



Session:	3/65
Date:	16 May 2018
No:	45

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 16 MAY 2018

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday in the House, the Leader of the Opposition equated the province issuing promissory notes to our pension plans in writing as: IOUs to ourselves. He further suggested these promissory notes allowed us to balance the books and asserted that we were, essentially, cooking the books. And asserted that yes, and these are misleading statements.

I would like to make some clarifications –

Mr. Myers: Oh, I don't think you can accuse him of that.

Mr. MacDonald: – we are not writing a cheque to ourselves –

Mr. Myers: Actually, I'm quite positive –

Mr. MacDonald: – in 2014, which is when we last issued a promissory note, we proposed –

Mr. Myers: We're allowed to say 'misleading' are we?

Mr. MacDonald: – an interest-bearing repayment schedule to the master trust. This agreement was accepted by the –

Mr. Myers: I'll be using it all day.

Mr. MacDonald: – unions and by government.

I would note, for the Leader of the Opposition that we pay the Master Trust a market rate of interest during the life of the note, and any money contributed by employees or employers to these funds cannot be used for anything other than pension, benefits paid to members, or for plan expenses.

The Teachers' Superannuation Fund and the Civil Service Superannuation Fund are legal entities separate from the province. They have independent governing boards consisting of representatives from government and the unions.

These notes have nothing to do with balancing the books. The expenses related to pension costs are recorded annually in the books of the province. The province's financial statements are audited by the Auditor General.

All the expenses related to pensions have been recorded and have been audited. Not only are the books balanced, we are projecting a surplus.

Though our last promissory note was issued in 2014, we did just finish paying notes issued by the Conservative government in 2005, and 2006. You can see the province's well-established history of repaying these notes. Repaying these notes is a legal obligation.

The Leader of the Opposition claimed we are the only jurisdiction in Canada actually to write such notes. In a news release from June, 2015, in which then Conservative premier, Paul Davis announced the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador would be issuing promissory notes to ensure the stability of their teachers pension plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The ongoing revelations of chronic mismanagement in the Provincial Nominee Program, underscores the need to make big improvements in our retention rates.

Improvements to retention rates for immigrants

Question to the Premier: Why isn't your government more concerned with improving retention rates for immigrants to PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism informed the House yesterday,

we have accurate and up-to-date numbers for the people, who came in 2014 over a two-year period and 2015 over a one-year period. Those numbers are 57 and 54%, as I recall him saying.

May I also say, if the hon. members are looking for an accurate measure of how our province is doing and doing on retention when it comes to immigration –

Mr. MacKay: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – look at the 2016-2017 report from Statistics Canada, which is a national survey by province and territory and you will find that Prince Edward Island led the country; led the country among provinces and territories for gains in immigration on a per capita basis. Those people are in Prince Edward Island and they're part of our population and we're proud of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Speaker: The hon. Leader –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) used to (Indistinct)

Speaker: – of the Opposition.

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

In fact, a new study by the Conference Board of Canada sheds light on the economic importance of better retention of immigrants.

It found that here on PEI and throughout Atlantic Canada, that immigrants under the family and refugee classes both had higher retention rates than the business class.

Retention rates of immigrants

Question to the Premier: If these other immigrant classes have higher retention rates, is your government's focus on the business class really just about the money?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad we're talking about retention rates. In 2008, our retention rate was 15%. We have improved our programs based on recommendations from the Auditor General –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – and consultants.

We've also strengthened settlement services to help immigrants integrate into our community and call PEI their home.

Our 2015 retention rates, based on tax file or data is 57% –

Mr. R. Brown: Oh! Great.

Mr. Palmer: – this is a significant improvement, but it's still not good enough. We'll continue to support settlement services –

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) misleading –

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – and work hard to make this even better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

While your government has concentrated on the lucrative business class, the other immigration classes have much better retention rates; nearly three times better under the refugee class at 37%, and more than four times better than the family class at 62%.

Question to the Premier: Shouldn't your government look at shifting its focus to immigration streams that provide more long-term benefit to PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, our government has a population action plan. In that population action plan, you will see this issue spoken to.

