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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2017

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

One of the biggest takeaways from last year's plebiscite is the importance of honouring the vote results, especially if the results aren't exactly what you expected or wanted.

Mr. Speaker, my first question today is to the Premier.

Recommission DR committee to work on referendum

Premier: When will you recommission the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal to start working on their referendum?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it was indicated in the Speech From the Throne that there would be legislation considered in the spring sitting to address a referendum and that's as far as anything that I've had to say about that to date.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

In last year's plebiscite, 16 and 17-year-olds were eligible to voice their opinion and many of the 16 and 17-year-olds were very engaged in the plebiscite process, only to have their opinion dismissed when this government rejected the results. With the referendum being tied to the next general election, where the legal voting age is 18, now 16 and 17-year-olds will lose their opportunity to voice their opinion on electoral reform.

Voting age on referendum

Question to the Premier: Will you commit here today to having 16 and 17-year-olds here in this province – will you give them the right to vote on the referendum?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it is not accurate to say that government rejected the plebiscite. We were very clear that the further step is to take the result of the plebiscite, to respect what was achieved there, which was the purpose in having a non-binding plebiscite, and to carry it forward into a referendum where Islanders will have an opportunity to make a clear choice on a clear question. That's exactly what will take place. The 16 and 17-year-olds who voted in the plebiscite will indeed be of an age to cast a vote by the time of an election.

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.

Well, I guess the Premier didn't quite understand my question. Yes, 16 and 17-year-olds were able to vote in the plebiscite, my question is: Will 16 and 17-year-olds be eligible, not the ones that have aged to 18, but the 16 and 17-year-olds that will be 16 and 17 on the day of the referendum. Will they be allowed to voice their opinion on how the electoral system will be operated here on PEI in the future?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: The particular question that's being asked, along with many others, will indeed be matters that will be for this Assembly to determine when we take up the question of legislation – which

will be required since we don't currently have referendum legislation in the province, but that legislation will address any number of questions. I'm sure that's the better time to take that up, not to be asking me to commit to this or that here today.

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.

The reason I'm asking the Premier what his opinion, or what he's going to do with this or that, is that's the way this Premier operates. It's this or that in his way, or the highway.

The Premier's on record on multiple occasions that the referendum will be an A or B option. One question has already been determined and the other will be determined by this House.

Public consultations on referendum

Again, question to the Premier: Will there be public consultations on the second question before the vote is called in this House?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there will be plentiful opportunity for the views of Islanders to be taken into account and that will be something that will take place, including here in this House and, ultimately, it will take place in the casting of votes in a referendum. That's exactly the spirit and the purpose of this direction, is to build on the work that's already been done through the plebiscite and to ensure that we get a clear answer to a clear question.

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.

Timetable for referendum on DR

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

Well, a lot of work needs to be done to hold a province-wide referendum, especially on getting the information out there and educating Islanders on what the options will be and we're already hearing that Islanders want this information.

Question to the Premier: What is the timetable for the next step so that Islanders will be able to make their voice heard again?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the timetable will culminate in conjunction with the next provincial election. That's been very clear. The further piece that we've talked about, and indeed it's been indicated in a Speech From the Throne, is that there will be legislation enabling a referendum in the spring sitting of the House and that is a very generous timetable, a timetable when Islanders will have an opportunity to consider the options, to consider the case to be made on one side or the other. Indeed the whole point of clarifying it and putting it forward in this way is to enable Islanders to have a fulsome debate and consideration.

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.

Commitment of fixed election date

Final question to the Premier: Premier, can you commit here today – can you advise this House and all Islanders as to when the next election date will be? Will you commit here today to the fixed election date?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the legislation pertaining to election dates in this province has many aspects to it, one of which is that if circumstances arise or if the conditions require in a sensible judgment that –

Mr. Myers: Rules don't apply (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – the date occurs as it's supposed to, then it will. But we know that the legislation provides that the Lieutenant Governor can indeed prorogue the House and that an election can be called and I don't see why I would stand here today when it's the law of the province and say I'm going to override what is in the legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an interesting debate here this morning. The Premier picks and chooses what he wants to override because he couldn't honour the vote. He could override that vote, but he couldn't override the Lieutenant Governor, but he couldn't follow the legislation to begin with when he called the last election. It sounds like the rules apply to everyone, but Liberals, once again.

