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

FOR

FRIDAY, 27 APRIL 2018

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, in the House, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale referenced statistics from the Coalition of Women in Government website during a question directed to me. I would like to take a moment to correct any misinformation the member may have.

The statistic the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale provided is outdated, and does not include individuals on the ABCs, who are nominated by an institution or of those who were reappointed to an ABC.

As of today, 48% of positions on government agencies, boards and commissions, are held by women. Since Engage PEI was launched in 2015, 55% of the new members on agencies, boards and commissions, have been women.

When Engage PEI was launched in 2015, there were 526 members in total on all 74 Engage PEI ABCs. At that time, 38%, or 202, were women. As of today, there are 590 participants on 76 Engage PEI ABCs, and of those 48% or 281, are women.

By implementing a policy we can ensure that, no matter, who is governing our province, that gender and diversity remain a requirement. A policy has the same functionality as legislation. However, it can happen more quickly and efficiently.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all Islanders to submit an Engage PEI application so that when a vacancy is identified, the applicant, who best fits the needs of the ABC, has an application on file.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition

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

At some point in the not-too-distant future, Islanders will be forced to pay a new tax. That, of course, is the carbon tax that is forthcoming.

New carbon tax

My first question is to the Premier: Premier, do you still support making Islanders pay a carbon tax?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, Prince Edward Island is a signatory to the Pan-Canadian framework on climate change, which follows on the Paris accords.

I believe, and I'm pretty confident that this is the case, that Prince Edward Islanders are proud that we are part of those commitments. That we believe that we have done a lot and that we can do more to reduce our carbon imprint, our footprint. I look forward to working with Prince Edward Islanders for that to be the case.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, in the fall of 2016, the Premier signed onto the framework to establish a carbon tax.

In December of 2016, the Premier actually closed the House early so that he could over the pond to the Paris climate summit. In his year end media interview, that year, the Premier promoted the idea of a carbon tax and actually comparing it to a war effort.

Question to the Premier: If you were so proud of adding a carbon tax back then, why are you and your government so quiet about it, now?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, this has always been referred to as a price on carbon. There are many ways in which that can factor into other measures, or together with other measures, that will reduce or mitigate, as sometimes said, our carbon emissions. That is precisely where the focus of this has been; should be.

It is not to create fear or to create some kind of a scenario as if this is all about tax. It's about a combination of measures that will include a price signal. There are various ways that can be achieved.

I believe that we had a very important discussion about that here on this floor, two days ago, when we were considering the estimates from communities, land and environment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Premier can spin it anyway he wants, but, at the end of the day, a tax is a tax.

A carbon tax will hit all Islanders in the pocketbook; seniors, low-income Islanders, working families already struggling with a huge tax burden here on PEI. Simply put, people that cannot afford another tax hit.

This government owes it to Islanders to level with them about the carbon tax.

Cost analysis on carbon tax to Islanders

Question to the Premier: Will you table all detailed costing analysis that your government has had on the financial impact that a carbon tax will have on Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I hope members will recall, it's not that long ago, it was Friday three weeks ago, that we had a budget in this House. A budget that, indeed, had tax relief for Prince Edward Islanders. It doesn't seem the opposition wants to talk about that –

Mr. Myers: Nobody else does either, do you notice –

Premier MacLauchlan: – tax relief for Prince Edward Islanders. Raising the –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) lead balloon –

Premier MacLauchlan: – basic personal amount –

Ms. Compton: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – and then the –

Mr. Myers: Call an –

Premier MacLauchlan: – opposition –

Mr. Myers: – election.

Premier MacLauchlan: – may recall –

Mr. Myers: See what they think.

Premier MacLauchlan: – that one of the measures announced in that budget was relief, a rebate of the provincial portion of the HST on –

Ms. Biggar: \$7 million.

Premier MacLauchlan: – electricity. That is – and I hope people here in this Chamber realize it –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – that is a pricing signal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The only people, who seem to be talking about this budget that the Premier references is his own members because of the general public, people see it for what it is –

Mr. R. Brown: No, everywhere I go –

Leader of the Opposition: – it's just another false document that's put forward, another spin by government.