Indeed, we are dealing with all of the streams; the Atlantic pilot; refugees; working class, increasing emphasis on that.

When it came to receiving Syrian refugees, our province took two times on a per capita basis the refugees that were taken across Canada and received and they're here and they're doing well.

If you look in all of our classes, we are working with people. They are settling. They are in our communities. They are doing well and they are providing a great contribution to this province. I hope that everything that we are saying in this House will encourage that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Conference Board of Canada also noted that female immigrants have a lower labour force participation rate.

We know that greater female participation in the workforce has countless economic benefits.

Greater female participation in workforce

Question to the Premier: What sort of gender lens has been used on our immigration programs here on PEI to remove barriers and enable greater female participation in the workforce?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We continuously review all of our programs and as I've stated in the House before, in 2009, the program was reviewed by the Auditor General and recommendations were all implemented. In 2010, the AG did a

follow-up review and recommendations were all implemented.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Mr. Palmer: In 2012, Grant Thornton was hired to review and the recommendations were implemented, and in 2015, we reviewed the program with Grant Thornton again. We continually evaluate all of our programs to make them better and we will continue to do that. Now we're meeting with our agents to review the activity as it relates to the immigration program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ever since the federal residency fraud charges were laid, this government has desperately tried to distance itself from the program that they created and run.

Applicants put through after program shut down

Question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: Will you stand in this House today and explain why you, as minister, jammed through thousands of PNP applicants after Ottawa tried to shut the program down?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our immigration program continues to evolve. As I had just mentioned, we made a lot of improvements to the program over the years. We now have an expression of interest model that engages the community and they can also work with immigrants to supply a community endorsement letter –

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Mr. Palmer: – so they can settle in their community. We continue to make improvements and it's working. As we say in – as I'd mentioned earlier – our 2015

retention rate is 57%, which is a dramatic improvement from where it was when it started.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a pretty misleading answer to the nature of the program and how it was used by this government. Any pretense of carefully matching immigrants with businesses was all thrown out the window when the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment decided he was going to sign 3,000 applications on the final day of it. Federal staff stated that in 2008 immigration levels, PEI estimated they would nominate 1,000 nominees. In 2008, what they actually nominated were 8,000 nominees – that's how many went to the federal government.

Trust of government in immigration program (further)

Question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: Why did you abuse the PNP program to the extent that you did?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, our 2008 retention rate was 15%. We've learned to improve our program and our retention rate in 2015 is now 57%. Our goal is to attract the very best and brightest immigrants to our province. Our new model, as I said, has immigrants applying to the province. It's no longer a first in, first out system as it had been in the past. We are working hard to make sure the new nominees are a good fit for PEI. As I said, we're meeting with agents now to review their activity as it relates to the immigration program in PEI.

Ms. Biggar: Good.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So again, the numbers that the minister is using are misleading because 14% of business applicants are actually retained here in the province, so I don't know where he's getting 57% from, but it's not the case.

Speaker: Hon. member, I think you should refrain from using the term 'misleading'. Okay?

Mr. Myers: Okay.

Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Myers: I thought it was okay today.

The Minister of Communities, Land and Environment testified before Public Accounts at the time and he said that PNP was a free-for-all and I'll quote him: It was like the pension plan was closing down. It was like, this is closing. I'm out of business. I had certain rules I could apply and the decision was made. I ran it, or – you know – it was run like a private sector company. I know the criticism is going to be that it's a Crown corporation and we ran it. We ran it to the maximum benefits to the Province of Prince Edward Island.

CLE in charge of PNP program

Question to the Premier: Do you agree with how the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment ran the PNP program when he was in charge of it that has now resulted in fraud charges in this province?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to start by citing my reference points, which was Stats Canada – is the information that I'm using. This all comes around from federal charges that – there's an allegation from border services that the folks who were – and border services are the folks that allow or deny entrance to the country at the airport or the border.

Mr. MacKay: You took the money. You cashed the cheque.

