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

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 23 MAY 2018

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

As we've recently heard, Health PEI is responsible for the delivery of health care in this province with a budget this year of in excess of \$696 million.

Resignation of Health PEI board

Question to the minister of health: Can you confirm why the board of Health PEI suddenly and unexpectedly resigned?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, it is unfortunate that as of yesterday afternoon, I did receive a written document from the chair of the Health PEI board stating that the entire board has chosen to step down. As I said, it is unfortunate and I am disappointed about that.

Obviously, last week there was a revision of the *Health Services Act* on the floor of the Legislature providing very clear roles for both the health board, myself, CEO, department and community engagement groups to try and enhance thoughts and vision from our two engagement committees.

Obviously, this is the approach that the board wants to take, but I do respect that. I do applaud them for the work they've done in the past on the health care system for Prince Edward Island, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Last week, government introduced legislation to give the minister more power over the management of health here on PEI.

Less than a week later, the entire health board, appointed by this government, resigned.

Question to the minister of health: Do you see a connection between these two events?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, last week, we laid some new legislation down. It's a modernization of a piece of legislation that was almost 10 years old.

We've done jurisdictional scans of other provinces to see where they were in recent legislation. We've adopted, or mirrored legislation from other provinces.

I had meetings last week with the board on two occasions; one with the board chair and a member and then with most of the board members on Thursday of last week.

Obviously, I did not anticipate that the board would step away. We talked about working collaboratively. We talked about strong vision for improvements in health care systems for all Islanders. I came away from that meeting feeling good last Thursday.

Yesterday's message caught me by surprise. It is unfortunate. I am disappointed, but I do thank the board for the work they've done in the past.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Last week, while we were debating this bill in the Legislative Assembly, the minister is actually on record by saying that the Health PEI board supported these changes.

Now, this week, that board has resigned and former board members are telling the media that the minister's bill is the reason for their mass resignation.

Question to the minister of health: What changed over the long weekend that caused the entire board to suddenly and unexpectedly resign en masse?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With the changes that we were looking at with the *Health Services Act* last week, as I said, it is basically a mirror of other jurisdictions. And, might I say, larger jurisdictions that work and function well with the exact –

Mr. LaVie: Taking the fall.

Mr. Mitchell: – same piece of legislation. As I said, I was disappointed by the board's decision. I thought we had an opportunity to do a lot of great work together. I had that conversation and felt that I had their support on that. Obviously, they've had other discussions. They've chosen to go in another direction.

I applaud them for the work they've done. I wish them well in whatever future endeavours they have, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Among the Health PEI board's duties are; employing the CEO; setting the strategic direction for Health PEI; monitoring executive and organizational performance; monitoring budget and quality and safety processes. Those are just a few of the key factors.

Trustee in place for Health PEI

Question to the minister of health: When will a trustee be in place now that your board has completely lost faith in you, your government and resigned on you en masse?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Currently, under the provisions of the old act, which we are still working under, and, as well, the new act when it becomes acclaimed and a piece of law, there is a

provision in there that in a case, such as this, a trustee can be appointed.

We are early days on this. I only received this letter of resignation last evening. I anticipate, over the coming days, in the next week, that we will have identified and have a trustee appointed to carry on and fulfill the work of the board. I have to maintain –

Mr. LaVie: Dodged a bullet.

Mr. Mitchell: – the role of the board was very clearly laid out under the new piece of legislation, with a lot of ample opportunity for doing great work to improve health care and health outcomes for Islanders.

I am disappointed that we aren't able to do that together. There are a lot of great Islanders with a lot of great, strong, solid backgrounds in Health PEI. I feel fully ensured that the new board will be developed from Islanders with great interest in health care. We will get that work done, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Islanders, who watch this government dismantle the school boards will feel like they've seen this movie before. If you recall this movie ends in people getting run over by a bus.

Government failure in health care

Question to the minister of health: After 11 years of failure, why does your government now think it has all the answers when it comes to health care?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, the decision for the board to step away was not my decision. It was their decision. I want to make that clear. I had great meetings with them on a couple of occasions last week, I talked to them about

my vision and was hoping that it would be their vision to work in cooperation with the department, with CEO, with members of the two engagement committees and all Islanders, to look at efficiencies, and look at development; new policies that will make a big difference in the lives of Islanders.

