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

FOR

THURSDAY, 22 NOVEMBER 2018

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During Question Period yesterday, the Member from Rustico-Emerald asked about rebate applications to low-income Islanders.

As I noted yesterday, rebate applications have grown over 300% over last year with over 2,400 Islanders participating. The wait times have been eight to 10 weeks, and that is decreasing. If an Islander applies today with proper certificates and information in hand, they can expect the process to take about six to eight weeks in most cases.

Over 130 low-income clients have received their rebates already. There are 150 more low-income applications currently being processed. Low-income clients are being given priority. Fifty are waiting also to have on-sight inspection.

We're on track to help over 600 low-income Islanders with energy upgrades to their home this year. That's 25% of the overall applications received. Clients can have their rebate paid directly to the contractor, which lowers their upfront costs.

We are continuing to roll out additional programs in the future, which will help meet the needs of efficiency for low-income Islanders.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday during Question Period, members were asking about visiting neurology services.

As I informed the House, we have a full complement of three neurologists practicing in the province. Additionally, we have three locum neurologists who have been providing services regularly in PEI since 2015. One locum holds a two-day clinic every month in Summerside, and that clinic is ongoing. Additionally, two locum

neurologists from Nova Scotia have provided service at the QEH, each working an average of three to five days every month.

One of those neurologists notified Health PEI over the summer that due to her increasing workload in Nova Scotia, she had decided not to continue with clinics in PEI after July of 2018. This was not a discontinuation of services by Health PEI – it was a neurologist who decided to step away from that particular clinic.

As well as a system, we fully support these locum clinics, recruitment continues for a local neurologist and if specialists are willing to come, we welcome all of them. We currently have our complement of neurologists, plus two neurologists who come from out-of-province on a regular basis to provide additional supports to Islanders.

While I'm on my feet, as well yesterday during Question Period the Leader of the Third Party asked about our staffing complement for community, mental health and children's services.

There are 42 FTE positions in total, of those 42, 18 FTEs represent RNs and Master of Social Workers who contribute to our student well-being teams. All 18 of these positions are fully staffed with no vacancies. Our child and youth community mental health and addictions division has a staffing complement of 24 FTEs. We do have two temporary vacancies for social workers, as well as four permanent positions – we are currently recruiting for two social workers and two psychologists.

Recruitment is ongoing, and we do have an offer out to psychologists to fill one of these positions, and we are just waiting for them to sign on.

Thank you very much.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Just before I start my first question, I just had a quick response to the health minister's referral to yesterday's questions.

I look forward to coming back with more factual information because I've been inundated with phone calls and emails about neurology services here on PEI. In fact, one neurologist was actually considering hiring a lawyer to sue this government.

My first question today: for many years students, parents, and staff have urged government to move ahead on the development of a great seven to 12 school in Stratford to address school overcrowding issues in Charlottetown schools. I was pleased to see funds committed towards new school infrastructure in Stratford in the capital budget.

Factors considered for new Stratford school

Question to the education minister: Were benefits like lower fuel costs, lower carbon emissions, and lower traffic congestion factored in when government decided not to proceed with a grade seven to 12 in Stratford?

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

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

As I advised the House here on a number of different occasions previously, it's the Public Schools Branch that undertakes the considerations as to what capital investments would be made, when and where. The Public Schools Branch has looked at this issue, and they have determined that the most appropriate and most immediate need in Stratford is for a high school.

They will be looking further at a need in the intermediate area, and they are also monitoring needs in the elementary area in Stratford. I would suspect, and they have indicated, that they will have further input on that in the next couple months.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Over 1,000 students cross the Hillsborough Bridge daily, to and from junior and senior high schools in Charlottetown. This, of course, leads to more traffic congestion, higher fuel costs, and higher carbon emissions.

People, again, are pleased to see progress made on the new school after years of hard work by the town, and especially the residents, such as Lindy McQuillan on this very important issue. Many have called it a half step forward.

Question to the education minister: Can you explain the logic behind students attending K-6 in Stratford, then having to travel to Charlottetown for seven to nine, and then once again back to Stratford for their high school years?

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

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

Again, I had indicated in the response to the last question that it's the Public Schools Branch that makes those determinations.