We, on this side of the floor, know that a carbon tax will increase government revenues. It's plain and simple as that. We know that if a carbon tax is put in it probably will not reduce emissions.

The simple truth is, the daily routine of Islanders will go on, it will just be more expensive for them at every turn.

Question to the Premier: Don't you owe it to Islanders to give them a better sense of the financial impact that your carbon tax will have on them?

Financial impact of carbon tax to Islanders

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there is a pattern of the way the official opposition has spoken about this from the time of the Paris accord. It's effectively Chicken Little to scare Prince Edward Islanders –

Ms. Compton: No.

An Hon. Member: No.

Premier MacLauchlan: – when, in fact, the whole objective is to work with Prince Edward Islanders to build on our track record; to be proud that we are, among the provinces in this country, the people who have the second lowest per capita carbon emissions.

We intend to build on that to make investments to take a series of measures. Let me say another thing about our budget –

Mr. Myers: King of the wafflers, right there –

Premier MacLauchlan: – while we have these students, in the gallery, we made big investments. The biggest in history so that these Grade 12 students can go onto post-secondary education –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier MacLauchlan: – with historic support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: You couldn't without (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

As we've seen in the media reports, not all provinces are onboard with the carbon tax. Saskatchewan, in fact, has launched a constitutional reference case against this federally-imposed tax that this government has signed on with.

The PEI government actually sent lawyers to Ottawa, recently, to argue on the Comeau case against more free trade between provinces.

Constitutional reference on carbon tax

Question to the Premier: Will your government be joining Saskatchewan's constitutional reference on carbon tax?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the opposition was asking questions here yesterday about how much we were spending on lawyers and various matters, but –

Mr. Myers: Didn't get an answer. (Indistinct) –

Leader of the Opposition: That was for the lawsuits against you.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we're not looking to turn this into –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: (Indistinct) lawsuits, more every day.

Premier MacLauchlan: We don't see this –

Mr. Roach: That'll go just like the (Indistinct) case.

Leader of the Opposition: Another one coming next week.

Speaker: Members, I hoped that I'd get through this week without having to – anyway. Let's have a little bit of order. When a question is being asked, I want quiet. When an answer is being given, I want quite. That shouldn't be too hard to understand.

Go ahead, Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we are approaching this as a matter of collaborative federalists and we believe strongly in the sovereignty of our province. We believe that we can be proud with good reason, and Prince Edward Islanders can be, of our track record in this area and that we have shown that we can take effective measures and that is the point of this, is to reduce our carbon footprint and we intend to continue to do that.

But we also recognize that as 150,000 people, we have to work with and take the lead from, or make sure that we're not getting out ahead of, what others are doing and that's exactly what we're doing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One thing we all agree on is we need to reduce the carbon emissions in our province. It's for our youth, for our children, and our grandchildren.

Reduce of carbon emissions on PEI

A question to the environment minister: How much do you expect Trudeau's carbon tax to actually reduce the carbon emissions on PEI?

Mr. Myers: Great question.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Prince Edward Islanders and Islanders in general, have been reducing their carbon footprint for a number of years now. It has been – you look at the energy from waste plant, taking all that product out of the landfill sites that carbon would be released into the air. Look at our forestry department, replanting forest all across Prince Edward Island to make sure carbon capture. Look at

our wind energy product on Prince Edward Island –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – and all governments have recognized that, Mr. Speaker. That alone has reduced a phenomenal amount of carbon. The other day, Prince Edward Island was producing 103% of its power from wind on Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: Okay, I'll get up again on another one.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to hear that response from the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment because indeed, the original environmental party on PEI, the Progressive Conservative Party –

Some Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Trivers: – has put in so much (Indistinct) to reduce our carbon emissions already, but really, the question is: Do we need a carbon tax at all?

After signing on to the climate change framework, the Premier told the House the following quote: To be introduced in January, 2018, the carbon price will not extend to agriculture and fisheries. We know at least one part of the statement didn't pan out.