Mr. Palmer: So this is where the alleged false information was provided – after the immigrants had landed on PEI. We continue

to work with border services and provide any information if they ask for it – and we're happy to do that. I want to also remind everyone that the province is not under investigation.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the 57% that he's talking about includes refugees and it includes immigrants who came through the family program. So, 14% of the business-class applicants remained in this province which is a shameful number.

I want to also caution the member in his use of 'allegation' because he's trying to make Islanders believe that there hasn't been charges and there have been charges. So it's more than allegations. They flew down from Ottawa and decided: Bam, there's going to be charges. He should be careful that he's not siding with the fraudsters here and that he's instead siding with Islanders because Islanders are who he should be – he shouldn't be sticking up for fraudsters. He shouldn't be sticking up for organized crime or whoever he thinks standing up for.

The Minister of Communities, Land and Environment at the time notified Ottawa. He was flying Island bureaucrats to Hong Kong and Dubai to interview immigrants overseas rather than having immigrants come to PEI. They didn't even have to set foot in Canada for this government to approve their application into the PNP program.

Cash and dash mentality and fraud charges

Premier: Would you agree that this cash and dash mentality has contributed to the recent fraud charges here in this province?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These charges and the allegations are from the 2008 model that we had. As I had said, we continue to review our models and

continue to improve on those. We also, as part of our ongoing business, we review our database and we look for any patterns that could, potentially, be found. We also now use qualified third-party vendor for verification process to further assist our office.

Again, this province is not under investigation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There was fraud charges laid. It lays at the feet of this government because the minister can run and hide from it all he wants, but he implicated his buddy who's sitting beside him when he was minister because he keeps referring to the program in 2008, well guess who was the minister? The guy who's sitting next to you. The guy who I'm trying to ask questions of. The guy who I'm trying to get answers about. The guy who you refuse to answer questions about.

We were the only province in the whole country that was flying staff to other countries to try to attract immigrants. Minister, when he was in front of Public Accounts said: We could have as many as we want, basically. I said: Let's go out and try to get as many as we want because I want my queue filled for the population in the upcoming years and I want to remind the House that he signed 8,000 through in one year.

Question to the Premier: How is it that this is the way this government has done business in the past and now again here in the present?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our retention rates were 15%. That was not acceptable. We did some work with the Auditor General and with consultants. We continued to strengthen settlement services. Our retention rate in 2015 is 57%. We continue to make improvements. That

number is not good enough and we're going to continue to work on that and we've implemented a new expression of interest model that engages communities so they can work with immigrants as they come to land in PEI and the community can endorse them.

We're very proud of the gains that we've made over the years and we will continue to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ninety-nine per cent of the 565 PNP clients registered as living at the Sherwood Motel have been nominated for permanent residency by the province.

PNP clients and PEI health cards

Question to the health minister: Can you confirm how many of these 565 individuals have PEI health cards?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I had the opportunity this week to speak with some foreign temporary workers, so the way that works is you have to be a resident of Prince Edward Island for 183 days in order to be afforded a PEI health card, unless you're here under some other program working with a visa.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: I'd look to another minister to answer the questions now too, Mr. Speaker, if I delivered that answer. It had nothing to do with my question.

We're curious how many of these PEI health cards are registered to addresses at the Sherwood Motel. These health cards are one of the most important public documents that an Islander can have. Your PEI health card lets you access a wide range of health services, physician, in-hospital services,

primary care services, home care, and drug programs.

Protection of health cards from theft and fraud

Question to the health minister: What safeguards are in place to protect the integrity of our health card system from identity theft and fraud?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, we regularly review our database for common elements such as addresses, and we will investigate any patterns –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – that we do find.

We also have a third party that does verification for us, and –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) won't let you do anything else.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) Spencer Campbell? Is Spencer Campbell the third party?

Mr. Palmer: – these charges are related to individuals who allegedly gave false information –

Mr. Myers: You just ask him if it's okay (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – to the federal government, to border services and border services, they're the folks who allow or deny access to the country at the airport or at the border. This is where the alleged false information –

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – was delivered after the immigrants had landed in PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's two ministers that answered with something that had nothing to do with my questions.

A PEI health card entitles a person to receive health coverage if they're in another province within Canada through out-of-province health services. This year's budget for out-of-province health services is over \$52 million.

