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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF  
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2018



Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

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

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

Neurology is an important medical specialty that provides vital services to a wide range of medical conditions, from epilepsy to cancer, and to MS.

**State of neurology services on PEI**

Question to the health minister: What is the current state of neurology services here on PEI?

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

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

Currently, on Prince Edward Island we have a full complement of neurologists, which that number is three. They do provide a wonderful service to Islanders and at any given time, I'm sure they have a wide range of patients, as was mentioned by the hon. member, and they do great work and we're very fortunate to have them, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I'd ask the minister to certainly go back and do some research with regards to that answer when he said that we have a full complement.

Like any in-demand medical specialty, patient wait times are a very serious issue.

**Wait lists to see neurologist**

Question to the minister of health: Do you consider the current two-year wait list for neurology services contributing to good patient outcomes here on Prince Edward Island?

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

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

I do stand by my comments that we are at full complement of three neurologists on Prince Edward Island. There was at two points of time this year where our neurologists – one was out early for a personal leave in the springtime, back in service though, and we do have another neurologist that is out currently but will be back by the end of the year.

In the interim, though, we've had locum neurologists that have filled in. We currently have a locum right now that covers some days of the month.

But, like every other medical specialty, there are times where there are waits. As a private health service, Health PEI does not track those specific times, but we continue to work with the neurologists.

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

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

The minister feels that a two-year wait time to see a neurologist is acceptable when you may be sitting at home wondering or not whether your diagnosis of MS or a cancer illness, or many other serious health issues, maybe be complicating your life. But, the minister is okay with Islanders waiting two years to see a neurologist.

To supplement our in-province neurologists many patients use temporary visiting clinics with off-Island neurologists to help reduce wait times and avoid travelling to another province for medical attention.

**Access to temporary visiting clinics**

Again, question to the health minister: Can Island patients still access these local, temporary visiting clinics?

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

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

Although I don't have specifics on Islanders requiring neurology services, we do have reciprocal agreements with other provinces in our region.

I'm sure, from time to time, there are requirements that require special attention and Health PEI provides methods and means for that. But, we support our neurologists locally with locum service when it's required. As I said, we have one now that is working in PEI and we'll continue to talk to neurologists in the situation, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

So, in fact, we used to have two neurologists from Nova Scotia that would come here to PEI for a couple of days a month and help to supplement the services to patients on this long wait list of two years.

This is no longer the case. This government cut that program so we no longer have those visiting neurologists coming to PEI to help eliminate the backlog.

The minister said we have a full complement of neurologists here in PEI; however, Health PEI's website shows that they're currently recruiting for a new neurologist.

### **Retirements of local neurologists**

Question to the health minister: Does government anticipate any further neurologist retirements in the near future?

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

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

The hon. member is correct. We currently are recruiting for a neurologist on Prince Edward Island.

One of our neurologists has indicated officially and formally that they intend to retire at some point in time next spring, so obviously recruitment and retention are out

trying to recruit a neurologist to come to Prince Edward Island.

In the meantime, though, we have locums that are available that are assisting and as I said earlier, the locum that is out on special personal leave intends to be back before the end of the year, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

### **Wait lists to see neurologist (further)**

I was talking to someone that was potentially exhibiting signs of having MS. I'm wondering if the minister of health – what kinds of things would go through his head if he was exhibiting signs of MS and had to wait over two years to see a neurologist.

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

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

The hon. member knows that I am not a clinician, but I do know that when it comes to the neurologists and their diagnoses, it's based on acuity need. The ones that are priority do get moved to the front of the queue and that's the normal practice that they have had in place for some time.

I anticipate if somebody was showing signs of MS, that neurologist would do the necessary medical treatments to ensure that their needs are met, Mr. Speaker.

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

### **Health PEI resources for specialty recruitment**

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

Another question to the health minister: Is the psychological toll on patients of extended wait times factored in when Health PEI commits resources to our specialty recruitment?

**Some Hon. Members:** Good question.

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

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

As I said earlier, all of our health needs of Prince Edward Islanders would be met by some medical attention when needed.

We do have a reciprocal agreement with out-of-province. Just as recently as last spring, I was standing to my feet talking about cataracts and eye surgeries that were going out-of-province. I do believe that if the neurologists had needs to send somebody out-of-province, or to bring another physician in from a specialist – a specialist in from some other area, that would be something that would be met and would be provided, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

These patients are referred to the neurologists. They're not just referred for no good reason, they have good reasons to be there and they're spending two years waiting, thinking, wondering what to do.