Industry-wide exemptions from carbon tax

Question to the environment minister: Has the federal government confirmed to the province that they will allow industry-wide exemptions from the carbon tax?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Look, we have a compelling case here on Prince Edward Island to talk to about Ottawa. We've done some great things in

this province. The Premier mentioned some, the hon. member mentioned some. We're going to continue to have those discussions with Ottawa because we feel that getting out into a public domain and a fight with Ottawa is not necessarily the appropriate manner. If we look at the \$140 million cable, the \$280 million in infrastructure we dealt –

Mr. Myers: You owe them.

Mr. MacDonald: – and the \$60 million agreement for low-carbon economy. These are things that we've done privately and jurisdictionally and we've been successful and we're going to continue to have those discussions with Ottawa.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: Good work.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The answer to my question holds great importance for Islanders and unfortunately, we still don't know what the answer is. Agriculture accounts for 23% of PEI's carbon emissions and transportation accounts for 46% of our carbon emissions.

A question to the environment minister: How many other provinces has the federal government agreed to allow industry-wide exemptions from the carbon tax?

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

Mr. R. Brown: In the Ways and Means resolution in Ottawa right now, there's 200 pages towards carbon pricing and they do allow exemptions under that carbon pricing legislation, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure if that was a statement of fact or a statement of hope. I hope they sure do allow us to exempt them. Agriculture, fisheries, and tourism are the main drivers of our economy. I mean, all three sectors depend heavily on transportation.

Contingency plan re: carbon tax to fisheries and agriculture

Another question to the environment minister: What is the province's contingency plan if the federal government decides to disallow industry-wide carbon exemptions for agriculture and fisheries?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned transportation – actually, it's 42% that transportation makes up, but my department has put together a transportation committee – working across government to work on that. We are implementing an electric efficiency and conservation plan, which will provide carbon reduction incentives.

We are looking towards more electrification on Prince Edward Island and through our low-carbon economy fund we will have over \$12 million in carbon reduction incentives. We're saving Islanders –

Mr. Myers: Electric tractors.

Ms. Biggar: – \$7 million by having that –

Mr. Myers: Electric combines.

Ms. Biggar: – HST portion taken off of their electric bills and they'll see that in their bill in July.

Ms. Casey: Ah, wow.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) electric bill.

Ms. Casey: Great news.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I hope the minister of transportation has her facts straight because she didn't yesterday when she came back with her facts (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Oh!

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: If provinces don't bring in a carbon tax that meets federal standards and Ottawa's developing its own backstop plan – six provinces have yet to roll out their carbon tax plans, including Prince Edward Island. According to a 2017 federal briefing document, Ottawa's backstop is expected to raise \$3 billion – \$3 billion from these six provinces over the next four years.

Dollars from taxpayers of PEI

Question to the environment minister: How much of that \$3 billion will come from the pockets of Islanders?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On a per capita basis and an extreme basis, we do very well and Prince Edward Island, we're going to continue to feel our way along at the federal level with this.

I was watching *Power & Politics* the other night and the minister was on there with Saskatchewan and there was a really genuine discussion. I was reading the hon. member's blog as of March of last year and he was talking about lowering the personal tax exemption to offset carbon and I thought: Gee, that's forward-thinking, but that's exactly what we did, in our latest budget – along with electricity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: We want a list of them.

An Hon. Member: Stop it.

Mr. Roach: Facts here, fiction there.

Mr. Myers: At least he's reading your blog.

No methane gas on bradtrivers.com.

Speaker: Okay members. I notice there's been a lot of sugar consumed this morning.

Go ahead, hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Well thank you, Mr. Speaker, and what a great response from the Minister of Finance.

Indeed, the number one thing we'd like to see over here in the official opposition is no carbon tax because we're already doing enough on our Island to offset carbon emissions. We've got a history of it thanks to the environmental PC party. Now the second thing was –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – if you're going to put in Trudeau's carbon tax, if you're mandated, we want to give money directly back to Islanders through a cut in the basic personal tax amount – just like we've always said.

So, I guess, this government's addicted to tax. We've seen over 400 fees increased since they came into power. There's HST, there's gas tax, land tax, land transfer tax, waste watch fees; all kinds of licensing fees.