This was a decision that they made. I do support it. I am disappointed about it, but I am fully aware that there are a lot of individuals out there, on the two committees currently, with a lot of experience; a lot of background; quality individuals with a lot of talent that will, more than likely, step up and do a great role in this job, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: *Merci monsieur le president.*

Contrary to the government's current sunny ways propaganda blitz throughout the current polling period, Prince Edward Island still have the lowest, average weekly wages in Canada, across the country.

Mr. Myers: Oh!

Mr. Trivers: Question to the finance minister: Can the Minister of Finance explain why some wages are lagging so far behind?

Lowest weekly wage in PEI

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I assume the hon. member is talking about the overall average. You know, our government, since we have come to power in 2015, has raised –

Mr. Myers: 2007 (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – the –

Mr. Myers: – just to correct you.

Mr. MacDonald: – minimum –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. MacDonald: Raised the minimum wage. Working collaboratively with the chambers of commerce right across the province now, and have the highest minimum wage, likely, in Atlantic Canada, and we'll continue to build on that.

We look forward to more opportunities to bring those – the labour force. We know where that is. There are all kinds of benefits right now in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

If you read the most recent articles in the paper, in the *Financial Post*, and I know the hon. member from the third party doesn't like hearing this, but Prince Edward Island continues to be on a tear.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unfortunately, there is a big difference between our current minimum wage and what is a living wage on Prince Edward Island.

Certified early childhood educators in government licenced early years centres are paid between \$15.30 and \$17.22 per hour. These workers are an integral part of our education system. Indeed, they provide the foundation for our children.

Wages of early childhood educators

A question to the finance minister: Does the Minister of Finance believe these wages are fair, reasonable and representative of the value that early childhood educators add?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've made \$17 million in additional investments in the education of Islanders on Prince Edward Island. Part of that implementation was 400 child care spaces; part of that was child care subsidies; part of that was increasing the wage grid for those exact workers. And we said when we've

done this, we're not done; we're not finished; we have more to do; and we'll continue to build on that. We had the highest growth of weekly wage increases in the first four months of this year at 3% right across Canada. So, we're doing well, but we have better things coming in the near future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government's been in power for almost 11 years. They need to work a little faster. Over the last eight years, a one-time raise of 30 cents an hour is the only raise these educators have received. Eight years and only a single pay increase. Not even enough to come close to covering the increase in cost of living over that period.

Question to the finance minister: Why has this government taken no real action to fix these poor wages?

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

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

I'm going to go back to the last question and I'll note firstly that actually, the hon. member is talking about last year's wage grid which we have in this budget an increase to of 2%. We have said, and I said here on the floor in estimates that this is something that we would like to see improved more. In fact, it's something that we have indicated that we are working with the association to come up with a labour force study to determine what we can do to improve this.

Let me be very clear in saying this: These are private businesses that employ these folks and by and large, we do not actually regulate the better part of these early childhood educators in the Province of Prince Edward Island. If we say that we're going to bump up the wages for some of them, there's clearly going to be a group that end up being left behind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Finance has just started advertising for clerks and managers for his new cannabis outlets. Clerks will make between \$18.70 and \$25.50 per hour.

Wages of cannabis clerks

A question to the finance minister: Why does selling cannabis pay so much better under your government than educating young children?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: They're making more now (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: That issue is like comparing apples to oranges, as far as I'm concerned. Anybody that thinks we're doing that in regard to the hon. member's comments, it's completely off. I think the hon. member of justice, actually, and education just explained why we have to be very careful not to run interference in effect of private business. But we'll continue to work on that wage grid and hopefully the private sector can continue to work on their wage grid and we can be compatible, so we don't put anybody in a position that they can't afford to hire people anymore because many of those workers are leaving for, maybe, government jobs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is important that government workers make a living wage – a wage that reflects the value they add; however, this government has chronically underfunded child educators' wages and now they're hiring pot clerks that will make up to \$8 an hour more.

Mr. Myers: Shameful.

Mr. Trivers: The minister really needs to stop trying to defend the indefensible. The directors of the early years centres are paid \$21.42 an hour – even less if they don't manage all aspects of the centres. The minister's new pot managers will earn between \$26 and \$36 an hour.

An Hon. Member: Wow.

Mr. Trivers: This government and their system is broken.

Priorities of government misplaced

Question to the finance minister: Why are this government's priorities so misplaced?

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

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

Again, I will correct the hon. member – it would be \$21.85 on the new wage grid.

What we have indicated is that we do not pay these individuals. These individuals are employees of private businesses. We have regulated the wage grid for early childhood centres. They comprise or represent a portion of the population and we indicate to them that they will need to pay that amount.