I was talking to a person that was exhibiting MS symptoms – they have decisions to make, they have serious life decisions to make. They could be looking at a new home, the different capabilities of that new home if they're going to have MS, but here they are waiting two years to see a neurologist.

### **Two-year wait lists to see neurologist**

Does this government think that waiting two years to see that neurologist to get an MRI is appropriate?

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

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

As I said, our neurologists are very highly trained individuals doing wonderful work here on Prince Edward Island.

As I said earlier the wait times are based on acuity. They're assessed based. They continue to work with their patients and all

Islanders to ensure that their needs are best met and in a timely fashion as possible.

Anytime that we hear of any medical condition that has a wait time, we are always concerned about that but we do our best and we try to ensure that Islanders health needs are met efficiently and safely, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I was told we used to have a neurologist come over from Sunday to Wednesday a couple of times a month to help with this backlog.

### **Visiting neurologists**

Why did we stop that?

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

**Mr. Mitchell:** Mr. Speaker, I don't have data on visiting neurologists that have come to Prince Edward Island in the past, I can check that and bring that back and I'm willing to do that.

But I do know that we do have locums that are Prince Edward Island that are working – locums that are available to come to Prince Edward Island. As I said we are recruiting right now for a neurologist and perhaps it will be one of those locums that come and stay and live in Prince Edward Island and help the needs of Islanders, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

### **Increasing neurologist complement**

If there's over a two-year wait to see a neurologist and our complement is three, do you think that we should be increasing that complement, Mr. Minister?

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

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

When it comes to physicians on Prince Edward Island, we are now at 262 physicians in its entirety. Compare that with when I myself and personally and other members of the Legislature came to power in 2007, we were sitting at 196. Couple that again with 31 nurse practitioners that have been added to the system over the last number of years.

We are working very hard to ensure that Islanders healthcare needs are met.

Does it mean that we're absolutely where we need to be? Absolutely not, we will continue to recruit, we will continue to go out and talk to physicians; we will continue to ensure that all health care needs for Prince Edward Islanders are well met, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Obviously the options of helping solve the problem of the wait list for the neurologists is not working. We've talked about a locum every once and a while – that's just maintaining the status quo or losing ground.

What options are this government looking at, besides what the minister has mentioned, for fix this problem? Two years is just not appropriate.

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

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

As minister of health, it's not my decision how many physicians we need or how many physicians in particular programs or covering particular health issues.

There is a committee that is made up of physicians and staff that determine that and they meet regularly to determine are complements where they need to be, do we need to make adjustments? And that is ongoing work every day.

I'm sure that committee is looking at issues like this. If it is a concern, they are dealing with it and will continue to work so.

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

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

### **Reinstating visiting neurologist**

Will the minister commit today to reinstating that neurologist that came over here for three, four days a week until we get this backlog down to an acceptable time?

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

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

I think what I would be prepared to commit to today is to go back and talk to my staff, talk to them about what happened in the past –

**Mr. MacEwen:** You've been doing that for 10 years.

**Mr. Mitchell:** – the neurologist that came from other provinces was that an effective practice? Did it show the results that we needed or for what purpose if it is not happening today, why was that practice ceased?

I'm willing to go back, talk to my staff –

**Mr. Trivers:** Less talk, more action.

**Mr. Mitchell:** – and if there's something that we can do there, absolutely we'll have a look at that, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Trivers:** The Energy Efficient Equipment Rebate requires that upfront payment is made and then the application can be made for the rebate. That's how rebates work, so the longer it takes to get the rebate; the more costly it is to the applicant.

People are finding that once they are approved to receive an Energy Efficient Equipment Rebate, there is a delay before payment.

### **Delays in rebate payments re: energy efficiency**

Question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: how long are Islanders waiting for their Energy Efficient Equipment Rebates?

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

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

We want to congratulate Islanders for taking advantage of this new program to convert to other sources of heat.

We've had a 300% increase in applications since the first of April. We are now up to about 2,500 applications. We have hired extra staff to process those applications, and things are progressing so that we are making sure that those are gone out.

We have access to direct deposit for clients who have applied for those and we're continuing to work on that.

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

Islanders do want to be energy efficient, and it's great that the government took our advice in the lobbying and put this program in place.