Revenue from carbon tax back to Islanders

But, I want you to commit today, the Minister of Finance: Will you commit today to giving any money collected by a carbon tax or some sort of carbon pricing directly back to Islanders through a decrease in the personal basic tax amount?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. R. Brown: We already did (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: We started it three weeks ago, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: Liberals are the party of the people.

An Hon. Member: He's in the fog over there.

Mr. MacDonald: Not to forget the wood and wood pellets, Mr. Speaker, but our approach –

Mr. Myers: They're partying. They're on a tear.

Mr. MacDonald: – will be fiscally neutral.

We will continue to build on a platform to reduce carbon emissions in Prince Edward Island like we have in the past with our industries right across the province.

I think we've got something to be proud of in Prince Edward Island. When you look around this room today and you see these young people sitting in the gallery, it's them that are going to have the major affect on this. It's them that are going to have to make major changes and major decisions –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – so we'll continue to do what good government does and prudence government with our second balanced budget allows us to do this, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

An Hon. Member: Second (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: Stick to their three.

Mr. Trivers: Zero balanced budgets.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our province's energy costs are closely linked to those in New Brunswick. New Brunswick is bringing in a carbon tax, which is planned to bring in an extra \$1.3 billion with those extra costs will be passed on to Islanders through NB Power.

Hidden carbon tax costs in NB power base price

Question to the minister of energy: How much more will Islanders be paying for

electricity with the NB carbon tax being hidden in the base price?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, we know we can't control the price of world energy prices here, but we can have control over how much we consume.

Maritime Electric recently negotiated a new five-year energy purchase with New Brunswick. As a result, Prince Edward Island electricity rates will not be affected by increases in New Brunswick.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: They're going to go around that, and I'll tell you how they're going to do that in a minute.

NB Power will be paying a carbon tax at the point of electricity production. This will cause the base price to increase with the cost of carbon tax being buried in the price.

Safeguarding carbon tax for Islanders

Question to the energy minister: What safeguards will there be to make sure Islanders don't get a double dose of a carbon tax?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

In order to ensure the lowest possible rates and rate stability, we put in a \$142 million cable across the Strait.

Mr. Myers: Thanks to Gail Shea.

Ms. Biggar: We also have successfully negotiated with Maritime Electric to limit annual rate increases to 2.3% in the past three years. We are protecting Islanders. We are –

Mr. Fox: No you're not.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – recently changed legislation, so we are an intervener at Maritime Electric and we will continue –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – to fight for Islanders.

Mr. Roach: Great work.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: She just confirmed that we do need a public intervener within IRAC.

Glad to hear her say that.

Mr. Myers: Yes.

Mr. Fox: In 2016, the province –

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: – teamed up with Maritime Electric to get three years of increases to electricity rates approved by IRAC. That three-year run of power rate hikes is up next April. NB Power is now looking to have the same power change ability with unscheduled adjustments, the same as we see in this province. So, they're going to bring in unscheduled power to change electricity rates in New Brunswick.

Electricity rate increase to Islanders

Question to the energy minister: How much will electricity rates of Islanders be increased again before your government brings in your carbon tax?

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

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) watch Sesame Street (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I mentioned, as part of our government's budget we have committed to saving Islanders over \$7 million this coming year.

Mr. Roach: Yeah.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Biggar: We are giving them a rebate on their electricity on their residential side.

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct) first block.

Mr. MacKay: First block (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: Also, we are going to be investing in over \$12 million in efficiency programs for carbon reduction incentives, and we will have those from low-income Islanders to businesses, to industry, and we will be working right across the Island through our efficiency PEI programs –

Mr. Trivers: Thanks for listening.

Ms. Biggar: – to ensure that Islanders have advantage of those programs.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Innovation PEI's Ignition Fund is a popular annual competitive program that awards seed capital of up to \$25,000 for business ventures that meet the specific criteria of the fund, including potential for export.

Successful applicants are required to sign a contract with government that includes submitting regular progress reports to Innovation PEI.