This Premier has the track record of not listening to Islanders. He didn't listen on the school boards. He didn't listen on school closures when we told him not to do it. He refused to honour the vote, and now he's not listening to Islanders who live in unincorporated areas, in particular the Three Rivers unincorporated area.

Three Rivers amalgamation discussion

Question to the Premier: Islanders want to be heard. Will you accept that unincorporated areas have a voice in this amalgamation discussion?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, would like to welcome all those from District 2 that are in the public gallery today. All Islanders are probably aware at this point that there is a community-driven initiative in six municipalities in the Kings County area. It began with seven and the municipality of Georgetown decided to step back from this community-driven initiative to form a new region.

Currently, the steering committee is working within the municipalities that exist there today on presentations and public meetings, and having opinion polls of how things are going there, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My questions aren't actually for the minister. They're for the Premier because this minister has made it very clear that he doesn't believe that these people are informed enough to make that decision, and that they can't decide their own future and they can't decide their own fate so this is for you, Premier, because we need you. We need your leadership. We need you to step in.

Will you step in and make sure that the people living in the unincorporated areas have their voice heard in this Three Rivers amalgamation discussion?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As part of this process, we were pleased to support the community to develop a feasibility study that was conducted by a private consultant from the area, well known

to the area and I think the hon. member might know him as well, who put together a presentation that painted a pretty good picture of how the community could look moving forward. Currently, the steering committee is taking that presentation, going out to the existing municipalities to explain how this could be affecting them in the future, what it could mean, how it could be better. That process is unfolding as we speak, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is quite insulting; it's insulting for the people that are here from unincorporated areas. It's insulting to my intelligence; it's insulting to the intelligence of the House. Every time I ask a question, number one, I ask the Premier he doesn't answer; number two, the minister gets up and talks about the communities who have a voice. This is all about the people who don't have a voice and he won't understand that because he thinks that they're uninformed.

Premier, you need to get up on your feet on this. You need to tell these people yourself. You need to face these people and tell them yourself, your amalgamation minister is wrong. Islanders living in unincorporated areas are informed. These people are well informed. They're so well informed and they couldn't have their voice heard, they decided to organize their own vote.

Honouring vote on amalgamation

Question to the Premier: When this vote is held, will you honour the vote, or will you again impose your will on Islanders when you don't get the result that you want to hear?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, this is a process that has been unfolding for some time. It's unfolding under the municipal government legislation. The minister

responsible has my full confidence that he is proceeding with this and the people that are involved are proceeding. I heard him say on many occasions that he's interested to hear the voice of the people. That's how I understand this to be unfolding and I'm confident that this is a continuation of something that has been signaled to this province going back over many periods of developing public policy and it will be done in accordance with our laws.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, this is quite insulting to the people who came in on a cold morning here all the way to Charlottetown to hear answers that they're not getting, the people that are tuned in from District 2 at home. It's insulting to them; you won't answer the question.

Premier, will you honour the vote that these people are going to hold?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Currently, as the process is unfolding in the municipalities of the area, through the steering committee and of course the steering committee did have representatives on it from the unincorporated areas. We will be talking in the New Year. I think most of the municipalities will probably have their opinion polls done somewhere in the early spring of January, even February months we'll be moving forward.

Obviously today, the hon. member announced that he is holding a plebiscite. Understandably, I think it would be well within the scope of the duties of any MLA on the floor of this Legislature to hold public opinion polls of their own residents of their own communities at any time under any issue; whether it be an issue under my

department, under health or education. That is the full scope on every MLA of this floor to go ahead and do those functions, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So twice the question has been asked: Would you honour the vote? Neither will answer the question. I think I know what's wrong. I think I know what's wrong with government. I think I know why the Premier is so unpopular in the polls, it's because he won't face issues straight on. I'll face issues straight on. I'll face them straight on. When I was told that it was my responsibility to make sure that these people had a voice, I stepped up to the plate to make that happen; engaged some wonderful volunteers who were going to hold a vote of their own.