Even after the Energy Efficient Equipment Rebate application form is filled out, the sales receipt with date, make and model numbers is collected, a certificate of compliance from the electrical installer is obtained. All of this is sent to efficiencyPEI and then it's deemed they meet the eligibility requirements. Islanders are being told it is a wait of three months to get these rebates.

**Some Hon. Members:** Three months?

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

**Mr. Trivers:** Yes, three months.

### **Three-month wait for rebate payments**

Question to the minister of energy: How are you planning to fix this problem?

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

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

Again, as I noted, there is direct deposit for those payments but each one of those heat pumps that are being installed saves over 1,000 litres of oil which is equivalent to 2.75 tonnes of greenhouse gas.

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

**An Hon. Member:** Three months.

**Hon. Member:** (Indistinct)

**Ms. Biggar:** If you look at that and we're moving towards expanding –

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

**Ms. Biggar:** – our programs, but we've also saved Islanders over \$10 million in energy costs through those programs and another \$10 million in electricity rebates and we're continuing to put more programs in place to save Islanders more money.

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

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

So Islanders with a household income of \$35,000 or less qualify as low-income, and of course we know that's way too many Island households right now.

So low-income can get rebates from anywhere from \$900 for a more efficient oil furnace to \$7,500 for a geothermal heat pump – that's just the rebate.

This is great, but how can low income households possibly afford to outlay that kind of cash and then wait for three months to wait to get their rebate back?

**An Hon. Member:** Yes.

### **Low-income Islanders re: energy efficient programs**

**Mr. Trivers:** Question to the minister: Why did you implement an energy efficient equipment program that low-income Islanders simply can't afford to use?

**Premier MacLauchlan:** They are using it.

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

**Ms. Biggar:** As I noted, we have a 300% increase in those applications since April; 2,500 people now have accessed that program, but we also have a free weatherization program which we've helped over 4,300 low-income clients with –

**Mr. R. Brown:** Oh great.

**Ms. Biggar:** – 500 businesses have accessed those programs. \$5 million in ENERGY STAR equipment and that is all to go towards our carbon reduction plan, and that's why we are so proud of Islanders for taking advantage of those programs.

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

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

What we're hearing is that low-income Islanders in fact are not using the program because they can't afford to use it so I welcome the minister to table that data anytime she likes.

**Mr. Trivers:** Seniors on fixed incomes particularly stand to benefit from energy efficient upgrades; however, once they figure how to apply for the program, they find themselves in a dilemma. How do they come up with the up-front money to make the upgrade? If they can get a loan or put it on a credit card, is it worth it for the amount of interest they'll have to pay?

### Change in energy efficient program

A question to the minister of energy: Minister, will you commit to changing this program so that it is accessible to those who need it the most?

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

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

This government is the government that reinstated the home renovation program that was cancelled by the PC government.

**Ms. Biggar:** We've helped –

**Mr. R. Brown:** (Indistinct)

**Ms. Biggar:** – 4,000 low-income Islanders through that home reno program. We are helping 2,500 also in combination with that, to put in more new efficient energy equipment. We're doing the free weatherization program; we're continuing to work with Islanders to address their needs. We're saving them \$10 million a year on electricity rebates and we're continuing to add to our programs.

Thank you.

**Mr. R. Brown:** You got 'em on the ropes.

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

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

I mean, this is the government that brought in the HST, raised the HST, they're taking money out of one pocket – a lot of money – and they're giving a little bit of it back with the other hand.

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

**Mr. Trivers:** Another problem with this program is that any home energy efficient upgrade projects that have already been started or just recently completed are not eligible. Islanders are trying to be more energy efficient and are taking the steps they need to make this happen; however, because of the program application procedure, many find out that they are not eligible until after the fact. They've already done the work – even though they seem to meet all of the program requirements.

Question to the minister of energy: Will you commit to changing the energy efficient equipment program to address this problem?

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Mr. Speaker.

We're also saving Islanders with oil reduction, tax on that, the propane, wood rebates, the tax on the rebates. The member over there is not correct in saying that everyone is ineligible – we will look at an application that meets the requirements going back 12 months.

**An Hon. Member:** Oh, great.

**Ms. Biggar:** We have done that. So, if they meet the criteria, if they meet the energy star value – we have worked with those clients to help them access this new program and we'll continue to work with them.

**Speaker:** Thank you, minister.

Next question will be from the hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Yesterday, we celebrated the day of the child and everyone in this House reconfirmed our commitment to care for all children.