Let me just say this and I have said this before, but I'll reiterate it again for the purposes of this discussion – the students from Stratford that go across the bridge go to Birchwood School. Birchwood School is a great school. It's literally about four minutes from Stratford Elementary and Glen Stewart School.

It's the school that I went to as my intermediate school. It's a school I'm very proud to have graduated from. It was a great school then, it remains a great school now.

As I indicated before, we need to get our priorities straight in this province –

Mr. LaVie: Oh, priorities?

Mr. J. Brown: – in terms of where we put our education dollars and whether we want

to put them in bricks and mortar or whether we want to put them in our children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) kid's name on a diploma (Indistinct)

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

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) look what happened.

Leader of the Opposition: I've noticed that the minister keeps referring back to the recommendations of the Public Schools Branch. In fact, the deputy minister of education chairs the Public Schools Branch Board and the minister appoints the remaining board members.

Public Schools Branch and new Stratford school

Question to the education minister: Isn't it a bit of a smoke screen to use the Public Schools Branch to justify your government's actions, when you control the outcome?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

No, is the simple answer to that. That's been the subject of a lot of debate here, the act that sets out the appointments was passed unanimously by this Legislature

So, I would say the hon. member that we're a day late and a dollar short if that's his feeling at this point in time. But, he is free to propose an amendment should he wish to.

I met with Paul Connolly this morning –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – he's on the record as saying: he'd rather have his name on a diploma rather than a corner stone any day.

And I have to agree with that. That should be the philosophy of every minister of education as far as I'm concerned.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last spring we had a wonderful debate here in the Legislature about breaking down the barriers to expanded scope of practice for many of our health officials in the province.

Expanding scope of practice re: health officials

Could the minister of health update us on how breaking down those barriers to expand our scope of practice is going?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Certainly, as I've referenced many times on the floor of the Legislature over the past 10 or 11 months, I've had numerous amounts of conversations with many, many health professionals, whether it be physicians, whether it be NPS, whether it be RNs, or LPNs; or any other allied health professional about working to their full scope of practice.

As health professionals, they all want to be working to their full scope of practice. But there are discussions and conversations that need to take place within unions, within areas of work to determine, is that occurring? And, how can we best achieve that?

We are continuing to work on that. I meet continuously with all of those in the health profession to listen to their concerns and see where we can get to.

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I didn't hear too many specifics, then. It's been seven months since I asked those questions.

Meeting with Pharmacy Association

Could the minister— we talked a lot about pharmacist and how they can help reduce the workload and some of the pressure points, especially in rural areas, about expanding their scope of practice. Could the minister update me on his meetings with the Pharmacy Association here in PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I recently had an opportunity to talk to some pharmacists. I won't say a full representation, but we did have a good discussion on that. As a result of that conversation, as minister and as our department — we've been working with a group called CADTH, which is The Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health, to take a look at and examine what kind of evidence-based good decision practices of expanding scope of pharmacists on Prince Edward Island. We're very fortunate because our representative on CADTH from Prince Edward Island is indeed a licensed pharmacist. We are looking at things like UTIs (urinary tract infection), as well as pink eye, or impetigo or things of that nature that pharmacists would be able to prescribe and help families who are suffering from any of those illnesses. We think that's a very worthy cause and CADTH will bring back that information back to us.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That was an awfully long, drawn out way to say — he hasn't met with them. I talk to pharmacists all the time too, but guess what? Talking to them at the pharmacy or out on the street doesn't count for negotiation, doesn't count for getting things done. This was seven months ago.

Minister, let me quote, May 2nd, the minister said: obviously, things of this nature, they

are negotiation. You sit down at a table, you talk about what you're doing today, you talk about what you're seeing into the future and what services should be rooted to whom and where.

Expanding scope of practice re: health officials (further)

That sounds like a minister that was going to get things done. It's seven months later. He hasn't even had the conversation about expanding the scope of practice for pharmacists here on PEI. When is that conversation going to happen?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, as minister of health on Prince Edward Island, I support fully, all medical professionals on Prince Edward Island working to their full scope. But that does take conversations, it does take process. We are well on that process.

