I just want to, again, reiterate: We do not buy all our power from NB Power. All the wind that we produce here on Prince Edward Island is used by Islanders for their use.

Thank you.

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

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

**Mr. Fox:** Mr. Speaker, my exact words were: Government purchases all of its off-Island power from NB Power.

NB Power has identified five expensive problems stemming from a carbon tax. Furthermore, revenues from carbon pricing are to remain within the province of origin.

Question to the minister: Just how much more in your carbon tax is it going to cost Islanders?

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Mr. Trivers:** Listen to the questions.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that the opposition is trying to get way down the path and every question that we're hearing is trying to raise the anxiety level of Prince Edward Islanders, when in fact, we believe Prince Edward Islanders are proud of what we're doing with our energy policy. They're proud of what we've done over the years –

**Mr. LaVie:** (Indistinct)

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – in terms of renewable energy and they're very appreciative of the fact and recognize the value of those electricity –

**Mr. Myers:** Except for District 11.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – transmission cables that have been installed between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, and we are on a track – and let's be very clear about this – where Prince Edward Islanders can expect to have a more autonomous approach to electricity. It's only 40 years ago that all of our power was coming from off-Island, from bunker C.

So, we're making headway and Islanders are proud of it.

Thank you.

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

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

**Mr. Fox:** Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the Premier brought that up because you have done nothing, sir, to make Maritime Electric –

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

**Mr. Fox:** – get off of bunker C.

NB Power has said –

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

**Mr. Fox:** – they need to hike rates accumulative 37.8% by the year 2027; much higher than their initial projection of only 14.9%.

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

**Mr. LaVie:** There's the facts.

**Mr. Fox:** Question to the minister: Why does your government refuse to be upfront with Islanders about your carbon tax going forward?

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Mr. LaVie:** There's the facts.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite demonstrated this summer that he has a very weak understanding of the electricity pricing in this province. I made the comment when we established and electrified those cables between New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island that this would give us greater leverage, or greater bargaining power in terms of power purchase, and I truly believe that and I think anyone with any sense would understand what it means. He was in the paper the next day wondering: What's the price going to be?

There's a process for establishing electricity prices in this province and the member should know very well, because I think he even appeared before IRAC, but that is a process that is ongoing.

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Premier MacLauchlan:** The only price that we know as of today is that to March of 2019.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. LaVie:** (Indistinct) the ropes.

**Mr. R. Brown:** (Indistinct) off the ropes. Call the house doctor.

**Mr. LaVie:** (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** Okay, members. Let's have some order.

**Mr. Fox:** Mr. Speaker, someday if the Premier wants to sit down and talk about the

costs of energy, I'll be glad to take him outside on that issue.

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh.

**Mr. Fox:** The Premier told Islanders that the new power cables would lower costs for Islanders and businesses. You made that statement, Mr. Premier.

### **New power cables and lower costs for Islanders**

What does them words – or what do those statements mean to Islanders, sir?

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Mr. Trivers:** Show us the money.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Very precisely, Mr. Speaker, they mean that we are in a better position to face the world and get the best price we can for our electricity, and we may even one day be in a position where we can sell more of our power because we currently do sell power to parties outside of this province, and we are in a very good position compared to just about any other jurisdiction that I can see in this country. In fact, I like to tell people that we have off-shore wind; it just happens to have land under it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**Mr. Fox:** Well, Mr. Speaker, in the last two years we've seen increases to Maritime Electric rates by 2.3%. This April coming up, we're going to see another 2.3%. You also, sir, put in another 1% on the HST to rate increases.

Question to the minister: This government has increased the debt of the PEI Energy Corporation substantially; over hundreds of millions of dollars.

**An Hon. Member:** No.

**Mr. LaVie:** Shame. That's a shame.

**Debt to PEI Energy Corporation**

**Mr. Fox:** Question to the minister: Why are you putting so much debt onto the PEI Energy Corporation?

**Mr. LaVie:** Shame.

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

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Mr. Speaker, when this government in 2015 came into power, we changed the electric act so that any assets going forward, bought and paid for by Islanders, would be owned by the government, not by the utility. That's the first thing we did.

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Then, we went to Ottawa and we got \$70 million to help pay for 142 million dollar cables.