One of the most disturbing trends that we are seeing, however, is the number of children and families, who are facing mental health challenges. Despite that, we have been unable to maintain a full complement of clinicians and community mental health children's services.

### **Clinicians and children's mental health services**

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: How many of these positions are there currently? And how many of them are vacant?

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

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

I don't probably have that exact detail on that, hon. member. I'll check and bring it back. But, what we are working on and what we continue to work with the minister of education and his department on is student health well-being teams and we're seeing great success from that

We continue to invest in our youth programs and in light of an announcement last week of a \$100 million dedicated to mental health and addictions on Prince Edward Island, we'll be working on adult programs.

I can assure the hon. member that from birth to adult, we have a very primary focus on health wellness and we'll continue to look at

those numbers and improve if they need to improve. And I'll bring back the exact number of people that we have working in the system.

**Speaker:** Thank you, minister.

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

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

I understand there are significant vacancies, and with these vacancies we are hearing concerns from families who are in need of the longer term intensive focus that those sorts of significant mental health concerns demand. These families are claiming that services beyond crisis intervention and triage are unavailable in community mental health centers.

### **Retaining of staff in mental health**

To the same minister: Why had it been so difficult to retain staff in children's community mental health?

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

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

When it comes to Islanders mental health, it is a major concern for us. Currently we have a complement of 13 psychiatrists working in the system; we are speaking with physiologists. And obviously, UPEI is developing a new psychologist program, which we hope that we can attract physiologists to work in our mental health system in Prince Edward Island in the coming years.

We are now strengthening all programs and children's mental health and well being is certainly one that we continue to work on. Our student well-being teams are showing great success, and we know that we can build on that and continue to work with our younger Islanders in special needs.

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

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

We all recognize the challenges in this area, but we're also hearing from the clinicians themselves, that they are stressed and anxious and frustrated with the system. And yet, they're afraid to speak openly at work or in public about where the problems exist.

To the minister: Will you commit to creating a culture in this department where staff feels that they can speak more openly and actively contribute to finding solutions?

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

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

Certainly, I encourage all my staff to come forth with ideas, with solutions on any problems that they see within their department. But as a result of that \$100 million that was just announced last week in the Capital Budget and is part of the consultations with Islanders that are suffering from mental health conditions and their families, and having conversations with them.

It was clearly indicated to us that community mental health is a gap on Prince Edward Island, and that's why a lot of that money – the \$40 million – part of that will be going into strengthening community mental health, to building on areas that we know that we need to get better on. So, we will see better improvements on that in the very near future.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford.

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

My question is for the minister of education. Over the last number of years in Stratford, there has been a lot of discussion about the new need for a new school over there. I know the town put forward a proposal that they should have a 7 to 12. In the Capital Budget that was put forward, \$38 million was set aside for a new school, as everyone knows; Stratford is the fast growing municipality in the province.

### **Concept of new school in Stratford**

I was wondering if the minister could tell us: why they went with a senior school instead

of the 7 to 12 concept that was put forward by the town.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a good question. The direct answer is that this was based on recommendation by the Public Schools Branch, and specifically in their meeting where they set out these recommendations; they delineated an immediate need for capacity at the high school level in Stratford or in the greater Charlottetown area; which would be most readily and appropriately alleviated through a school in Stratford.

That's not to say there won't eventually be another school in Stratford, but it is to say that the Public Schools Branch, as they indicated in their recommendations, did wish to have more time to review an appropriate set up in terms of school configurations there in Stratford.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford, your first supplementary.

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

### **Amount of land required for Stratford school**

And that does lead well into my second question because it's around the question of land. How much land does it take for a school? And if we are looking down the road of possibly completing the 7 to 12 concept, how much land do we really need? How much land does the town – have they identified any piece of property of whatever for this school? But around the acreage, do you have any idea how much land we really need to complete the complex, now and in the future?

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

**Mr. J. Brown:** Mr. Speaker.

This is an interesting one, in this particular situation. We have of late, indicated that we have a strong willingness to work with communities in an effort to develop appropriate educational institutions in their communities. We met with Mayor Dunphy and councillor Cooper on a number of occasions; they had indicated a desire to procure the land and put an athletic complex around the schools. They've indicated that they wish to do that and secure that land, which they had indicated would be between 110 and 160 acres, I believe, and that they would make it available to us to put the schools on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford, your second supplementary.

