



Session:	3/65
Date:	6 April 2018
No:	23

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 6 APRIL 2018

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

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

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

I rise today to respond to questions about athletes' regulations, which was asked by the Leader of the Third Party and Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale yesterday. There were approximately five questions.

PEI has passed regulation clarifying that should athletes satisfy the test of an employment relationship, they are exempt from such aspects of *Employment Standards Act*, such as: minimum wage, hours of work, and notice of termination. This change was published in *The Royal Gazette* and on the Orders-in-Council website in October of 2017. The *Employment Standards Act* already exempts other groups.

Part of the rationale for exempting athletes is that the CHL athletes, including those playing for the Islanders, do not fit the traditional arrangement for employment relationships that are covered by the *Employment Standards Act*.

They receive training, physiotherapy, as well as academic support in the form of free tutors and university courses. For each year played with the team, players earn a \$6,000 scholarship, which after four years; they would have accumulated \$24,000 to apply to post-secondary. In addition to the above schooling benefits, the team pays for all housing, food, travel, equipment, and athletic development courses.

Athletic employees still have protection under the *Employment Standards Act* for compassionate care, bereavement, reservist corps, protection from sexual harassment, and continuity of employment. Government spoke with the Charlottetown Islanders and heard from some of their affected athletes in developing these regulations and government is open to continuing these discussions with the athletes. I would also like to wish them all the best in their second round of the play-offs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question Period

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

A year ago today *The Guardian* published an in-depth examination of poverty and its impacts here on PEI. There was a great deal of talk that day about poverty in this exact Chamber. Today, I want to check-in and see what progress, if any, has been made since.

Reduction of poverty and food insecurity

Question to the Premier: Premier, what specific actions has your government taken to reduce poverty and food insecurity here on PEI over the last year?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, in the time since we came to government we can point to upwards of \$40 million in new investments that are in place to support people who are in vulnerable situations in our province.

In particular, in the past year, we implemented the fourth of five increments to the food allowance for our recipients of social assistance. When those five implements or those five increments are in place, the increase will be upwards of \$3 million on an annual basis. That comes together with two increments, roughly a 70% increase, to the personal comfort allowance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Great words, little action. All you have to do is get out and actually travel across this Island and speak to those Islanders that are actually facing poverty and food insecurity.

The complex economic and social issues created by poverty continue, unfortunately, to plague our Island.

Question to the Premier: How many Islanders have been able to escape poverty since you took office as Premier?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate these questions, and indeed, I expect that by the time we hear the budget address today, we'll have some further news in terms of our commitment; our commitment reflecting what we believe are the priorities of Islanders to assist our families and neighbours and friends who are in need.

Our government has, indeed, acted on that. Let me mention two categories – to stick with the 40-second rule – we implemented immediately upon becoming government the Generic Drug Program and Prince Edward Islanders registered for that in the number 20,000, now who have registered for that program, an expenditure of on the order of \$3 million – \$2 million a year.

In another category we have made income tax changes which mean that now 3,000 Prince Edward Island tax-filers no longer pay any provincial income tax.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Premier talks about the Generic Drug Program and when that was announced, I stood and I said that that was a great initiative; long overdue. But, I'm talking to Islanders on a daily basis that are still trying to figure out if they can afford their medicine, prescriptions, or actually buy some groceries to put on their table that particular week. And that's totally wrong. There's no reason why any Islander should go hungry here on PEI, but alas, there are too many Islanders who are.

Question to the Premier: What changes have you made over the last year in how you address poverty and food insecurity issues?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the points that I made earlier, I guess I'll repeat, since the question is about the last year.

Indeed, the food allowance for people on social assistance was increased for the fourth out of a five-stage commitment. That is very significant in terms of the number of people and families who benefit from that.

In the past year, I'm pleased to say, we went through a third iteration of home renovation programs. Those were programs that had, indeed, been cancelled by a previous Tory government, and that was something that we implemented shortly after coming to government and continue to make that commitment and broader commitment to housing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's great to stand in the House and talk about a home renovation program when essentially the day it opens is almost the exact same day it closes because it's not funded properly.

You can talk about funding food insecurity, but when the rates of the cost of food increased dramatically over what small pittance of increases that this government has provided, it doesn't equate; we're still having Islanders that are unable to afford food here on PEI.