Information collected from Ignition Fund grants

A question to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: What information does Innovation PEI collect from recipients of the ignition grants in these ongoing and mandatory progress reports?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very proud of the business community, and I can tell you one of the stats that we collect is that 2017 was the fourth consecutive record for international exports,

at \$1.3 billion in goods and services, which is an increase of 4.6% over 2016.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Good news keeps rolling out.

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

Ms. Bell: Coming back to the Ignition Fund, with an investment of \$700,000 to-date so far, it's important that we evaluate the performance of programs like this to ensure that public money is being spent effectively and with accountability.

Evaluation of Ignition Fund investments

A question to the minister: What outcomes and metrics does the department use to evaluate the overall performance of the Ignition Fund investments?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our economy is on a tear. We know that our exports are increasing. We know we've added 2,200 jobs in the last –

Mr. R. Brown: 2,200 jobs.

Mr. Palmer: – year, which is one of the other metrics we measure.

There is lots of great news happening on PEI, and we're happy to continue to support business so that we can continue to move that along.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

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

Ms. Bell: I do hope that the minister, Mr. Speaker, is familiar with the Ignition Fund. It is a great program.

But, on a general basis, the Ignition Fund and other investments seem to be strictly focused on business development and jobs. These sorts of programs, though, can and do have wider effects in our community. I believe greater emphasis should be placed on the social and community impacts of these programs in both their selection criteria and in how they're evaluated.

Adding social and community criteria to grants and loans

A question to the minister: Will you consider formally adding social and community criteria to the section and evaluation processes for economic development grants and loans?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're very proud of our business community. There's lots of positive change that's happening in PEI from an economic perspective, from a social perspective. We're very happy to continue to that, and we know that PEI businesses are able to respond, and we're happy to support them every way we can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

My question is to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries. If we take a drive through our province right now, you can see that it is coming to life. The fishermen are getting ready to go out on their boats. The farmers are on the land, and before you know it a lot of the plants – you'll see it in the grass, it's greening up right now. But, before too long, a lot of other crops are coming in to bloom like our berries, our apples, those things as well, others like that as well.

Safeguarding Island beekeepers

My question to the minister is: We need pollinators for some of those crops. I

understand the department has changed some of the import protocols on that, but I'm just wondering what the department is doing to safeguard our own Island beekeepers.

Thank you.

Speaker: the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, that's a great question because part of the debate here has all been about the impact of carbon pricing and the impacts that climate change can have on our industries on Prince Edward Island.

Actually, one of the first things I did after becoming minister, I had a meeting with the PEI Beekeepers Association and the blueberry growers association to see what we can do to try to alleviate some of the issues about pollination in the province. In fact, in collaboration with those two sectors, we've implemented a number of restrictions about the import of small hive beetle, potential areas for bees coming into the province.

One of those things is about we've increased the geographical restrictions on where bees can be imported from. We've increased the inspections on bees for the hives for those locations, and we've also added small hive beetle detectors and pollen patties on all of the hives to make sure that we can identify beetles.

We've also done destruction protocols that if small hive beetles were found on any of the imported bee colonies that they can be destroyed immediately, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

There has been talk, around the province, as well, that, perhaps, we could have enough of our bees ourselves, grow those and improve that so that we do not need to import any.

New beekeeping program

I understand there's a new program at the department that is helping to build that. Can you give us a little information with regards to that new program?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, this is a challenge that Island blueberry growers are facing in trying to make sure we can increase our pollination in this province.

Actually, the former minister of agriculture introduced a great program called the Pollination Expansion Program. The 45 beekeepers on the Island, they are able to apply for some supports and funding. In fact, we have approved 17 applications for a total of \$150,000 to assist those beekeepers with introducing bringing in more bees into the province.

As well, we have hired, or recently hired, a provincial apiarist, Cameron Menzies. His focus is to try to grow the bee industry in this province. There's a course starting tomorrow on introduction to beekeeping for Islanders.

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

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Speaker, the apple industry, which is growing here, for sure, and the blueberries, as well, is very important to the economic value of our agriculture community and the province itself.