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

When I go into the Tim's over there at the Petro in Stratford, this is one of the biggest questions that comes is about this new school and what it's going to take to put it in place. They are very pleased that we've taken the first step, for sure. They are certainly interested in the timeframe. That size of acreage, there can't be that many places in the town they can put that.

Timeline for new Stratford school  
I was just wondering if the minister could give us an actual timeframe of when we'll get this thing started, at least.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly when the capital budget goes through here, presuming that it does, we will endeavour to work with the town to set forward on the selection of land and what that school might look like. The town had indicated to us that they felt there were three or four parcels that might be possible either in or around the periphery of Stratford as it exists right now. So, I'm sure they're

looking into the different possibilities, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

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

My question today is to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Minister, this past summer your department placed wheelchair accessible mats on some of the provincial park beaches on Prince Edward Island. I think this was a great idea, and anything that we can do to make it more inclusive and to remove any barriers that all Islanders can enjoy our beautiful beaches is welcoming news.

#### **Public response on beach wheelchair mats**

Can you tell the House today what the response has been for those placements of mats?

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

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

The addition of the mats and the floating wheelchairs has been a great addition to the product that we have here in Prince Edward Island. We received a number of comments from tourists, the PEI Council of People with Disabilities were onsite actually one day and were very pleased with the product that we have, and the products performed very well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

#### **Accessible beaches in 2019**

Minister, will you continue to make these beaches and all provincial beaches, including Jacques Cartier in West Prince, accessible for wheelchairs in 2019?

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

**Mr. Palmer:** I can't say that I'm shocked by the request.

I could see this one coming, but we are planning to roll this out right across PEI. Jacques Cartier Park is one that we will be doing this summer.

**Ms. Biggar:** Great.

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

**Mr. Palmer:** So we will be continuing this right here with a ramp and a mat and a floating wheelchair.

Thank you.

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

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

I feel like I'm in Staples – that was easy.

So let's try another one – we'll try another one. Okay?

So it's my understanding that Jacques Cartier Campground is the only provincially-owned campground that doesn't have Wi-Fi access.

### **Wi-Fi access at provincial campgrounds**

Minister: Will they see Wi-Fi access is the very near future?

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

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

There are other campgrounds that don't have Wi-Fi in our system, and we will be doing that next year, including the campground in the member's area.

Thank you very much.

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

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

Islanders have been long in calling for an action plan in investments in mental health care in this province.

### **Mental health supports**

Is the health minister committed to doing all he can do to further improve mental health supports here on this province?

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

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

The short answer to that question is: Yes.

Last year alone; \$34 million into mental health in Prince Edward Island. This year, as of last week, another \$100 million will be invested in mental health and addictions over the next five years.

As part of consultations, we heard from Islanders about – a new mental health campus would be wonderful, but that would not fill all the needs associated with mental health or addictions. We needed more community support, we needed dedicated ERs; we need tele-mental health.

I as minister and we as government will continue to make those investments so that mental health and mental health wellness is what we are achieving by these investments.

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

**Mr. Fox:** Well thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Let's be clear, you've announced that number – those two numbers coming into almost what we think is an election period when Islanders were needing that money years ago.

It is important that the health minister is committed to further improvements to our mental health system.

### **Proper care and time of treatment**

Is the health minister also committed to ensure Islanders suffering from mental health problems receive the right care at the right place and at the right time?

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

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

Absolutely, hon. member, that's exactly what we're looking to achieve. That became quite clear in conversations with staff, with clinicians, with clients, and their family, that we needed to make large investments in community first approaches – build in the community where they live and are close to home to make enrichment investments in there that will improve their mental health and addictions situations.

That's why \$40 million of that new \$100 million is going towards community development; it's going toward tele-mental health – all areas that were highlighted to us by clients, their families, and those working in the system, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Fox:** Well thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Well, let's be clear. Islanders have been asking for this help for years. So the right time was years ago, the right place was across the Island, and the right time was back then.

### **Funding for mental health court program**

Question to the health minister: Why then did you refuse to fund our bill to establish a mental health court program in Prince Edward Island, which could have led the country when it was brought to the floor last evening?

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

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

As minister of health for Prince Edward Island my job and my role is to invest in health and mental wellness. I can't make that any clearer. That is why we are earmarking dollars to go into the much needed areas for mental health and addictions on Prince Edward Island – be it adult day programs, dedicated EDs as I mentioned earlier, but more importantly,

community and enhancement for supports for needs that are not being met today.