The Premier's fond of travelling far and wide to talk up his mighty Island brand, but that sunny talk rings hollow when we see the reality of poverty and food insecurity for so many Islanders.

Again, question to the Premier: How mighty an Island can we be when so many Islanders go without struggling just to survive from pay cheque to pay cheque?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, since we've been in government, we have had three primary areas where we've made

investments, over and above, or beyond the rates of either, inflation or the growth in government expenditures. Those are family and human services, health and education. Those are our commitments and we have stuck to them and we intend to continue advancing those priorities and to investing in Prince Edward Islanders so that we all do well and that Prince Edward Islanders benefit from the fact that we do have a mighty Island.

I said, in response, to the first question, and I'll say it again; upwards of \$40 million, including federal investments, very significant dollars, in the families and budgets and homes of Prince Edward Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When you're living in poverty and struggling to get by it's tough. You can feel trapped and it takes a toll on a person's mental health as the bills pile up. It's soul crushing.

Mileage rates for medical appointments

Question to the Premier: What's the current mileage rate for people on social assistance who have to travel to medical appointments?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, that's something that the minister would answer. I'll be happy to bring back the response to that. I don't have it at hand.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When we raised this issue last year the mileage rate for social assistance clients going to medical appointments was 20 cents a kilometre. It hasn't gotten any cheaper to travel over the last year.

Question to the Premier: Why hasn't the mileage rate been increased over the last year?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of fronts on which the province and our collective population respond to need. We've spoken this morning about a number of them. Indeed, in the area of health, we make significant investments and continue to do so. As we work our way through we address new areas and when we have our Budget this morning, I'm sure that Islanders and all members of this House will have an opportunity to see that we continue with those commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All social assistance clients get is \$25 a month for transportation.

Cost of bus pass

Question to the Premier: How much does it cost for a bus pass?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I don't have a bus pass, but I'll be happy to get that information and bring it back to the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The monthly cost of a bus pass in Summerside is \$30. If you live in the greater Charlottetown area, a monthly bus pass will run you \$65.

Transportation cost versus bus pass cost

Question to the Premier: Does it seem strange that a monthly transportation

allowance for social assistance clients is less than half the cost of a bus pass?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there are many components to the areas where social assistance clients are supported. When we came to government we said we would first address food, which is an issue that has been brought up here, and as I said we are now going to soon surpass \$3 million a year in additional support.

We said when we came to government, that we would increase the personal comfort or the allowance for personal items which is discretionary in the hands of social assistance clients. That's now been increased twice, and people have spoken to me that they appreciate that they get those funds that are discretionary. It's now \$91 a month. It's not a lot, but it's a nice increase compared to what it was four years ago.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Cost allowance for clients with medical needs

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Social assistance clients can also get up to \$31 a month for medical appointments. That's a total of \$56 a month.

Question to the Premier: Do you think someone on social assistance with medical needs can get to and from their appointments on less than \$2 a day?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I guess, really, the way the question got posed is that someone would be going every day to an appointment.

But, in any event, let me say we are aware that people have needs, that people are putting food on the table, that they've got kids to look after, they've got personal expenses that they're dealing with. Let me mention one item that has been added to the mix in this province over the last two years,

and that is the Canada Child Benefit; \$25 million extra in the hands and in the budgets and on the tables and in the vehicles of Prince Edward Island families. That makes a very big difference to people throughout this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The social assistance mileage rate was last adjusted 12 years ago when Pat Binns was premier. Social assistance mileage rates haven't changed in 12 years, but government mileage rates are adjusted monthly.

Social assistance mileage rates

Question to the Premier: Do you think that using 2006 social assistance mileage rates is helping reduce poverty in 2018?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, we have increased food, comfort and home renovations. We'll be hearing more before the day is out about other areas where we know there are needs, where we are responding.

Let me add in conjunction with the comment that I made about the child benefit, which in total is \$100 million in this province when the Liberal government, federally, changed that program to bring it forward in the format that it now is. We committed that it would not affect any social assistance benefits that those people would be receiving.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, poverty can touch everything a person does. It becomes their reality. It can turn daily routines most Islanders take for granted, in a moment, (Indistinct) stress and anxiety.

Current price of fuel

A question for the Premier: With last weekend's fuel price increase, what's the current price of a litre of gas?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: I haven't filled up since last weekend, Mr. Speaker, but last time I did it was around \$1.14, was it?