Backlog in blueberry storage

I'm just wondering, there has been a backlog in the blueberries in storage. I'm wondering what the situation is with regards to that, hopefully, that we can have a better price for our berries in the coming season.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Once again, Mr. Speaker, our government is hearing good news in the agricultural sector when it comes to any production of food in this province. In fact, just checked recently that blueberries are

starting to move and there seems to be a focus on promoting blueberries as a healthy food source. I actually noticed a commercial on TV the other night on blueberry production.

In fact, actually on April 23rd, the USDA cold storage report actually shows that there is a 30% reduction of inventories over last year of blueberries in cold storage in the US. Very positive news for the blueberry industry.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy. Minister, as you are well aware, Highway 2 just heading west past the Northam Road has a passing lane. For the last while, I have been hearing from many residents from West Prince, including myself, that the right lane is in serious disrepair.

So many individuals tend to go to the left lane to avoid any of that broken pavement. Then, heading east on Highway 2, there is a broken line, so people have the opportunity to pass. I am concerned that –

Mr. LaVie: Join PEI.

Mr. Perry: – due to people going on an inside lane, there is potential for a serious accident.

Repairs for Highway 2

Do you plan on repairing that section of highway, this year?

An Hon. Member: Yes.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am familiar with that particular stretch of highway. It has two lanes going west, plus a left turning lane and one lane going east.

We would be concerned; certainly, any safety issue is one that we look closely at. That's under our capital infrastructure plan.

We submit those plans to Ottawa. I know the leader of the Green Party, the Leader of the Third Party doesn't want us to do any work on the main highways anymore –

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Not what I said.

Ms. Biggar: – but that is on our infrastructure plan for next year.

Mr. Myers: I think she was paraphrasing.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, I hope that, this year, with the repairs on it, at least to hold it over to next year are done as soon as possible.

Passing lane between Coleman to Bloomfield

I also have residents who wish for another passing lane, possibly between the Coleman to Bloomfield area, where they can safely pass another vehicle, as many residents, I know in my district, travel to Slemon Park. Many fishers travel outside of the community to go to work. This is an opportunity to pass a slower vehicle in a safe way.

Is that a possibility?

Thank you.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the minister of economic development mentioned, we have over \$1 billion in exports go. Those roads are a very important infrastructure system to our industries across PEI. We will continue to upgrade those –

Mr. Trivers: Minister of broken pavement –

Ms. Biggar: – hon. member, we will –

Mr. Trivers: – minister of potholes.

Ms. Biggar: – look at that particular section to see if we can do some patching in that area, for this year.

It is on there, again, though, to assure you for next year –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – when we look at putting in any passing lanes, we also have to look at where the driveways are located. We would have to look at that area to safely install any kind of a passing lane. We will take it under review.

Mr. Roach: (Indistinct) good minister (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: Now, that the brains of the operation just walked in.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to rise and ask questions today and it's great to see young people here. I would like to say, this is called Question Period; no answer. Unless, you're a government backbencher, usually you get a prepared statement –

Mr. Roach: A member's statement or a question?

Proclamation of whistleblower legislation

Ms. Compton: To the Premier: Why hasn't your government yet proclaimed the whistleblower legislation?

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

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

This is something that obviously was important enough to us that we brought it through. I'll look into the answer to that and bring it back to this House.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We debated that legislation in the fall sitting of the House. It was finally passed, and it received Royal Assent back, December 20th.

Training for managers and employees

What training and education plans have been made for managers and employees about this new law, and how widely have they been delivered?

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

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

Again, this is something that our government took very seriously when we came in. An ethics and integrity commissioner was appointed, at the time. Through that process, a great deal of training was put together. As time went forward, policies were developed around this, for the first time, in government. We are very proud of that. That training will continue through the implementation of this legislation, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Proclamation of whistleblower legislation (further)

The Premier said it was one of the biggest accomplishments of the fall sitting of the Legislature. If you consider it such a great accomplishment, Mr. Premier, why has so little been done to put it into effect?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Accountability has been a topic of discussion ever since I became elected. I think our government, from our track record of what we have done since 2015, is pretty substantial, as far as the new changes that we've made. Public interest disclosure and whistleblower legislation that we're doing, a

new *Archives and Records Act*, ethics and integrity commissioner, conflict of interest requirements. We amended the *Financial Administration Act*.