Aside from that, there's a whole other group of private sector employers that employ these early childhood educators and we have worked with the industry over a long period of time to develop an expertise and a group of employees that we can be proud in and that educate our early childhood students much better than they had previously.

We will continue, Mr. Speaker, to work with them to improve wages for this group.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The month of June will soon be upon us – a busy time for weddings all across Prince Edward Island.

Promotion of PEI as wedding destination

Question to the tourism minister: How much will your department be spending this year to promote Prince Edward Island as a wedding destination?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tourism is an important component of the economy in PEI and we employ 7,700 full-time equivalents here in PEI. Visitors come for many reasons: they come for weddings; they come for beaches; they come on cruise ships; there are lots of reasons why visitors can come to PEI. 2017 was our fourth consecutive record for tourism in PEI and we reached over one million night stays.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Each year, Islanders and people from around the world get married on Prince Edward Island – some traveling great distances to take in our beautiful province.

PEI visitor's guide re: wedding destination

Question to the tourism minister: Can you explain why there wouldn't be a single ad in the visitors guide promoting Prince Edward Island as a wedding destination?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's lots of ways to advertise and there's private sector businesses here on PEI that provide wedding services and all the supports that go with that and they do tremendous business. They have lots of visitors come here every year because why wouldn't you want to come to PEI to get married? So we're happy to support those private sector businesses right across PEI and we encourage as many visitors as would

like to come to PEI to come here this summer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last year over 900 wedding ceremonies were performed on Prince Edward Island. Between the wedding party, family, and guests, they can become quite a large affair.

Tracking of info from off-Island travelers

Question to the tourism minister: Does your department track any information about how many people from off-Island travel here to take part in weddings?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We do track – just like a lot of the metrics in tourism that we track. We know overnight stays; we know we had 1.56 million visitors to PEI last year; we know there's 900 weddings in PEI; we continue to monitor those things and make investments in those so that we can continue to grow the economy. I can tell you, as a former tourism operator, I'm very happy with what the province is doing to continue to grow the economy and provide dollars into the local economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Weddings involve a lot of details and generate a lot of economic activity – most from small businesses and suppliers: the wedding venue, marriage commissioners, caterers, servers, accommodations, bridal wear, hospitality, musicians, photographers, and videographers, just to name a few.

Promotion of PEI as wedding destination (further)

Question to the tourism minister: Wouldn't promoting the Island as a wedding destination bolster these local small businesses in communities across the province?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We continue to advertise PEI in a number of facets. Wedding is one of those. We don't do all of our advertising on PEI because luckily enough, everybody on PEI knows what a great product we have here. It's in other areas where we want people to come to PEI – where we have the focus of our advertising dollars. So we pick our strategic markets and that's where we do our advertising. There would be some various advertising mediums that Islanders wouldn't see, but certainly we are advertising right across the markets to encourage visitation to PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some have estimated that the value of the wedding industry on Prince Edward Island to be as much as \$10 million annually. The province routinely runs targeted promotions for tourism sectors like golf, culinary, and other areas because they have an economic impact. The wedding sector seems tailor made to benefit from this approach.

Promotional dollars for wedding industry

Question to the tourism minister: Will you commit to putting some marketing and promotional dollars behind Prince Edward Island's growing wedding industry?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know the wedding industry is growing and we continue to evaluate all of the sectors that generate a return –

Mr. MacKay: You just (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – to PEI. So we continue to do that, and we'll monitor that again this year, like we do every year, as part of continual business growth that will help us to measure our contribution of \$447 million to the provincial economy –

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – every year that comes from tourism.

We'll continue to do that and we'll make strategic investments that have pay offs and we know that there's wedding –

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – venues that are fully booked for the summer, so we know that there's a lot of success in there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: A million room nights.

Speaker: The hon. Member –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) Sherwood Motel.

Speaker: – from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The *Electoral System Referendum Act* has a long list of requirements for the eligibility for a registered referendum advertiser. One of those is that the organization being not for profit. Now, the minister of justice and I both know that from a legal perspective, if you were calling your organization a not-for profit, it means that the organization is incorporated under provincial or federal not for profit statute.

Referendum advertiser: legally incorporated non profit

A question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: Is it your intent that any registered referendum advertiser be legally incorporated as a not for profit?