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: What does he care? He doesn't pay it.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I can bring that information back, but I could tell you I fill –

Mr. Myers: How much did it cost you?

Premier MacLauchlan: – I fill up at self serve in my neighbourhood and the last time I filled up, it was \$1.14.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Probably the cheapest price is \$1.21 a litre for regular unleaded right now.

The price of gas matters a lot to Islanders who rely on their vehicles. It has a real impact on low-income households and families. Most families need to travel for work and to access healthcare, especially in rural communities.

Island communities serviced with public transit

Another question to the Premier: How many Island communities are currently serviced with public transit?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there are various arrangements in parts of the province. There's Transportation West, there

is in the Greater Charlottetown Area, there's between Charlottetown and Summerside, and that's obviously in areas where, because of population and the way that our Island has developed, we are not served to the extent that more built up areas are, and this is something of course that the members opposite have been drawing attention to when they're looking at the whole question of local government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, not all parts of the province have access to public transit services. Other than moving into an area where public transit is available, they don't have an alternative but to use their vehicle.

Expansion of public transit

A question to the minister: Does your government plan to expand access to public transit this year to support more low-income Islanders and seniors?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Mr. Trivers: I'll direct that to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We were very happy as a department last year to provide extra funding to Pat and the Elephant, to Transportation West. We do, and have made a commitment, again, for this year to provide funding to the County Line Express between Charlottetown and Summerside. We have a transportation committee which we formed to look at different areas that we can approve upon transportation across PEI.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It sounds like, once again, doing a lot of great talking about it. Transportation accounts for 46% of all greenhouse gas emissions on the Island.

Carbon tax and fuel prices

A question to the minister responsible for energy: When a carbon tax is adopted on Prince Edward Island, will the price of a litre of gas go up or go down?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In regard to our province's energy, our energy strategy is helping to develop a strong and more sustainable and resilient province. We certainly can't control what the price of gas is here anymore than we can around the world.

Mr. Fox: Carbon tax, up or down?

Ms. Biggar: But, Mr. Speaker, we can control how much energy we consume and the more that we can do around efficiency programs and conservation, that's our primary goal. Through our energy strategy, through our efficiencyPEI programs, we're going to be working with Islanders to help them save energy in all areas.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So there's a lot of speculation out in the public of whether you actually have a plan for carbon tax at all.

So I'll ask the question again: When the carbon tax is adopted on PEI, will the price go up or will it go down? Simple question.

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

Ms. Biggar: Well, I thank you for the question. However, carbon pricing or climate change does not fall under my

portfolio so you might want to ask the minister responsible –

Some Hon. Members: Oh!

An Hon. Member: Come on, come on.

Mr. Myers: Weak, weak.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I always thought that this minister was the minister of everything so she'd be able to answer any question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: At any rate –

Ms. Biggar: I want to share it (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: If you don't want to answer the question, why don't you just say so?

Many Islanders, Mr. Speaker, are struggling with the cost of gas and home heating fuel now. I'll direct this question to any minister that cares to answer, because I assume they do know their portfolios.

This is the question: How will more taxes on the price of gas and furnace oil prevent more Islanders from slipping into poverty?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As minister of energy, I can certainly respond to the fact that through our low-income home programs, through efficiencyPEI, through other programs that we've been able to offer Islanders to help them save energy, we've been able to help save Islanders over \$9 million in their energy bills since we implemented our efficiencyPEI department in 2008.

We are going to be launching a new suite of programs in the upcoming months and there will be more opportunities for Islanders to take advantage of those to help them save energy and improve on their homes.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Premier, every time you drive to the Legislature, your mileage is paid for. Do you know by who?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: So is yours.

Mr. Trivers: The very taxpayers that get only 20 cents for mileage, and you're right, the government rate is around 40 cents per kilometre.

The question is, really, with the government rate of 40 cents, the fact that the Premier and Cabinet gets their gas paid for and the mileage rate at only 20 cents for those on social assistance.

Mr. Premier: How is that fair?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: And, first, Mr. Speaker, for the hon. members opposite who didn't know the price of a litre of fuel it's a dollar-twenty-one-point-three for regular fuel, so that's good for everyone to know that in the House.