These came out based on the Auditor General's recommendations. I can assure you that Islanders are looking back, saying, okay, they're finally getting to it, and we're getting it done –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) sued 86 times.

Mr. MacDonald: – and we're moving forward with accountability and transparency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a great list that you're giving me there, but we're talking about whistleblower legislation and the fact that it hasn't been proclaimed yet.

Both the opposition and independent experts consider your whistleblower law fatally flawed because it requires employees to report incidents to their own deputy minister instead of an independent third party.

We voted against the bill and we rejected those amendments because it needs to be strengthened for the public servants. How can you report to your deputy minister on whistleblower issues, when they are the person that you have to answer to?

Is your government's slow implementation of a subtle – is a, sorry – is your government's slow implementation a subtle admission that your whistleblower law is really just window dressing?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, this is a debate that we had in the fall sitting of this House. It was made clear in those debates that the approach that is taken here in our province is consistent with the approach that is taken elsewhere in this country.

It was never the intention that you would have a whistleblower regime that would eliminate the leader, or the person who's the head of the department. This is about building culture, changing culture, encouraging people to follow this whistleblower legislation and that is precisely what is taking place in terms of implementing this law and it will be proclaimed and we will have legislation that follow on the will of this Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In December, the Privacy Commissioner issued a scathing ruling about government's treatment of three female public servants who came forward to report wrongdoing. There's nothing in the Premier's whistleblower law that would have prevented that shameful episode from occurring.

Protection for whistleblowers

Premier: What extra precautions does this law offer whistleblowers beyond the protections that they already have from the labour law? What is different?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, this is going back to the discussions that we were having in this House in December and, indeed, it is true that when we got to the end of our six-week sitting with 30 pieces of legislation, the third party, together with the opposition did indeed try to send this all back into committee and I guess we're now sending it back into Question Period.

There are offences, there are reporting divisions, and there is protection against reprisals, which is precisely why you have whistleblower legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) would Spencer (Indistinct) be protected again under this legislation?

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The lack of an independent process will doom this law to fail. Anyone who saw how those women were treated by government would find the Premier's version of whistleblower protection rather cold comfort.

Question to the Premier: Do you really expect to get potential whistleblowers to come forward if you control the process?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, this has been going on in this House, really, since the election. It was in 2015 we appointed a commissioner of ethics and integrity who brought forward a policy, the opposition complained that that was not independent enough. We brought forward legislation – it's been adopted by this House – and Mr. Speaker, we still keep hearing the same question. It may be that the opposition is getting down to the bottom of the barrel in terms of questions. They're asking the same questions they were asking in 2015.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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

Mr. Myers: Call the election, then. We know how popular you are.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's why we're calling it 'question, no answer period'.

Whistleblowing of employees

Do you still feel comfortable having employees whistleblowing to their own boss?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: We said last fall, and I'm happy to say it again – I don't know how they plan to change a workplace if you take the boss out of it. And really, let's remember this is the public service. These are deputy ministers, these are heads of agencies, and these are people who are public servants.

Mr. Myers: All answer to you (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: What about the commissioners?

Premier MacLauchlan: And, there is, in that legislation, a process by which they can go directly to the commissioner –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – a commissioner who was independently appointed.

Mr. Fox: They serve at your pleasure.

Premier MacLauchlan: So there are various routes that people can follow and then the encouragement is there to report wrongdoing and to have protection against reprisals and that's exactly what whistleblower legislation does everywhere where it's been adopted and Prince Edward Island is directly in line with that practice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Encouragement to report to their own boss. If the PNP whistleblowers looked for justice or redemption against your government, are you going to drag them through the court system, or settle appropriately?

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, that's a very hypothetical question and it's one that, frankly –

Mr. Myers: It won't be soon.

Premier MacLauchlan: It's one that frankly – well, maybe the opposition is up to something – perhaps they'll tell us about it, but in any event, Mr. Speaker, I think that's something that's better left for another day.

Thank you very much.

[End of Question Period]