I have met with pharmacists, I have met with others in the health profession, and good advancement is being made. We hope to have some result back from our CADTH — experience really soon. But it's important that it needs to be evidence-based, it needs to the proper type of work that is within the scope of that individual. We're making great progress and we'll continue to work hard on that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Good job.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let me read you something else, here, from our debate last spring. This is the minister, again: we're willing to sit down and talk about that. I've had some conversations with pharmacists individually; I've had some conversations with the governing body. I've indicated that we will continue this and I sent a letter recently. A letter.

I'll give you another quote, again from the minister: I've stated in here, that I'm willing to sit down and talk to pharmacists. I understand this scope of practice; maybe we'll be able to do something there.

There has been negotiations; there has been no negotiations. We haven't had any updates. Time is ticking, we have pressure points in rural PEI, we have pressure points here in urban PEI. When will these changes happen so that the scope of practice can actually occur and these health professionals can start practicing so that we can relieve these pressures?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously the hon. member is a great quoter of Hansard. We can see that.

An Hon. Member: He can read.

Mr. MacEwen: Don't say them if you don't mean them.

Mr. Mitchell: All across Prince Edward Island, we have physicians working to their full scope of practice; we have recently increased our number of nurse practitioners to 31 on Prince Edward Island, working to their full scope of practice.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mitchell: Couple that with 1,152 RNs on Prince Edward Island –

Mr. R. Brown: Ah, great.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mitchell: – working to their full scope of practice.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Mitchell: Add that with discussions of LPNs –

Mr. LaVie: Tell 'em the fine point.

Mr. Mitchell: – who come to work every day, work diligently, covering all our health

care needs on Prince Edward Island working to their full scope of practice. We are there on Prince Edward Island, but will continue to work with all allied health professions to ensure they are all working to their full scope of practice.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) Gallant.

Mr. LaVie: You said that about the last health minister.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have fantastic nurse practitioners in this province and we have fantastic RNs in this province. But I can tell that to say that they are working to their full scope of practice is ridiculous. They are not. They are doing fantastic work, but there is not a chance that they're working to their full scope of practice because they have come and told you – the Nurse's Union told you that they can do more – we have used examples in this Legislature before about people that travel north and they run whole clinics. I can't even understand how you could say that.

Yes, it's a slow process when you keep working at it, but if you're not willing to sit down and have these conversations – and to move this stuff forward – you came in, I remember, as a new minister and you said: you were gonna do this; we're going to push this stuff forward –

Mr. Roach: Question.

Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Myers: At least he's got a job over there in the corner.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's good to know that the former Minister of Finance is paying attention because he could have funded this stuff at Cabinet table, he

could have made these changes happen. If it's legislative changes, we need to start working on this.

Mr. LaVie: That's why he's sitting back in the corner.

Mr. Roach: What are you doing?

Impact of recruitment and retention to health professionals

Mr. MacEwen: Is the minister concerned that these delays on expanding the scope of practice could impact our recruitment and retention of health professionals?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I, as minister of health in Prince Edward Island, I am not as critical of our health professionals as the hon. member across the street. I work with health professionals every day to ensure that they are doing the work that they need to be doing. I just came from a meeting about an hour and a half ago with a room full of young RN graduates, who will be graduating in the next month, and the rest of them will be graduating in April that are very excited about their new career path. They are very excited to take what they have learned at the University of Prince Edward Island and implement that into our health care system.

I will continue to work with those young professionals and all health professionals across PEI to ensure that they are working to their full scope. That is what they want to do, and we want to encourage that strongly. I will continue to work with them on that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When the minister starts talking about being critical, or of us being critical of our health care professionals here in the province – you

know, they might be starting to be around too long. I've heard ministers say that before, and it's not long before they have to retire or move on because that is completely untrue.

Mr. Myers: Ronnie MacKinley.

Mr. MacEwen: Mr. Speaker.

What we're doing is wanting these awesome health professionals in this province to do even more to solve the problems that are happening to solve the problems that are happening in rural PEI. They can do a lot more and we need to push them.

We can't just keep talking about it, we've been talking about it for 11 years, we need to start action and someone to put their shoulder behind this and get it done.

Expanding scope of practice for health professionals

Question to the health minister: Has the department ever done – and we've asked this before – if they've ever done an actual cost benefit analysis to look at the potential savings that expanding the scope of practice could bring?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I try to stress the point about supporting full scope of practice and to the hon. member's point, when it comes to looking at pharmacists and their full scope of practice: is there more that they could be doing? I think there is.