Security and integrity of health card records

Question to the health minister: With so much money being spent each year on out-of-province health services, shouldn't the security and integrity of our PEI health card records be a high priority?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Absolutely the integrity of Islanders' health – responsibilities with their health cards is a very important issue from the department of health.

As I said earlier, you have to be an Island resident for 183 days to qualify for health care on Prince Edward Island. If you're coming from another province, the first six months you're dealt with the province that you came from. After that point in time, you'll be given a PEI health card and you can show up at any of our facilities and reserve Island health care based on that card.

We will continue to do that. We will continue to monitor who has health cards on Prince Edward Island to ensure that all those needs are being met and the needs of immigrants are being met when they come and they spend six months on Prince Edward Island, or 183 days, and that they do receive those health cares.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister is right. 183 days or, perhaps, if you're living at the Sherwood Motel since 2008 qualifies you too.

The 2015 Auditor General's report looked at out-of-province health services and found that, and I quote: Health PEI's process for approving physician referrals for out-of-province health services requires improvement as we noted a significant proportion of out-of-province claims did not have the required physician referral request.

Out-of-province health service claims

Question to the health minister: In light of what we now know about the questionable practices in the Provincial Nominee Program, what concerns do you have that some of these out-of-province health claims may be for people not living in PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On Prince Edward Island, we are a small jurisdiction and we don't have health care professionals to serve for every health care need for Islanders. It's a must that we have to have Islanders go to other provinces, mainly Nova Scotia and mainly New Brunswick, and sometimes Ontario, for their health care needs met.

If an Islander who has a health care card, has obviously been a resident on Prince Edward Island for the 183 days, they are permitted to go out of Island to have their health care needs met. However, we do monitor those situations. It is a concern of costing, so we look at that very closely. But, we are not able to provide every health care measure on Prince Edward Island, including when it comes to areas of heart disease and orthos that have to be sent off-Island, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A person becomes eligible for a PEI health card on the first day they become a permanent resident; a process that begins with the province nominating them for permanent residency.

The 2015 AG report found a significant proportion of out-of-province health claims didn't have the required paperwork. This year's AG report looked to see what had been found out, and they said and I quote: Health PEI has not been monitoring the extent to which referrals required by policy are submitted.

Exploitation of health care system

Question to the health minister: The immigration minister didn't know that 565 people nominated by his own department were using fake addresses. Do you know whether or not our health care system is also being exploited?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Fortunately, as Islanders, we are able to have a great health care system on Prince Edward Island. We have a frontline of doctors and nurses providing wonderful care to all Islanders. Whether you're an immigrant to Prince Edward Island or whether you were born and bred on Prince Edward Island, it's imperative that when you need your health care needs met and we're unable to perform that specific surgery or treatment on Prince Edward Island that you do have a place, a neighbouring province, to go to get that service.

We've been doing that for years. We will continue to do that, and we will monitor those costs, as any good government would do, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know darn well that we've got the best health care system going. That's why people are trying to get here.

Audit of health cards

Is the minister auditing our health cards to see if folks who are just trying to buy their way into Canada are billing taxpayers for our health care coverage?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is great to see the health care critic acknowledging our wonderful system on Prince Edward Island. He knows full well from his perspective just how valuable it is on Prince Edward Island.

When it comes to health care needs, such as Medicare cards and others on Prince Edward Island, we do monitor. We do research on that to ensure Islanders have those cards and health care needs and access to the services that they need right here in Prince Edward Island.

This is a foremost priority of the department of Health PEI that people when they need health care are provided that service in an effective and efficient way and provision of those health cards is one piece of that, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Last week government tabled their long-awaited Climate Change Action Plan and I stood in this House and I said: Let's give credit where credit is due – because now we have a plan. But upon closer examination, I was disappointed that it did not directly discuss the issue of carbon pricing in spite of the fact that the federal government has mandated that every province submit a carbon pricing plan by September 1st of this year.