Premier, answer the question: Will you honour their vote?

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

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

As I said earlier, last week on the floor of the Legislature, this is a process that is working its way through. Currently, opinion polls are being taken within the municipalities. When that process either says we're moving forward or we're not, then each step begins a new step. When the time is right I will be talking with the representatives from the unincorporated areas to establish a method that the voices from those areas can be well heard. It's been a mission of mine from day one to ensure that all residents involved in this have an opportunity to have their say, to be heard, to be fully engaged in this, and I believe that's been fully undertaken at this point with many public, open presentations for members to come in and have their say, to have a look at the presentation, and that will continue as the process evolves, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Democracy in amalgamation process

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So this isn't a joke; this is actually real life. These people are organizing their voice. The minister's talking about having some other – what's he going to – is he going to trot in the steering committee in front of them and give them a presentation of the virtues and say: Here's the ballot box, vote – like he's doing with all the other communities? This is real life and these people came for real answers.

Question to the Premier: Will you let democracy rule the day, or are you going to let your amalgamation minister dictate a solution instead?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Currently, what's going on in the East Kings area, it's going on all across Prince Edward Island. Communities are talking to communities all over our wonderful province about building new regions, about building strong futures, and we want to be a part of that, and we want to hear and talk to every individual that has a thought on this.

As a department, we are open for discussion to help communities in any way, shape, or form. We already provide funding for studies; we will help communities if they're looking to organize votes; we'll give them advice and much advice needed and experience that we have; so our door is always open, Mr. Speaker, and we're working with communities all across Prince Edward Island every day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Dividing rural Islanders

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It makes me wish there was an actual rule in our Assembly that required ministers to answer questions because it's embarrassing to take people in here on a cold Friday morning – give up their own time, drive all the way to Charlottetown on their own dime, unlike you fellows who all have government gas cards to get yourselves here, they paid their own way here today and they're not getting answers? Boy oh boy. This is why democracy isn't working. This is why people are upset. None of you guys seem to get it. None of you guys seem to understand. Some people have a vote. They have a vote and it goes back to their council. Now we're organizing our vote.

Question to the Premier: Why are you letting your amalgamation minister divide Islanders in rural Prince Edward Island into two classes: Those whose voices heard, and those who aren't?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Actually, what we and I, as a minister, are doing – we're actually working to join communities. We're looking to join communities that have areas of common interest, areas that need to be improved on, and that's the work that we're doing, Mr. Speaker. It is very important to us that everybody has an opportunity to have their voice heard and spoken and we'll continue with the process. It's been an incredible process thus far. Many people have attended meetings; many people have come to see the presentation; many people understand that things probably need to change in the future and they're coming to see what it means. For that, I commend those people who take the initiative to do that and I will continue to work with them in the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Democracy in amalgamation process (further)

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister keeps saying: Those who want change are wonderful and great people; those who don't want to amalgamate into mega communities: Well, go on. Go on your little way. That's what we're hearing. That message is loud and clear through rural Prince Edward Island. That message is loud and clear through the unincorporated part of Three Rivers. These people are upset. These people are upset that number one: Government has completely cut them out of the process. Government has completely ignored them. Government won't answer any questions on it, acts like our whole fate lies in the hands of whether or not the incorporated areas want it. So if the incorporated areas want it, then they're going to come talk to you and not see if you want it, see how they can force it down your throat. If they don't want it, you won't get a voice.

Question to the Premier: How is that healthy for democracy?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, like any process that occurs on anything, there are steps, there are measures that are taken. We are at the early part of the process involving the municipal areas.

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Mitchell: When it comes to the point in time where unincorporated areas need to have an opportunity to have their say that will be the case. I've indicated that as often and as plainly as I could. Obviously the hon. member has a problem coming to terms with that, but I will work with him on this. We want to encourage people to have their say and we want to work with them assure that's obtained.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.
Islanders' voices heard equally

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's funny to hear the minister say he wants to work with me. It certainly wasn't his attitude Tuesday and you know exactly what you did on Tuesday. I think rural Islanders are looking for a signal from this Premier to say that this type of process will not stand.