That is why we go out and ask CADTH we go out and ask our Island representative on CADTH of pharmacists: Is there some evidence based research that you can provide to us that tells us concisely what kind of prescribing pharmacists should be doing?

We're in that process and I expect to have some results back from that very soon. That will put another whole group of our health professionals on PEI doing more work for the health care of Islanders and doing it very effectively.

Mr. R. Brown: Great Job.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When I was driving in today and I talked about the winter conditions, I felt compelled to ask some housing questions.

Access to affordable housing is an issue that continues to plague Islanders of all walks of life from all communities. It's an issue we've brought up in this House, we've studied it in standing committee, there have been numerous strategies and announcements and planning long term is great but currently, people are in crisis, right now.

Immediate assistance re: housing needs

Question to the Minister of Family and Human Services: What immediate assistance is available to help Islanders struggling with housing needs?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would agree with the hon. member. When we hear these stories of Islanders struggling to find housing, it is very impactful and I know that I hear it from the members of her caucus when they call me and I hear it from the members on this side of the House as well when they call me and they tell me the stories of their constituents.

But I will say that as of August of this past year, we have rolled out over 300 rent supplements.

Now rent supplements are very important to Islanders who want to remain in their home. They're in safe, appropriate housing but they are paying more than 30% of their income on housing. A rent supplement would immediately lower the rent that they're paying to 25% and that's in addition to all the other programs that we have.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've talked about it before in committee and here in the house about the large waiting list we have for affordable housing, there's more than 1,000 people waiting for affordable housing in this province. Meanwhile, we're hearing from people who are forced by circumstance to live in substandard housing or be homeless or couch surf.

Question to the Minister of Family and Human Services: If someone is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, what emergency assistance is available to that person?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As of today, less than 1% of our social housing applicant list is people that are in urgent need.

We do have supports and services that we can roll out the door right away; we just need to know who they are.

The people that are struggling – the MLA's when you hear it, Islanders when you hear it, please let us know because we do have short-term emergency services that we can offer while we wrap other services around those Islanders to make sure that they will be successful once we are able to find them long-term placement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today is National Housing Day and there's growing public awareness around the housing issue and the prices that we have here, not just in Charlottetown but rural communities as well through the great journalism we've got through CBC's local and this week doing a no-fixed address series and through *The Guardian's* previous

investigative series on poverty, it shed a light on how many people are really in crisis.

I commend the media for doing that because I think a lot of us are just used to our day-to-day living and we don't think about it but it really did shine a light on those that are in emergency need.

Advice to homeless Islanders

Another question to the Minister of Family and Human Services: What advice do you have for Islanders who have been forced by circumstance to live sub-standard housing through a lack of an alternative?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It does pain me to hear stories such as the ones we have been hearing through the CBC report and I do acknowledge and commend the CBC for making this a priority and to make Islanders aware of the challenges we are facing.

This is something that community and government together have been working on to solve.

We've heard the stories during the housing action plan procedures and actually there was something I heard the other night when I was watching the CBC article, when the member from Charlottetown-Parkdale spoke about their office being flooded with calls from Islanders, but I've yet to receive one phone call from the Office of The Third Party, the Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale or the Leader of the Third Party.

So again, as I stand in this House today, I'm telling Islanders that if you are hearing people struggling, please call my office. We have supports and services there that we can wrap around these Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Last year while we were discussing the rural growth initiative, I asked the Minister of Rural and Regional Development to define rural and the minister very astutely replied that rural is not urban. It was a great answer, but actually it's very relevant.

The program criteria for RGI say that funds can only be awarded to projects that target rural areas; however, money from the program has since been awarded to groups in Cornwall and in Charlottetown.

Now, they were for good causes and I have no argument there, there's no doubt about that, but towns and cities have a far greater ability to gather funds together than do rural areas.

There are all kinds of worthy groups in rural communities both in my district and in the rural districts of my colleagues that do great work but have real difficulty in accessing funds for their projects.

Rural development money spent on urban projects

Question to the minister: Why is rural development money being spent on projects in urban areas?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess we're just trying to be fair with the funding and any programs that we do contribute funding to that are in urban parts of the province, they have a connection to rural PEI. They're programs that all Islanders are able to use, urban as well as rural.