I can appreciate that carbon pricing is a hard thing for politicians to talk about and we'd like to kick it down the road. But, the time for denial and evasion is over. On Friday, I said that climate change is universally accepted as the biggest challenge that humanity faces today. I believe Islanders deserve political leaders who are courageous enough to initiate an honest conversation on this and other potentially unpopular and touchy subjects.

Climate Change Action Plan in lieu of carbon pricing

A question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: Do you honestly believe that the federal government will accept your climate change action plan in lieu of carbon pricing?

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

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

I thank the Leader of the Third Party for that question because it's a good time to have a good debate about climate change.

The federal government's objective is to reduce carbon in the atmosphere. That's number one. We have presented a plan that will reduce carbon in our environment by 600,000 tonnes. We're already down by 200,000 tonnes and we haven't even begun yet. We have a good plan. The federal government wants reductions in carbon in the atmosphere. This plan provides that, and the federal government should accept our plan.

Thank you very much.

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

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

CBC published a report yesterday in which Dale Beugin, executive director of Canada's eco-fiscal commission stated that: the PEI action plan is inadequate, and he expects Ottawa will impose its carbon tax on PEI in January if the province does not amend its proposal.

Federal government and carbon pricing

A question to the same minister: Has this been your plan all along? To force the federal government to impose carbon pricing on Islanders so Liberal MLAs won't have to have an honest conversation with their constituents?

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

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) and why did you abuse the PNP program.

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

We have had honest –

Mr. Myers: While you're there.

Mr. R. Brown: – conversations with Islanders.

When it comes to listening to people, I'm not going to listen from somebody from Toronto in an ivory tower. I'm going to listen to the people of Prince Edward Island –

Mr. MacKay: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – who have achieved climate change reductions here on Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: The people of Prince Edward Island have in the past, and will continue in the future, to contribute to the reduction of carbon in the atmosphere.

We have. We will, and we will do it right.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

In the spring of 2015, the Premier ignored PEI's fixed-date election laws. He called a snap election and then less than a year later, he imposed a surprise HST increase on all Islanders.

Reluctance to answer questions re: carbon pricing

A question to the same minister: Is your reluctance to discuss the need for carbon pricing in any related to the Premier's refusal to answer a direct question on whether he intends to respect PEI's fixed-date election law?

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

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

We are talking about carbon pricing. We have in our budget carbon pricing. We're

reducing the price of electricity to Islanders and that will, as it did in 2011 under the energy accord, reduced carbon in the atmosphere.

That one project in 2011 saved over 100,000 tonnes of carbon in the atmosphere. We have a plan that'll reduce carbon now and into the future and I believe in the plan that we presented and if the federal government believes in reducing carbon in the atmosphere, they will look to PEI to how it should be done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Minister, from time to time we hear about disease outbreaks affecting livestock in Canada and, indeed, in other parts of the world. These outbreaks have devastating on the farm, farmers, and their families, industry, and often trade. Some of these diseases are new and often have the potential to impact human life.

With Old Home Week shows and the movement of animals and our harness racing industry – such an important industry here in the province – you can understand concerns.

Preparation for possible livestock disease outbreaks

Minister: What is your department doing to prepare for such an event in Prince Edward Island or in the Maritimes?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Food traceability, biosecurity, emergency management plans are all very important when it comes to the transmission of diseases and the impacts that it can have on our Island economy.

I want to reiterate: Currently there is no provincial requirement for livestock

movement within the province as far as documentation, but Health Canada, through the CFIA, has proposed changes to its federal health livestock regulations promoting food traceability and in that particular case, we are working with our provincial veterinarian to try to implement biosecurity measures and traceability measures for all livestock sectors within the province.

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

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's good to hear where we have beef animals, in particular, and certainly horses traveling across provincial borders.

Funding for possible outbreak

Minister: Within your budget, do you have funding available to be used in the event there is an outbreak and we have to respond?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, we wouldn't have money specifically for an outbreak per se because some of those things come under the Health Canada and the CFIA regulations around quarantinable pests and the quarantinable process of livestock, but our department has, in this last provincial Budget, has implemented a provincial veterinarian and that person is working with – making sure that we have excellent biosecurity measures for should an outbreak occur.