That's where those investments, as minister of health, that I am very proud to be able to look at that today and continue with that work, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Our bill to establish a mental health program here on PEI was on the floor last night. This bill, because of the need for public investment to launch this little program, requires the procedural royal recommendation from any cabinet minister, which commits governments to fund it prior to third reading.

Not one cabinet minister asked last evening would commit to funding a mental health court program.

### **Refusal of funding for mental health court program**

Will the health minister explain why this happened?

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

**Mr. Mitchell:** Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I think I tried my best to make it clear to the hon. member as he sat at the committee of the whole yesterday. I think his intent is sincere, but I did do – as minister responsible for mental health – I did ask him questions about his bill.

I understand that there are flaws in there. I understand that others have concerns about that. Quite frankly, I would have to spend some time with that bill and go out and consult with clients of mental health to see does that bill – would it ever meet their needs?

So, all I said to the minister yesterday was I would need more time to look at that bill in its entirety to consult with Islanders on it and I did agree that his intent was sincere. I still do that today, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Well I appreciate that, minister.

All we need is to listen to Islanders and support the establishment of a mental health court program.

Why is this government refusing to take action on a program that will have real merit to help those suffering from mental health and are before the courts?

Can you answer that minister?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As we indicated when this bill was on the floor last night, we have some very serious constitutional concerns and some internal inconsistencies within the bill.

The hon. member himself took the bill off the floor acknowledging those issues, and decided to proceed another way.

I'll say now what I said then: We have the best court system in Canada right now where we have almost zero wait times to trial, zero wait times to a disposition, where the individuals that are going through mental health or therapeutic courts in other jurisdictions are getting the direct help that they need in the ways that they would in other jurisdictions through the court system that we have.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I will agree with the minister. We do have three of the best judges in this land residing over the provincial court, bar none. But, I will say, that whatever we can do as a government and as opposition to help people with mental health issues, not go before the

court, and being put into a program is a step forward.

### **Status of mental health campus**

Can the Minister of Health and Wellness give us an update on the mental health campus planning committee and what stage they are at?

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

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

I'd like to commend the committee who has done a large amount of work over the last number of months. This is the same group that last year alone indicated we needed to invest that \$34 million, which we did, to improve programs as the walk-in clinics, as the strength and insight programs for our Island youth, as well as investments with our student well-being teams.

Couple that this year with investments on a new mental health campus, with dedicated EDs, with tele-health for mental health – I can only commend this group for the amount of hours they put in and next week this group will be coming together and we'll be doing some more talking about this in a larger scale, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Fox:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

### **Recommendation of mental health court system**

Given what the minister says, and if this committee comes back and they make a recommendation to have a mental health court system put in place, will you consider it and look at our bill?

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

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

As I said yesterday, I am not the minister of the judiciary or legal aspects, but as I said to the hon. member yesterday, I would like to

have continuous conversations with those that are suffering or dealing with mental health issues in regards to a bill of that nature. That may come to fruition sometime over the next coming months, but that wouldn't be done in the next few days.

Our committee is focusing on the needs at hand. They're focusing on that \$100 million announcement. They're focusing on blueprints and drawings and figuring our RFPs. I think they're at a very busy time in their schedule and I look forward to working with them on all aspects of it.

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

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

I'm very curious if the Minister of Health and Wellness had any knowledge or any briefings or read any reports or studies on the merits of a mental health court prior to the bill being introduced in the Legislative Assembly.

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

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I believe it was back in 2015 when we were first elected to this Legislature, the hon. Premier, who was minister of justice at the time, indicated that our department had commissioned a study in relation to a therapeutic court on Prince Edward Island and we had reviewed that possibility and came to find that what would inevitably look to be accomplished through that court, we were already doing it.

That's not to say there's not work to be done. There's always work to be done, but we have some great programs that we're looking to enhance and we're always looking to do better on; diversionary programs that do enable a lot of the things that the hon. member has proposed about a mental health court, and we will look to continue working with the minister of health, and with others, including family and human services, to improve the services we have on offer for Prince Edward Islanders.

But, you have to look at what you're trying to accomplish, and what I would have to say to the House right now, is that we do not have the issues that many other Canadian jurisdictions suffer with in relation to mental health courts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]