Mr. LaVie: Parking lots. Parking lots and tents.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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

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

I'd encourage the minister to go back to the department and review their definition of rural; the one they're using because

nonetheless, I think the RGA program is a great program.

It looks like a good program, but unfortunately as we discussed earlier this year, it's only a one-year commitment, it's a one year program, when what we really need is long-term stable commitment across our Island.

Long-term commitment to rural growth initiative

Will this government be making a long-term commitment to this program and to PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

Ms. Biggar: Regional. Regional.

Mr. LaVie: Election year.

Mr. Murphy: Extremely well uptake in this rural growth initiative, we're getting real good uptake and it's my hope and my belief and my ask of Treasury Board and the fellow Cabinet that yes we do make a long-term commitment to that program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Bevan-Baker: That's great, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure there are many MLAs sitting around this House who represent rural areas who will be delighted when that news becomes official.

Back when the Department of Rural and Regional Development was first created, I asked the minister if the new department would engage with Islanders on rural issues, to which the minister replied a simple: Yes.

Public engagement re: rural issues

Could the minister share what his department has learned from public engagement so far?

Mr. R. Brown: We're doing a great job.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I must say, I'm glad to get these questions from the Leader of the Third Party because I noticed the other day when somebody pointed out to me, they don't actually have a critic for my department so I don't know how much credence the Green Party gives to rural Prince Edward Island, but I don't know if that was an oversight or – but yes we do consult.

We have four regional advisory committees right across the province and we meet with them on a regular basis, and they meet three to four times a year.

Mr. R. Brown: There'll be a critic tomorrow morning.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

So let's take a closer look at these regional economic advisory councils because the purpose of these councils, at least according to the province's website, is to, and I quote: Guide, develop, and help drive economic growth across Prince Edward Island.

Further, their only mandate is to provide advice to the Premier and to the Cabinet. There's no public reporting. There's no accountability, no mention at all of engaging with a broader public or representing the views of rural Islanders. They are, in effect, another advisory reward appointed by Cabinet to give advice to Cabinet, and I think that's a real missed opportunity, minister.

I think to have these boards present; they should serve as a conduit for rural Islanders to share their voice and to have greater influence.

Rural advisory councils re: public engagement

A question for the Minister of Rural and Regional Development: Why isn't public engagement part of the mandate for these councils?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

Mr. Murphy: Well, although it might not be written into their mandate I think it goes without saying that's what their job is, to engage with the public. That's why across of every sector of the province that we have local people, we have professional people, we have (Indistinct) people on these committees.

That's why, because they are out there talking to people every day. They know what's going on in their community and they relay what's needed back to us.

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

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

Another issue I have with these councils is that their mandate is purely and narrowly economic, as if Islanders were to care about nothing other than the economy.

Balanced decisions re: advisory councils

Dr. Bevan-Baker: A question to the minister: How can this government expect to make well-balanced decisions when the advice that they solicit is only in the narrow scope of economic concerns?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

Mr. Murphy: Of course these boards are just one of the many tools that we use in making our decisions at our department. We have many other programs such as the community develop program, the Jobs for Youth Program, the rural job initiative program, and we rely on many different aspects other than just the councils alone, to direct our department in what direction to go.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

To me, good, sustainable community and regional development is about addressing economic, social, and environmental

opportunities and challenges in a holistic and a collaborative manner.

A question to the minister: Will you expand the scope of the regional economic advisory boards to reflect a more sustainable development approach?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

Mr. Murphy: Of course.

I don't really think they need my blessing to expand their scope. We get all kinds of advice from them, but more than just economic. For instance, we have advice on how important health care is to rural Prince Edward Island.

I might read a note here from Hansard back on June 12th when you, hon. member, were responding to a ministerial statement from the minister of health: Maybe we need to think of emergency services as being provided in two main hospitals with a vastly improved and expanded ambulance service in order to take care of those Islanders.

Mr. R. Brown: Shame.

Some Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Murphy: So what exactly does that mean? Does that mean you're going to close the hospitals in Alberton – or the emergency rooms in Alberton and Montague?