One of those particular issues when things have happened in the past – instead of basically shutting down the whole entire province or a whole county, we now can implement a plan that will be much more limited to the amount of quarantinable animals that would be affected.

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

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Identifying farms with diseased livestock

Minister, that's great that we have a plan that's there, but I'd like to know: Does your department have in place a system, or a plan, or any kind of a way of identifying farms that have livestock in PEI that become diseased and do you have anything in place for that farm to ensure that it doesn't spread beyond that farm?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, as I'd mentioned earlier, out of the proposals, all domestic movement of livestock will be reported. This is implemented through CFIA and our provincial vet is working with each particular livestock sector to implement a plan around identifying those particular animals –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: – and then making sure that they're going to be reported and that process is also about if an outbreak should occur, that we have the proper biosecurity measures that are in place to prevent any potential spread from that, but also not to impact our other livestock sectors so it is not going to impact our industries that are so fundamental to Prince Edward Island.

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

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

My question is for the minister of health and we've already had a little discussion here this morning between the minister and his critic with regards to the value of our health care system.

Last week, right across Canada, we were celebrating nurses' week and I think we all heard and we know the great value of the nurses in our system and the terrific role that they play to keep our health system in as good as shape as it is.

Registered nurse vacancies

Question to the minister: Could you give us a bit of a rundown on how many registered nurse vacancies there may be in the province at this time?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, the hon. member is absolutely right. Last week, of course, was nurses' week here on PEI and I was very honoured and pleased to be able to attend several of their events. Nurses play a vital role in our frontline health care system and we're very fortunate to have the quality of nurses we have on Prince Edward Island.

Currently, we are recruiting for 57 nursing positions here on the Island. Of those 57 positions, 10 are permanent full-time, 10 are permanent part-time and the part-time positions would range from the 10% of time per cent to 90% time work percentage. We also are currently looking for 37 temporary positions to cover needs of things such as maternal leaves and other reasons why people need time off. Of those, 14, I believe, are full-time and the rest then make up the part-time percents and they go from a 40% position up to a 75% position.

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

Mr. McIsaac: Thank you very much.

Recent UPEI graduates of nursing students

That kind of leads right into my next question. Now that you're recruiting, I know last weekend we saw many, many – I think there were hundreds of students graduated from UPEI. I'm wondering if the minister may know how many of those graduates happen to be nursing students and what you're doing with regards to the university there to make sure some of them stay here in PEI.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. member is absolutely correct once again. We have a phenomenal nursing program at here at Prince Edward Island. I'm a little biased, I say second to none, but the grads they roll out of UPEI are top-of-the-line graduates.

Our recruitment team at the department work very closely with administration at UPEI to be able to go out and talk to these nurses. I had an opportunity just a couple of weeks ago to go out and spend some time with the third and fourth year nurses to kind of indicate to them that we'd really like to have them stay on Prince Edward Island. Last Saturday, we were thrilled to see 78 nurses crossing the stage. Of those 78 nursing students that crossed the stage, seven of those included Masters of Nursing and five nurse practitioners as well.

As well, this fall, Holland College will be graduation – I think the number's around 20 LPNs to add to our nursing care – and we are currently out and talking to all of those nurses to see if we can secure employment and have them stay right here on PEI.

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

Mr. McIsaac: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, your second supplementary.

Filling nursing positions

I'm just wondering: I know there are students actually graduating in other universities across the Maritimes. I don't know if you're looking at that area as well, but between them and with UPEI, do you have a rough idea how many we may get to fill those recruitments that you need for our health care system here in PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

It's a little early for those exact numbers, hon. member, but we're working on that. What I do know, though, that we have 18 sponsorship science nursing students, 12 of whom are from UPEI, the rest are made up – they are attending nursing programs in other areas and we're keeping them all back here.

As well, 21 of the students that graduated last Saturday will be part of our New Graduate Employment Guarantee program and those 21 nursing students will all begin working right here on Prince Edward Island this spring.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The government's climate action plan contains some good measures that the Progressive Conservative caucus, us over here, have been championing for some time now. Hopefully, we'll finally see some positive action, unlike when your Liberal government cut the subsidies for hybrid vehicles.