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: The people – thank you.

People in this House all are supported by the taxpayer through our salaries, through our support staff, through various ways including either gas or mileage, depending on what arrangements we make. That is done according to terms that are meant to reflect the market. That is something that I didn't think was put in question by the hon. members opposite, but if they want to question it they can do it through, I suppose, legislative management committee if they think we're overdoing it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

As was clear yesterday during Question Period and the awarding of the Medavie home care contract, public purchasing by government is an important area where transparency and accountability need to be improved.

The Legislature passed a bill in the fall of 2016 to reform the public purchasing process, but we're still waiting, two years later, for the regulations to be developed and for that act to be proclaimed.

Procurement of Goods Act

A question to the Premier: When do you expect to proclaim the Procurement of Goods Act?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, that would be something that would fall within the domain of the Minister of Finance. It's not a day for me to be speaking for him. Let me say, we'll take that under consideration and come back with an answer to the House.

Thank you.

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

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

PEI currently does not publish much information on contract winners. However, many other provinces do and they have already moved in that direction. Nova Scotia, for example, publishes a list of all the companies that submit bids, the amounts of those bids and the winning bidder. PEI does not publish any information whatsoever on winning bids.

Published tender information under Procurement of Goods Act

A question to the Premier, or anybody who does feel like speaking for finance minister: Will the regulations under the Procurement of Goods Act require government to publish

information on the outcomes of tendering processes?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can report any bids that go out for tender through the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy are listed on our website. Anyone can see who was successful in those tenders. They can go online and get that information.

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

Before you ask that question, I just want to remind all hon. members, the supplementary questions, I had said yesterday, should be without preamble, so that should be fairly easy to understand.

Go ahead, hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

That department would be the exception in many other cases; procurement is not made public. The Nova Scotia *Procurement Act* that was passed in 2011 includes another innovative practice called Sustainable Procurement Practices.

Sustainable procurement principles

A question to any minister who prefers to answer: Will you commit to a sustainable procurement principles policy in the procurement regulations?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know, in terms of Atlantic procurement within the department of transportation, that's something we work collaboratively on. We have agreements in terms of Atlantic Canada Procurement Agreement. I know the Minister of Finance would have more detail on our inter-provincial trade agreements.

We're always cognizant of the fact that it is public money being spent. When we have a tender open it's a public tender. All people

that have bid on those tenders can come in and see exactly what it is and they are certainly posted on our website. We will continue to work with our Atlantic Provinces on our procurement agreements.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy and the Minister responsible for the Status of Women. Minister, as a former speaker and the current Deputy Speaker, I'm very interested in ensuring the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island has the facilities it needs in order to provide services expected of a modern functioning Legislature now and into the future.

As our most important democratic institution, members, the public, staff and all Islanders expect no less. Since the province vacated Province House in January 2015, it has been under extensive conservation work that is expected to continue to 2022. At which time your department has stated publicly that it sees no reason why the Legislative Assembly will not return to Province House.

Province House as the future home of LA

Minister: Has your department fully assessed the suitability of Province House as the future long-term home of the Legislative Assembly, and if so, what factors have been taken into consideration in arriving at this conclusion?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As former deputy speaker, I know having sat on legislative management committees it is very important to all the hon. members and it is the people's House, as far as I'm concerned.

My department is working closely with the Legislative Assembly staff, staff through the Clerk's office to catalogue the current and future requirements of the Legislature. Legislative staff has provided a significant

amount of information, which does identify what those operational needs are going to be. We are also working with Parks Canada and their design team on a functional review process, but the intent, on all sides, to be clear, is to have Province House meet the requirements of the Legislative Assembly.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, I understand the federal government through Parks Canada is covering costs associated with the conservation of Province House. However, it has been made very clear that the re-establishment of the Legislative Assembly must be paid for by the province.

Cost to re-establish LA in Province House

Have design plans been finalized for Province House, and if so, how much is it estimated to cost the province to re-establish the Legislative Assembly in the building?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Those particular plans are certainly not finalized at the moment. We are working with Parks Canada consultants to discuss those requirements. The consultant will develop the options to meet the needs of the Assembly's operations. It's too early, at this point, to say what the exact estimates of those costs will come to at the end.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, as you know, and most hon. members of this House who have served at Province House, know that Province House presented challenges as the home for a modern legislature even before we vacated the building.