We're definitely more concerned about rural PEI, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Minister, there is a campaign going on across the country to have doctors inform women about their breast density. The concern is that if a woman has breast density over 75%, their breast tissue is not easily read on a mammogram and could hide some cancers.

As someone who lost her mom to breast cancer two weeks into her 51st year, I am in

a high-risk category due to my family history. I am grateful to my family doctor, the staff at mammography, and the radiologists for their ongoing care and timely screening over the years.

Doctors informing patients re: breast density

Minister, do Prince Edward Island doctors currently inform women about their breast density following a mammogram?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. member is absolutely correct.

In recent months, there has been a heavy focus right across the nation put on breast density. On Prince Edward Island, each year alone we screen about 10,500 Islanders, both women and men, in regards to cancer screenings.

The process that's in place right now after an individual is screened, the results are then sent to their primary care professional or their physician and a letter is sent to the patient as well, which encourages the patient to talk to their physician about the results of the test. I would assume that those conversations occur and physicians have the opportunity to talk to the patients about what the results are.

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

Screening process for dense breasts

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, can you explain the steps your department is taking to review the screening process for women who are told they have dense breasts so they can be confident with their mammogram results?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Currently, the data that I have indicates that there are about 1,000 Islanders currently that have breast density over 75%. We are looking at reviewing or doing a comprehensive review on the screening process of all aspects.

As minister, I have asked Health PEI to look at putting on that letter that is sent to the patient, a line of information that is both informative and is appropriate, telling the patient their breast density is greater than this level and that they should have an immediate conversation. So, we've asked Health PEI to look at getting that done, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Casey: I'm good, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Minister, I have learned that the federal government is in favour of allowing bonafide students to collect EI while attending classes.

EI payments to deserving students

Minister, does your government support paying EI to deserving students?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is a program called Career Connect and yes, we are very supportive of it. With the high cost of tuition and getting post-secondary education, anything we can do as a department and a government to help students get an education, we'll certainly support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dumville: Minister, is this program funded through Skills PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's part of what our department does. It's in collaboration with the federal government and people have to have the appropriate, insurable hours to be able to draw if they're going to post-secondary education. It's a collaborative effort between two departments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Qualified codes and student funding

Minister, if Skills PEI is partly funded by the federal government, who seems to be in support of this method of funding, would you not change the qualifying codes to allow student funding?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

May I inform this House this program brought between \$8 million and \$9 million into pockets of Island students last year?

Any rules as far as pertaining to what are done by the federal government and our department work collaboratively with the federal government to help Island students with this program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was pleased to hear yesterday that more accessibility mats are being added to provincial parks and beaches.

Thunder Cove beach is a very popular beach destination in my area. It draws thousands of Islanders and tourists to its shores every summer, but it's not a provincial park or beach.

Government support for non-provincial park beaches

Question to the tourism minister: How does your department support public beaches that aren't part of the provincial park system?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Beaches are really important to our tourism product here in PEI, along with culinary and golf and the Island hospitality. We know those are all very critical components to our tourism industry that attracted 1.56 million visitors here last year. We're happy to support beaches in communities right across the Island with anything we can do to continue to help grow the tourism industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Great job.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thunder Cove is so popular that it's featured for its natural beauty in tourism advertising.

Question to the tourism minister: Do you think Island beaches not part of all provincial or federal parks adds overall value to our tourism product?

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

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker –

Mr. LaVie: Be careful.

Mr. Palmer: – I think we have 11,000 kilometres of beaches here on PEI and it's really important to the economy of PEI.

I think tourism generates \$480 million, if I'm not correct. We know that each one of those beaches are as important as our culinary experience, as our good old hospitality, and all of that combined makes a wonderful product here in PEI, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One website describes the beach this way: Thunder Cove beach is one of those hidden gems that locals try to keep for themselves. It's off the beaten path in Darnley, just outside of Kensington. This is an unsupervised beach. Thunder Cove is outside of federal and provincial parks, so dogs are permitted off-leash.

Waste carts and signage for Thunder Cove beach

Question to the tourism minister: Would it be possible to have waste carts and information signage placed at Thunder Cove beach next summer?

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

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, Thunder Cove is a tremendous beach. I've been there lots myself; very close to Summerside.