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct) treasure chest.

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Mr. Speaker, the energy corp is financing the \$70 million –

**Mr. Myers:** Nobody's money.

**Ms. Biggar:** – through a loan for other portions –

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

**Ms. Biggar:** – of those cables. Included in that 2.3 rate is the cost of paying –

**Mr. Fox:** (Indistinct) \$200 million.

**Ms. Biggar:** – back that plus the cost of decommissioning the plant that's out there on Riverside Drive that produces too many emissions for Islanders.

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

**Ms. Casey:** Great minister.

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

**Departments to go through justice re: hiring Legal Counsel**

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

During the last sitting on April 11<sup>th</sup>, when I asked how contracts for outside legal services were awarded, the Premier said, and I quote: As things have been done and this has been for some time, departments or agencies determine their own relationships with outside counsel.

Yesterday, in Question Period, when asked, the Premier said: We have a director of our legal services, we have a Deputy Attorney General, we have senior civil servants who deal these matters and make judgments and give advice as to when it's necessary to get outside Legal Counsel.

A question to the Premier: Can I take it from yesterday's answer that you mean you have introduced a new policy since April that requires departments and agencies to go through the department of justice before hiring Legal Counsel?

**Mr. LaVie:** Let's hear from the lawyer.

**An Hon. Member:** Hear! Hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, we have not gone to that point at this stage. This was in the context of the written question from the member that was addressed to me as Attorney General. We are in the process of gathering that information through the office of legal services and through the office of the department of justice.

It may, indeed, be that that – answering or doing the work involved in that question, we may, indeed, move toward the kind of approach that's being described here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Premier MacLauchlan:** But we haven't yet.

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

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

### **Legal services contracts**

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

Of course, I understand that it's often necessary to hire outside legal counsel. There are many instances when government lawyers may lack the specific expertise needed or they may be in conflict, or it's just simply we don't have enough resources to respond in the department.

My main concern is that all of this money is being spent without any oversight. Individual departments do not have the expertise to establish when it is advisable to contract outside; if the price is reasonable, or if the advice received is of high quality.

A question to the Attorney General: Don't you think that every contract for legal services should be vetted and approved by legal experts in the department of justice?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, as the hon. third party leader indicated in his first question, things have been done at the department level of the agency level over the period of time. Indeed, there may be a benefit that can be gained, not because people are incapable of making a judgment. We have confidence in the agencies and the commissions that engage legal counsel and where the quality of the work that's being done for them.

I don't want to imply that even if there is a benefit in having a centralized capacity, that's because there are poor judgments being made; they're not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

### **Tendering process for hiring lawyers**

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

During my response to the throne speech last evening, I pointed out that there are many large donors to the Liberal Party who also compete for these legal contracts, but if a construction company wants a contract they have to go through a tendering process

**Mr. LaVie:** Oh.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** – which is there, in part, to ensure that government gets the best value for money. However, when government hires lawyers there is no such process.

A question to the Premier: Why do you think that legal services should not be subject to a process that ensures that Islanders get best value for money?

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, when we bring back to the answer to that October 10<sup>th</sup> question I will also indicate the instances where there is, in fact, a tendering process for legal services.

That, in fact, is done where you have larger accounts. Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to bring back that information.

Thank you.

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

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

### **Centralization of issuing driver licenses**

**Mr. Dumville:** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Your department recently announced it is centralizing the issuing of driver's licences in partnership with other Atlantic Provinces.

Minister: Can you tell the House why the province opted to go in this direction?

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

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

The Atlantic Provinces were the only jurisdictions that were left in Canada that did not have a centralized service. Those discussions started back in 2005, actually, but in 2016, September, 2016, there was a tender that had been put out and it closed. There were four companies replied. There was an evaluation team from the Atlantic Provinces.

This increases our security with features that are embedded, and it also allows expansions for our other services like putting our health care in there or fishing licence. It's going to be more efficient for other services, as well. But security is also a key feature.

**Mr. R. Brown:** Good.

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

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

### **Impacts on Island drivers and Access PEI employees**

**Mr. Dumville:** Minister: What will these changes mean for Island drivers and employees of Access PEI sites?

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

**Mr. Myers:** Won't be any new jobs; they're all in Quebec.

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

Actually, we have over 108,000 drivers on Prince Edward Island, approximately, that are serviced through Access PEI.