Options for future of the Legislative Assembly location

In the event the final design plans and resulting costs suggest Province House does not represent a sound provincial investment as a long-term home for the Legislative Assembly, has your department been working with the Legislative Assembly on possible options?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Province House has been the historic location of our Legislative Assembly. We are working closely with the Clerk's office on this project. We'll continue to do so and ensure that the functional needs of the Assembly will be met. We have no reason to believe that it can still – that we'll not be able to function in the future as a Legislative Assembly, and we're working towards that goal.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness: The Kings County Memorial Hospital is very important to all residents of Kings County and it has been some years since there have been any renovations or expansion to the hospital. This hospital needs to be replaced.

Future of Kings County Memorial Hospital

Can the minister tell us here today what his plans are for a future Kings County Memorial Hospital and does he have the dollars budgeted in his management plan?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Let me also begin by saying just how important the role Kings County Memorial Hospital plays to residents, not only of the Montague area, but of the Kings County area in total.

It was great for me to, in recent weeks, to go down and do a tour of the facility and I

thank the member for joining me on that. I was quite impressed by the facility and the upkeep it's had over recent years. We've had total renovations to the emergency department, replaced the back-up generator, as well, we've also replaced the medical gas system, and did some recent upgrades to the roof. As well, this year, we are going to be making a \$525,000 investment in the area of renovating the area of blood collection and lab services, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, this will be your first supplementary.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Additional services to KCMH

Can the minister advise what other additional services he is considering for Kings County Memorial Hospital? Additional services have recently been added, in both Queens County and Prince County.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are continuously reviewing and researching ambulatory care needs of all Islanders from all across the province. I don't have an announcement to make today for the Kings County Memorial Hospital, but we'll continuously be reviewing their process and what needs they have and certainly any suggestions that the hon. member would have to give me, I'd certainly accept them and any residents from that area as well. We currently want to provide the best health services to all Islanders in all regions of our province, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, your second supplementary question.

Structural assessment of KCMH

Mr. Roach: My question with the minister: Will the minister work with the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy to complete a structural assessment of Kings County Memorial Hospital by this fall and

also have his staff complete a service assessment of the hospital, including what additional services could, or will be, added by this fall?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly taking the chair, I do apologize; I did not have a lot of time to spend with the minister of infrastructure, but as we move forward, I would be more than happy to sit with her to have discussions of all infrastructure regarding health facilities all across PEI. Kings County Memorial Hospital is definitely an aging facility and we'll look at opportunity to invest in that region and I'd be more than happy to sit with the minister to discuss those.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During the fall sitting of the House, the House passed Bill No. 102, *An Act to Amend the Workers Compensation Act*. This bill extends workers' compensations benefits for workers diagnosed with PTSD across the whole province. The bill passed in the House unanimously and received Royal Assent, but yet has been proclaimed by Cabinet.

Voting of Bill No. 102

Question to the Premier: If your government had no plan to proclaim Bill No. 102 into the law, then why did you vote for the bill in the first place?

Mr. Trivers: Who amended that clause (Indistinct) –

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, that bill was adopted subject to proclamation, as the hon. member indicated, and the minister brought forward yesterday a plan to improve on the service, on the coverage, and on the way in which the coverage will be implemented by the Workers Compensation

Board. It was through the advice of the Workers Compensation Board that we are bringing forward a bill that will incorporate and build on and improve what was done in the bill from last fall.

An Hon. Member: Good job.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier a minute ago talked about ‘personal comfort’ – were your exact words. Recognizing workplace PTSD injuries is a positive step toward and to forward to Island workers. This bill will pass unanimously again with support from all parties – the Green Party and the Liberal Party.

Question to the Premier: When did you decide to reverse your support for a legislation that you voted for only four months ago?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, in preparation for a legislative session, there are various proposals that come forward from departments, and indeed, this was one that came forward from the Department of Workforce and Advanced Learning in consultation with the Workers Compensation Board. I would say it was within the last two weeks or in the lead-up to this session, that that bill came forward in draft form to be considered, as is done in other legislation as we prepare for our session.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, if that was the case then and the Premier’s always talking about being open and transparent in collaboration, then maybe you should have reached out to opposition and talked with us or the unions on your proposed change.