I know that it's well used by locals and visitors alike, so there are lots of people that are in the area and it's one of the important pieces of our tourism product right here in PEI, and we're happy to work with all communities and anyone who's in interest of getting some help with their beaches.

I know we helped one of the members across the way last year –

Mr. R. Brown: Morell.

Mr. Palmer: – putting some –

Mr. R. Brown: Crow Bush.

Mr. Palmer: – garbage cans in the area to help make sure the beaches are clean.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Beach users and area residents want to preserve it and have asked for help. Right now, we have area residents collecting garbage without any garbage cans for the public to use or signage to direct them.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) watershed groups (Indistinct)

Mr. MacKay: Question to the tourism minister: We have beautiful beaches and a world class waste watch system; shouldn't we be trying to make residents and visitors aware of that?

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

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, we do have tremendous beaches here and we also have a world class recycling program here in PEI and we're going to continue to support all of those things because we know that's very important to the product that we have here in PEI and we'll continue to grow our tourism industry by making sure that we do have clean beaches here in PEI.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the tourism minister: You just mentioned government does provide waste carts to some private beaches, which I'm certainly glad to hear, so will you commit today to provide those waste carts at Thunder Cove beach so the residents no longer have to pick the garbage off the beach themselves?

Mr. Fox: Yes.

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

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, our beaches are very clean. Our residents pick up garbage. Our tourists pick up garbage. I've seen it happen lots because there is sometimes garbage on the beach and everybody is able to make a contribution to that, and if there are communities – if there are beaches that have some concerns and if there are things that we can do to help, we certainly welcome their call to our department so we can continue to grow this important industry here in PEI.

Mr. R. Brown: Great job.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My final question.

Constituents have reached out to me, Mr. Minister, and I was told on two occasions they have called your department and have asked for these waste carts to be provided, without little or any response.

I'm hoping today you can commit to them residents and provide waste carts at Thunder Cove beach for them for next summer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Fox: Yes.

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

Mr. Palmer: I invite the member to give me a call, make sure we understand who's looking for what and see what we can do to help. We know that tourism is very important here in PEI. It generates \$480 million to our economy. We want to make sure that all of our visitors have a wonderful experience when they're here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Great. That's cooperation.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the health minister.

Minister, when you were up in Souris when you first became health minister, you did a tour of the Souris hospital, and I thank you for asking me to go along with your tour. When we sat down at the round table talking to the frontline staff, one of the issues was therapists in Souris and there were none. There was only one that comes in one day a week.

Physiotherapists in Souris

Minister: Are you working on – since then, are you working on getting a physiotherapist up in Souris?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Myers: Make Souris great again.

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

I do welcome that question from the hon. member. That day, we did have a great experience walking around Souris hospital talking to frontline staff. I drew some very valuable information from that discussion.

I did see that the physiotherapy part was a gap at the Souris hospital, and since that time we have went out and developed an incentive program to bring physiotherapists back to PEI. That program is being worked through recruitment and retention. I believe – I'd have to verify this – that we do have some identified candidates. In the interim, to cover some of the areas there, we have been working with out-of-government companies that do have physiotherapists on staff to help us fill needs there.

It was a great conversation that day with the hon. member. He knows his members of the community very well and does very good work to bring their attention forward.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Mitchell: (Indistinct)

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

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While we were on that tour, we did a tour of the clinic downstairs below the hospital. At the roundtable down in the clinic, we heard from the frontline workers, nurse practitioners. The nurse practitioner was talking about the load she had on her, and she was by herself. She was looking for a second nurse practitioner down in the clinic.

Additional nurse practitioners in Souris clinic

Minister: Do you know if the second nurse practitioner is been looked at for the clinic in Souris?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When we are recruiting any health professional to any area it's based on the amount of work, the amount of patients that would be seen. I don't have the exact information from the Souris area or what that means, but I do know that there was recently another nurse practitioner who has gone to the Kings County area that may be at the KCMH – I'd have to verify that.

There's also a nurse practitioner in the western end of Prince Edward Island and in the very near future there will be several more nurse practitioners hired.

Our complement is at 31 now, and it will be soon at – I believe the number is 38 that's projected to be over the next year. We're doing great work in recruiting, retaining nurse practitioners who love to be here, and love to help Islanders meet their health needs in a very professional manner.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

End of Question Period