These new services will, again, I say, enhance fraud protection for Islanders in regard to their driver's licences identification. Again, the ability to expand it. The driver's licence photos will still be taken at Access PEI. The licensee can expect their new licence to arrive within 14 days. They can have a receipt or they can still use their other driver's licence until their new one arrives. There won't be a big change for drivers, and there will be no change in the number of staff at Access PEI.

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

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

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

### **Stakeholders prepared for changes**

**Mr. Dumville:** Minister: Will you be working with stakeholders such as law enforcement, air ports, LCC staff to ensure that they are prepared to deal with these changes?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Actually, Mr. Speaker, we have worked with law enforcement. They were there beside us when we did our launch of this new announcement. The police enforcement agencies are quite happy with this new technology.

It provides other opportunities for them to secure – make sure those licences are secure. Staff across Prince Edward Island where other identifications are required have been informed. We are working to implement and the program, itself, will be fully implemented at all Access sites across PEI by mid-December.

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

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

### **Oyster Enhancement Program**

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

The oyster fishery is very important to my district of Tignish-Palmer Road, as well, to all of Prince Edward Island.

This summer past I heard many concerns about the shellfish association including; not delivering its oyster enhancement program and the resignation of their board of directors. In addition, there was a board elected.

With the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries inform the House about what his department has done to help the association and the oyster fishers?

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

**Mr. Trivers:** (Indistinct) dedicated deputy minister.

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

An excellent question and I know the fishery is of great importance to the Member from Tignish-Palmer Road and the shellfish industry across the province.

I mean, outside of the crustaceans of oysters – of lobsters and crabs, it brings into our province about \$90 million; creates over 2,000 jobs.

We did have an issue in the past year where the board was dismantled, but we have a new board in place. We have a great president from the member's riding himself, and the whole board has put a lot of emphasis in restructuring this program.

We worked with them for a business plan and governance training and we have a dedicated staff and a super deputy minister, and myself, who will work with that board going forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

This is encouraging to hear and with the service that took place over this past summer, but there are still our concerns of what will happen in the future.

Will the minister put this uncertainty to rest and ensure us that this important program will continue in the future.

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

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

We are certainly dedicated to the shellfish industry. The enhancement program is still there – \$100,000 a year. They also receive about \$100,000 from Skills PEI. Just in this past year we went out and got 18,000 pecks of oysters and spread them in three different areas across the province. We have UPEI working with them to monitoring these areas to make sure that they are growing properly and we will continue to work with the shellfish industry because we need this industry to grow and to be strong.

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

**Patients in hospital waiting for long-term care**

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

My question is to the health minister today.

Minister: You've said that the number of medically discharged patients in hospital who should be in long-term care has been decreasing. I understand this year it's been between 70 and 100, but I understand in the winter of 2016, it was around 50 – this doesn't sound like much of a decrease to me.

Minister, what are you doing to fix this ongoing problem?

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

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, we have seen a decline in the amount of patients that are awaiting long-term care that are in our acute care facilities. We've seen that number decline from about 89 now to currently about 74. These numbers do fluctuate from time-to-time and that's part of the reason why we're implementing a long-term care strategy that Dr. Michael Corman is working on and we're expecting an outcome from that with some good, solid recommendations early in the New Year.

**An Hon. Member:** Great.

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

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

It was 50 over a year ago, I don't see how that's a decrease. Patients can lose 1% of their ability every day they are in a hospital bed after being medically discharged. This means that patients could easily be going into the hospital at an assessment level from one to three or community care and then after they sit in a hospital bed for a number of weeks, they're assessed at a level for a long-term care at a four or a five.

Minister: What are you doing to fix this problem?

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

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Once again, Mr. Speaker, as long-term care is a challenge that many jurisdictions are facing all across the country. We've got some great long-term care facilities in this province. In fact, we've added, actually, 145 more long-term care beds into our system back in since 2014.

As we continue to meet the demands and needs and we are now doing another reassessment of what those demands and needs, and we have to make sure we get the right balance between our expenditures into long-term care, as well as home care and acute care.