One thing the plan lacked was a clear picture of what carbon pricing will look like for Islanders. We have similar concerns as the Leader of the Third Party.

It uses statements like: relative pricing on cleaner energy.

Carbon tax to PEI

Question to the minister of the environment: Why are you being so unclear, even evasive, about whether you are bringing in a carbon tax to Prince Edward Island?

Mr. MacEwen: Misleading.

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

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

I thank the member's question because it's always great when we're talking about the environment here on Prince Edward Island. I am so proud of Islanders, in the reference when it comes to the environment.

I would have to say, Islanders are the most environmentally-friendly people on this planet. We go back to 1981 when we really got into the Climate Change Action Plan. We were ahead of the curve far before anyone else when it comes to climate change because we recognize the impacts climate change could have on our Island and that's why each and every Islander is concerned about climate.

When we went out for consultation, each and every Islander said: we have to do our part. And we're willing to do our part.

I want to thank each and every Islander.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Here's what the minister said last Friday. He said: There are two options. You can increase the price, ask people to pay more and get them to move off carbon from that, or you can incentivize it; and to incent people to move off carbon. He said: We believe in incenting.

Over here, we believe in the carrot and not the stick, too. We've said so many times. But, the minister's own plan says it will work to achieve the goals of the pan-Canadian framework on climate change. A framework that government helped developed in 2016.

The framework has four main pillars; the first one being pricing carbon pollutions, in other words, a carbon tax.

Minister, Islanders don't want a carbon tax –

Mr. J. Brown: You do –

Mr. Trivers: – question to the environment minister –

Mr. J. Brown: – (Indistinct) asking for one (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – can you confirm –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – that you're breaking your commitment to a carbon tax that you made as part of the pan-Canadian framework, because I hope you are.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, the pan-Canadian agreement was about reducing carbon. That's the main item here.

How do we get –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) carbon tax

Mr. R. Brown: – this carbon out of atmosphere –

Mr. Myers: One of the four pillars.

Mr. R. Brown: – how do we save the environment? That's what this is all –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – about. We have a percent of the plan –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – that will reduce carbon.

This plan has been proven in 2011 with the Energy Accord. We gave 14% reduction to energy prices in 2010. What did that do? Took 90,000 tonnes of carbon out of the atmosphere. So we are pricing carbon. We're reducing the price of electricity so Islanders will move to electricity, which is a cleaner fuel.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: Awful worked up.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, thank goodness for the actions of previous Progressive Conservative governments on this Island because nothing significant has happened to address climate change since 2008 –

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) talk (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – and you can look at the Climate Change Action Plan.

The Trudeau government has been clear of that province – about –

Mr. Myers: Worry about (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – when provinces want to avoid a carbon tax.

Here's what the federal environment minister said. They told this to Saskatchewan, "In the event that your government does not adopt a price on pollution that meets our standard, we would have no choice but to ensure that a price on

pollution applies in Saskatchewan, just as we would anywhere else in the country.”

Islanders don't want a carbon tax, and need clarification from this government that they will fight against one –

Mr. J. Brown: You want it –

Mr. Trivers: – we know that the environment minister wants to fight for Islanders.

Ms. Biggar: You're (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Question to the environment minister: Can you commit here today that you are prepared to fight for Islanders against a forced carbon tax by the Trudeau government?

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Stand up for Islanders.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) Trudeau (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister –

Mr. Myers: Stand up for the drama teachers.

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

We are fighting for Islanders. This side and Liberals have been fighting for Islanders since 1854. We will continue to fight for Islanders –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – I have been in Ottawa. I have been in Ottawa and I presented my plan to the environment minister –

An Hon. Member: Forward looking.

Mr. R. Brown: – we have a plan to reduce carbon and to help the environment. That is why we reduced the price of electricity, propane and wood pellets. They are an environmentally-friendly, carbon-reducing fuels.

We want to get off oil. My dream is to have no big oil tanks on the waterfront, at all. My dream is having our biomass here –

Mr. LaVie: No plan.