Question to the Premier: Will you clearly tell Islanders today – because this is going to happen in more than this community – will you clearly say to all Islanders living in incorporated and unincorporated areas that they are equal and you will make sure that their voices will be heard equally?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

The hon. member is right. This is happening in many communities all across Prince Edward Island and it's important that we take the opportunity to listen to all Islanders on this very, very important subject. This is the one that may be the furthest down the pipe on the Three Rivers, so we certainly want to take our time to do this one correctly so that other areas can look at that and say: That was a good process where it's time we want to come to my area and talk about it.

We will take all the effective measures to ensure that everybody has had an opportunity to have their say, to speak their mind, to offer their concerns, and to do it in the proper manner, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier this week we celebrated Human Rights Day. It is important to be reminded of the importance of respecting the rights of all people. In 2010, Canada became a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Question to the Minister of Family and Human Services: Could you update the House on progresses being made to make PEI compliant to this convention?

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it was last – actually probably my first House sitting, we decided to take a look at our disability support program and to transform that disability support program. We were very happy to bring many, many advocates from throughout Prince Edward Island, and even people from off-Island to come in and help us with that transformation. We are looking at many, many avenues and many, many aspects of the disability support program and accessibility and making Prince Edward Island fully accessible will be something that we are talking about and we will be looking at.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Legislation supporting persons with disabilities

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the most significant changes that PEI must make to comply with the convention is to introduce supported decision making legislation that recognizes the right of those with intellectual disabilities, aging diseases, and other cognitive impairments to stay in control of decisions which affect their lives.

Could the minister provide us with an update on progress being made towards this new legislation?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Supported decision making is something that I'm very aware of. I have met with advocates several times and it has been part of our management plan for several years.

We have now moved to the next phase of that and we have moved on and we have engaged our colleagues in justice and public safety and we were looking at how we can incorporate supported decision making into the lives of Islanders, who will benefit from supported decision making.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My understanding is that government has been very actively working with community groups over the last seven years to implement this requirement under the convention. Although I can appreciate that it is a complicated issue, we must also remember that vulnerable people with disabilities are being denied their fundamental rights as we continue to wait for this legislation.

Could the minister provide us a timeline of when she expects this important legislation to be introduced to this House?

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed important work. It's something that I live with in my life every day. I have a son who has autism and currently, I cannot speak for him so this is something that is front and foremost in my mind every day and something that I will continue to push and work collaboratively across government with my colleagues in justice and public safety and when we get it right, we will be presenting it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point.

Province House renovations

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy. Minister, Province House National Historic Site and home of this Legislative Assembly, and the most prominent symbol of our province-hood, is currently closed for extensive conservation work. Islanders are curious. Minister, they're curious about this steel scaffolding surrounding the building.

Can you update the House on the progress of the renovation and explain the purpose of the scaffolding?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, recently we all have seen the scaffolding go around the outside of the Province House and the ongoing work that's taking place there. We, as a province, are a stakeholder. The project itself is being handled by the federal Parks Canada.

Phase one was tendered earlier in the year and the successful company was Quinan Construction from Ontario, but I do know there are a lot of local contractors working there such as Livingston Steel, Hansen Electric, Tim's Crane Services, amongst others. They're doing extensive work to the outside and inside and phase two is expected to be tendered in early 2018.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, your first supplementary.

Legislative Assembly to be held in renovated Province House

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, Province House is owned by the Province of Prince Edward Island and has an agreement to co-manage Province House with Parks Canada. The home of the Legislative Assembly plays a major role in Province House.

When Province House reopens with over \$43 million in renovations, and as the

minister responsible, have you received assurances that the Legislative Assembly will be able to operate as a modern parliament with appropriate space and amenities well into the future?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we would all agree that we consider Province House the home of the people of Prince Edward Island and are anxious to see it renovated in a safe and operate-able way. The federal government has committed \$41 million towards that renovation and included in that will be improvements to the building to ensure that there is safe occupation and improve security measures for when the Legislative Assembly does re-occupate the building. We expect that that work will be completed and for occupation in 2021.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Heeding to emergency vehicles

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is also for the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy. As a former RCMP officer, I quite often encounter drivers who are unsure of what to do when encountering emergency vehicles on the road. When approaching emergency vehicles such as ambulances, police cars and fire trucks, some people are confused about whether they are supposed to pull over and come to a complete stop or slow down. We have many tourists and new citizens.