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

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

Mr. Speaker, the speaker didn't answer the question. We've got patients that are going into hospital at a certain care level; they're there for so long they're reducing their ability. By the time they're finally assessed, or by the time a bed opens up, their ability is much worse and they're not assessed at a four or a five or for nursing care or for long-term care.

What is the minister doing to correct this?

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

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, when an individual is medically discharged for an acute care facility, then they work with the long-term care component of our health care system to try to find the accessibility of a bed. We have integrated a first-available bed policy in this province for anybody that's in an acute care facility that requires long-term care. They may also require community care, so once again, we work with those particular patients to see that they are discharged and put in the most appropriate place for the level of care they require.

**An Hon. Member:** Good job.

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

#### **Assessing patients for long-term care**

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

Mr. Speaker, I'm told that it's taking too long to assess these patients once they leave acute care and they're waiting in a hospital bed for long-term care.

Minister: What are we doing to make these assessments happen sooner?

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, it's not so much that the assessments. They are assessed, it's just that the situation would be a case where we just may not have an available long-term care bed in the location that that particular family or individual may want to go to. That's where are – we have to go through all the different options that might exist to that family to find an appropriate spot and to provide the appropriate care.

But, we have also done some significant investments in those that are awaiting long-term care in some of our facilities. I know we've made some announcements in the past at Maplewood Manor for day programs

to try to help individuals get the type of care that they require and the social interaction that would be required as well, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

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

The idea, of course, is to have proper supports in place to allow these seniors to age in place and remain in their homes as long as possible. That means being able to access proper home care services. Ten months ago, the province signed an agreement with the federal government to see increased investment in mental health and home care.

#### **Medically discharged patients waiting for placement**

Question to the minister: Why aren't we seeing the results of this federal money for home care being used to target services to medically discharge patients so that they can safely return home while they wait for long-term placement?

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

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

**Mr. Henderson:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid is correct in saying that we have just recently signed an agreement with the federal government to provide more resources towards, both home care and as well as mental health. We are in the process of making those announcements in the near future, but we have to make sure that we have these initiatives that may be approved by the federal government, the federal government health department, and we are nearing an announcement on that in the near future. But, we're not quite ready to do that just right yet.

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

**Leader of the Opposition:** (Indistinct) until the polling period (Indistinct)

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

I could tell you who is ready for it, is the family members of these people that are waiting in long-term beds in hospitals. Many of them would like nothing more to have the home care support so that these family members can be at home with the supports that they're getting in hospital, but they're at home. Guess what? That opens up a bed in the hospital for someone that needs that acute care bed.

What's this in the very near future? Announce it today if it's ready. Minister: Will you announce it today?

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

**Mr. LaVie:** Announce it today.

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

**Mr. LaVie:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, we have made some significant investments in home care in the past and we, once again, feel that there's great value in home care and it hasn't been too awfully long that we've just made a recent announcement through the Minister of Family and Human Services to provide some supports for seniors in their homes. Once again, these are initiatives that are in the process and they will be announced in the very near future.

But, if you look back at the issue, it's not necessarily about providing – you've got to provide the right level of support for the right level of care. So, not in every situation will people be able to provide services in their home. Some of them do need long-term care services. Some of them need community care services. So, we just have to make sure that we're getting it right.

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid, your final question.

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

Getting access to home care is one solution. Another solution might be getting people back into private long-term care facilities.

Obviously, giving them the licenses is one way, which we have been lobbying for for quite some time, but we know that they had this extra capacity right now because of them.

**Contracting with private long-term care facilities**

Have you given any thought to contracting with these private long-term care facilities to provide temporary long-term care placement until a permanent bed opens up so that we can get these people out of hospital?

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

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, as many are aware, we went through an issue awhile back regarding Atlantic Baptist home and we're going through a process with our community care facilities at the moment, an arbitration process that's part of a negotiated process that we've had in the past. We are expecting arbitration hearings to happen in the near future.

But during that time, yes, we have had communications with a number of the community care facilities out there, but when you look at providing a temporary service there's a whole complexity around staffing. There's a whole model of care that needs to be required. Yes, we have – the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, we did add some additional beds in that particular location to meet the needs of Islanders in the short term as we work through this.

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

[End of Question Period]