An Hon. Member: I have (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – employing Islanders and make it our own way. We can become a carbon-neutral province –

Mr. Myers: Oh, Brownie's Island (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – we're on a road there and we're going to get there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're just a little unsure about this government over here.

Starting in 2016, this government has taken actions that appeared to commit Islanders to a carbon tax. They call it carbon pricing, but there is no difference. Really, that's just a nice way of saying tax.

Like the Leader of the Third Party told the federation of municipalities –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) not like you to (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – carbon pricing, taxation: take your pick.

We want to believe that no carbon tax is coming. Islanders want to believe that no carbon tax is coming, but given this Liberal track record of broken promises –

Mr. Myers: Yes (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – the Climate Change Action Plan –

Mr. LaVie: No plan.

Mr. Trivers: – is being met –

An Hon. Member: Good plan.

Mr. Trivers: – is being met –

Mr. LaVie: No plan.

Mr. Trivers: – with a wall of doubt. We have a wall of doubt over here.

Real plan for carbon tax for Islanders

Question to the minister: Will you level with Islanders about what the real plan is for a carbon tax?

Mr. LaVie: You don't have one –

Mr. Myers: Good question. That's a good –

Speaker: The hon. –

Mr. Myers: – question.

Speaker: – Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

Mr. Myers: Come on, give us the, I Have A Dream speech.

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker – yeah, I do have a dream –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – and Liberals have a dream –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – we have a dream to make Prince Edward Island a carbon-neutral province. We have plants here. Down there at Holland College they built a building: carbon neutral. Holland College.

We have the University of Prince Edward Island. We have Holland College. We have some of the brightest students here on Prince Edward Island. We have some of the brightest people here in the world.

I saw students on Friday that are going coming up with innovations and innovations that will reduce carbon in the atmosphere. I have faith in the Island students that are coming ahead. I don't know if the opposition do, but I recommend that they go visit them –

An Hon. Member: No faith (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) no (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) no faith (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: – because they will get the faith I got in Island students.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, your final question.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – over here we have a dream, too.

We have a dream of a government that works for Islanders –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – that's open. That's transparent. That tells Islanders what's going on. And just listens and does what they say they were going to do.

Islanders can see what's going on here. This minister is dancing. I'm not sure what he's talking about half the time. After all –

Mr. Myers: Neither does he.

Mr. Trivers: – this is the same minister, who famously said: keep her afloat until after the vote –

Mr. Myers: Yes (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: The Tories (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: – this was the minister that said that –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) me up.

Mr. Trivers: This is a question to the minister –

Mr. Henderson: Until the Tories ran aground.

Mr. Trivers: – Minister: Will you come clean and admit –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) the Green Party now.

Mr. Trivers: – that you’re trying to stall on bringing in a carbon tax until after the next election just like you did with the HST?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: There it is! There it is!

Ms. Biggar: Here’s your lesson.

Speaker: The hon. Minister –

Mr. Fox: Can’t run now!

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Speaker: –Communities, Land and Environment.

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

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – and in that reference: keep her afloat until after the vote. That’s what the Tories did when Polar Foods happened. They had a Cabinet meeting and they said just before the election: let’s keep her afloat until after the vote. So, let’s get that fact straight –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – we have a plan. It is a good plan. Our plan is backed by science –

Mr. Myers: A dream or a plan –

Mr. R. Brown: – Mr. Speaker, because –

Mr. Myers: – I’m confused –

Mr. R. Brown: – we’ve tested our plan in 2010 when we –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) plan (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – reduced electric power rates, then.

We will remove carbon from the atmosphere. We will play our part. We will exceed other countries –

An Hon. Member: Misleading!

Mr. R. Brown: – in lowering our carbon.

When it comes to doing the right things, Islanders –

Mr. Trivers: Your targets are less than the –

Mr. R. Brown: – will do the right –

Mr. Trivers: – last ones you had –

Mr. R. Brown: – thing. And under the –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – right leadership –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – we will get –

An Hon. Member: You’re misleading.

Mr. R. Brown: – there and the right Liberal – the right leadership –

An Hon. Member: What (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – here is simple –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – it’s Liberal leadership –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – that is the best thing of all, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]