Can the minister remind the public of the rules of the road in those situations?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The safety of the travelling public and those emergency vehicle operators is very important so, if you see an ambulance pulled over on the side of the road with lights flashing you should slow down and safely

go around the vehicle. If you meet a vehicle, an emergency vehicle, on the road – meet it or coming behind you with flashing lights – you need to pull over to let them pass safely. They have the ability or the right to go through traffic lights if they need to and can do that safely. Also, you may see them go above the speed.

We need to ensure that when an emergency is occurring, that we heed to the emergency vehicles.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Respecting funeral processions

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Prince Edward Island drivers are some of the most courteous drivers in the country and are very respectful of funeral processions. We're all proud of the way people pull over when they're meeting a procession.

Are the rules of the road the same for funeral processions?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have had it commented to me by several visitors as well about meeting funeral processions and seeing Islanders pull off the road and thought it was a wonderful gesture, of showing respect, but they do not have the same rules in regard to vehicles needing to pull off. What we do advise as a safety measure –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – is to slow down and pull over if you can to show respect, reduce your speed and pull off to the side if you possibly can. But, they do not have the same ability or right to go through stop lights or to be speeding, but we appreciate what Islanders do to show respect and if there are any questions that drivers have, they can contact highway safety.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Education of drivers

Minister, will you look at launching a social media campaign to educate and remind Island drivers about the rules of the road in these situations?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have seen several tragedies with RCMP officers being killed on the side of the road, some close calls with our emergency vehicles on the side of the road, and we certainly would be very glad to work together with our department and with highway safety to engage and to educate people on the importance of heeding and being aware of those first responders that are pulled off on the side of the road or that we are meeting, so I think it's a great idea and we will take that under consideration to engage the public in a campaign.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. LaVie: Here we go.

Electricity demand-side management plan

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government turned the energy corporation into a public utility last week. Staff told this House an electricity demand management efficiency plan will be submitted to IRAC between the next four to six weeks.

Question to the minister: Why are you not bringing this plan before the House, or at least standing committee, and allowing public debate?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it was noted during our Committee of the Whole when we had our bill on the floor, but this is a time-sensitive demand-side management plan that has to go before IRAC on behalf of Islanders to ensure that Islanders, through our energy efficiency program, will get the best benefit from efficiency programs that we provide for Islanders.

We are working on that plan as we speak, so we have not had it completed to be able to table here in the House, but it's a public hearing that people will be able to see what is being put forward.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government has been quietly meeting with larger electricity consumers and other stakeholders around this plan. The message from their government has been: Making our electricity system more efficient, modernizing our grid, putting together a whole suite of programs.

Question to the minister: Why are there no public details around your plans, and you are keeping this in secret?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, we certainly are not keeping anything secret. We went across the Island as part of our energy strategy and coming back out of that we're now implementing a lot of those recommendations that were put forward as part of that consultation process.

We are meeting with other energy areas to ensure that going forward we have the best plan that we can put together. We need to have efficiency programs put in place. We need to be out there looking at other options

for energy, which we are doing. The energy corp are working on a smart grid and a grid modernization program, so we are doing that work as part of our energy strategy, which is a 10-year strategy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Other energy suppliers for electricity

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I asked the minister of energy last week about looking at new suppliers for energy besides Maritime Electric. The minister responded that we are.

Question to the minister: What other energy suppliers are your government meeting with and who are they?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, as we talked about, having energy storage is very important. We have had a number of discussions with companies out there that are looking for innovative ways to store energy.

Mr. LaVie: Which companies?

Ms. Biggar: We haven't entered into any contracts with anyone and at that time, we certainly will be transparent on what is happening. We have to go out there to the market to get the best deal that we can for Islanders. We are working on that; we are working on our strategy; we're working on our efficiency programs; we're working on other wind opportunities; –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) secrecy.