When this bill was being debated, there was great support from Island first responders

and nurses and firefighters – the gallery was full. They all saw the potential to help Island workers who suffer from PTSD.

Mr. Premier, why string along Island workers for the last four months by letting them think you meant what you said when you voted for Bill No. 102?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me object to the language of ‘string-along’, we take our responsibilities seriously in this House and that was very much the case when that matter was on the floor here as a private members bill; there was some concerns at the time.

But what is done here, is to put Prince Edward Island workers in a position that the workers in only one other province currently are. In a further part, there’s a clear improvement in terms of the coverage for Island workers in that it’s not PTSD by itself, but it’s traumatic conditions generally.

I believe workers in this province, so far from being dealt with the way you’ve described it, are being offered coverage and a proper service that they would not have been if we did not bring forward this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, since the House closed on December 20th, Cabinet has met 13 times and approved over 200 Orders-in-Council; not one of them proclaimed Bill No. 102 in law.

Question to the Premier: What was so objectionable about Bill No. 102 that you refused to proclaim the bill after you voted for it and the leader of the Green Party?

Mr. Trivers: Playing politics.

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

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

In all due respect to the hon. member, when this bill was on the floor, we recognized the spirit of your bill and we had to do this as government; we have to take legislation very seriously. When we reached out to workman's comp, their medical advisor reached out to the physician community and 20% of them felt they could diagnose this and 80% felt they couldn't.

Also, your Bill No. 102 was just for PTSD; we felt we had to expand that and look after all Islanders and that's –

Mr. Trivers: Why didn't you amend Bill 102 then?

Mr. Gallant: – and that is what we did in these amendments to the *Workers Compensation Act*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Roach: Good job.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I'm glad to see the minister stand up because he wasn't long running out to get his photo taken when Bill No. 102 was passed by all members of the House.

Our first responders put life and limb at risk to help protect others. Doing that comes with personal cost that isn't always visible. Complications from PTSD can have major, and sometimes, deadly consequences for those who suffer from it.

Mental health of Island workers with PTSD

Question to the Premier: Shouldn't the mental health of Island workers with PTSD have been more significant and important than who gets credit?

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

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

I'd like to just kind of comment on the member opposite. You invited me out for the picture, hon. member.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Gallant: I'd also like to say there was quite a bit of discussion back and forth on Twitter that I didn't bother responding to because as the Premier said, we wanted to wait until we were coming into the Legislature. We wanted to get this right.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Gallant: Excuse me, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Member of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have to look out for all Islanders, as I indicated earlier, and these amendments to the act is what we are intending to do and we will continue to do that as a government, as long as we are the government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, if the minister and the Premier would have been paying attention to Twitter then they would have realized that the firefighters, the unions, the nurses, everybody was asking for this bill to be proclaimed. Clearly this delay was about the Premier's ego. Otherwise, Bill No. 102 would have been proclaimed into law already. Instead, yesterday government decided to reinvent the wheel by tabling its own watered-down legislation.

PTSD coverage

Question to the Premier: Why do you think it's okay to make workers have to wait even longer now because we have limited psychological resources available to get PTSD coverage?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I only hear one person here speaking about ego.

This is about workers. This is about coverage. We brought in, since coming to government, through policy, coverage of traumatic conditions and expanded it. It was in response to meetings that we had, I had personally, with Jason Woodbury, who is here and who has been active in promoting this.

What has been done in bringing forward this bill – and I heard the minister by the way say in his statement yesterday giving credit to the minister from Borden-Kinkora for bringing this forward. There's lots of credit here to share and ultimately, it's about protection and service and coverage for Island workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To make matters worse, the government's replacement bill makes it harder for workers to get help by restricting diagnosis only to psychologists. We know PEI has a shortage of psychologists right now. This will make it harder for workers to access PTSD diagnosis.

Limiting access to care for workers

Question to the Premier: How will limiting access to support improve the care for Island workers?

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

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

As we indicated earlier over and over, this is about all Islanders and when this was implemented into policy in 2016, there was no increase on the workload of workers comp and there is no anticipated workload in the future. If there is, we will deal with that as it comes upon us.

I need to reinforce that this is about all Islanders. The hon. member across said the nurses and the first responders, that we didn't respect them; we included them in this, and this is about everyone on PEI that suffers from a traumatic stress disorder.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.