Ms. Biggar: – we are working on our smart grid to incorporate those all together into a plan that will help Islanders.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Accessing dollars from Low Carbon Economy Fund

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's also over \$34 million from the federal government's five-year Low Carbon Economy Fund that's been available since April.

Ms. Biggar: Yes.

Mr. Fox: Question to the minister: Why has this government never once mentioned this \$34 million?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: What's going on?

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

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Ms. Biggar: When the federal government announced the low carbon energy fund, Prince Edward Island is one of the available provinces that have access to that fund.

We are making efforts and have applied to the low energy carbon fund to be able to provide a suite of programs for Islander. We are in the middle of those negotiations with the federal government, which are going very well, and we will be looking forward to the fruition of another partnership with the federal government who have supported us in many of our energy projects, including the cable for \$70 million.

Mr. R. Brown: That's great.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been no detail whatsoever on how that \$34 million, or even that it existed, how it's going to be spent and how much will be available for the next fiscal year.

Question to the minister: When is this government planning to access the money?

An Hon. Member: Yeah.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Trivers: Open and transparent.

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, as we are aware, and it hasn't been any secret, that we are presently in bilateral agreements –

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Ms. Biggar: – discussions with the federal government on the new suite of programs that they announced under the new bill Canada under their green energy fund. We are in those negotiations at the moment; we are applying for funds to ensure that Prince Edward Island gets their share of federal government funding for energy and it's all tied in with our energy strategy. Anything that we do is going to be for the benefit of Islanders.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

PEI Energy Corporation administrating dollars from federal fund

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Low Carbon Economy Fund has three criteria: projects that significantly reduce emissions; prioritizing those that reduce the most emissions the most cheaply; and the third: initiatives must also be in addition to existing projects, or those that are already planned.

Question to the minister: Will you confirm that the PEI Energy Corporation will be administrating this \$34 million secret fund from Ottawa?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: Islanders on a need-to-know basis.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: They've announced it. They've announced it. It's on the website.

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

Mr. Trivers: Let us know what's going on.

Ms. Biggar: Well I'd hardly say it was secret, Mr. Speaker.

It is on the federal website. I believe they made announcements yesterday in other Maritime Provinces. We have our projects in there that we expect to be announced very soon. They will centre around energy efficiency. It is not a secret fund. It will be through efficiencyPEI and the energy corp and again, all part –

Ms. Biggar: – believe they made announcements yesterday in other Maritime Provinces. We have our projects in there that we expect to announced very soon. They will centre around energy efficiency. It is not a secret fund. It will be through efficiencyPEI and the energy corp and again all part of our energy strategy for Islanders to help save them on energy consumption.

Mr. Roach: (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, \$34 million will go a long way in efficiency and new incentives to reduce emissions on PEI.

In fact, it would assist the transition from home heating oil to other forms of heating. It would upgrade transportation infrastructure for thousands of Islanders. And, it could retrofit fishing fleets and farm vehicles.

Question to the minister: Minister, will this money be invested back into Islanders directly to offset your carbon tax?

Mr. Trivers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it's important to reiterate that the new fund will help Islanders in reducing their energy costs. It will help reduce gas emissions, carbon emissions on Prince Edward Island by doing that.

We are putting, again, the demand-side management plan forward, which will include a whole suite of programs that will be funded under the low-carbon energy fund.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, this is your final question.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker for the final question.

Minister, simple question: When will you give the public –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: – the details of this \$34 million and a solid cost-benefit analysis of how you will be spending it to help Islanders?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, we expect, very soon, in the near future to have that –

Mr. Trivers: Very soon.

Ms. Biggar: – agreement with the federal government which will lay out detailed –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) specific.

Ms. Biggar: – programs, which Islanders will be able to take advantage of, whether it's for home retrofit, or for heating alternatives –

Mr. Trivers: Winter, spring, fall.

Ms. Biggar: – and other programs that will benefit Islanders. Our commitment, through our energy strategy, is to work with Islanders, work with business, work with transportation, and –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – going forward to be able to reduce the emissions, and to also help Islanders reduce their energy costs.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]