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

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

The first thing I'd say is when we get this bill on the floor, we'll have a fulsome conversation about this and I don't think I'd want to get too far out in front of that. But, I do anticipate in the way that we have drafted the bill, would be to indicate that if there's a group of people that are together and their purpose of being together is a not for profit going concern, then we would see them work together to form the purposes of a proponent or opponent group.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Costs and time to incorporate a non profit

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the same minister, as the minister responsible for incorporations as well as a former private sector lawyer who has no doubt been hired to facilitate incorporations for not for profits, could you let the House know the estimated cost and time required to incorporate a not for profit, including obtaining a name search report, preparing letters, patented, drafting bylaws, setting up a board of directors and obtaining liability insurance?

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) legal document.

Mr. Myers: Depends if you have a good lawyer or not (Indistinct) asking the wrong guy.

Mr. R. Brown: \$100.

Mr. Myers: \$100?

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: For a lawyer like Jordan, \$100.

Speaker: Okay members, we're in the middle of Question Period now so let's listen to the questions and the answers.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

For the benefit of this House, and I guess given that I'm not in private sector practice anymore, I can say this and not expect a stampede: I often did them and donated my services (Indistinct) –

Some Hon. Members: Oh! Hear, hear!

Mr. J. Brown: Even better than 100 bucks.

[Laughter]

Mr. J. Brown: There was a disbursement, I believe, of \$250.

But, to be clear, we are saying that if there's a group of people that are together, we wouldn't necessarily require them to be incorporated. We'll start from that position and we'll see where the debate takes us.

Thank you.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

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

Ms. Bell: I appreciate the clarification and I look forward to what your phone bill is going to look like afterwards.

I appreciate the minister recognizing that there is a fee that must be paid, regardless of whether it's paid to the lawyer; however, thank you for clarifying that it may not require incorporation. However, one of the great advantages of incorporating is that it allows not for profits to purchase director's liability insurance which they cannot purchase as individuals.

Fines for infractions re: incorporation legislation

If one of these organizations was your client when you were working in the private sector, would you in good conscience advise them to forgo incorporation and take on the risk of being personally liable for the fines of up to \$10,000 per infraction that are stated in this legislation if they make a minor error?

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

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

If we want to get right down to the detail of this question, what I would have to say would be that whether they're incorporated or whether they're not, there is an ability for the directors of a corporation to be held personally liable. You always have to be careful of that and it just depends on what exactly you are asking in terms of the advice that you might seek.

As far as that goes, I would expect that the same ability to obtain insurance would be available to folks in their own right, whether they are acting through a corporation or whether they're acting personally. So, everybody always needs to be aware of what they're getting themselves into. The legislation that we have put together, I think, does a good job to contemplate the potential issues that we might be into, and I look very much forward to getting it to the floor to have a great debate.

We have addressed the opposition caucuses in terms of our willingness to do that and we are very open to a debate on this legislation and I look forward to the opportunity to get there, and we hope that will come soon.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

In government's 2018-2019 budget, 100 new beds were announced for long-term care facilities on PEI.

Location of new long-term care beds

Minister, where will these beds be located and if so, how many are in Western PEI?

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) Charlottetown.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As a government, we are investing in significant supports for our Island seniors and that is part of our \$32.5 million of new investment in the health budget this year.

Currently, we are reviewing our long-term care needs across our province. Geographically, it may be a little bit early to determine, hon. member, because we do have to look at things such as areas of greatest need. We need to look at where our population growth is perceived to be occurring.

We also need to look at what type of beds are required. Are they dementia beds or are they the level four and five? We are working on that process. In the very near future we'll be putting our RFPs to the private sector to determine what kind of capacity and desire they have to provide the 50 beds. But, we have certainly committed to 50 new long-term care beds this fiscal, and an additional 50 next year on Prince Edward Island, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last spring I questioned the then Minister of Health and Wellness about his department and if they would be adding more beds to the existing manor facilities in Prince Edward Island. He said that his department, and more specifically the seniors' policy analysis, would look into it.

Demand for long-term beds

Minister, are these 100 beds enough to meet the demand of our long-term bed need?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Currently, at the present time we have in the vicinity of 1,140 long-term care beds on Prince Edward Island. We feel the addition of an additional 100 over the next two fiscals; that will provide very manageable and sustainable patient flow from our long-

term care facilities, from homes, from hospitals.

As I mentioned earlier, we are doing that comprehensive long-term care review at the moment, but there are other things that we would like to additionally look at as well when we make these investments in providing that extra care for seniors, whether it be community care, whether it be home care, whether it be respite care, palliative programs, or other supports that may be required. We are still working on that review, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, these long-term beds at various facilities, they aid hospitals tremendously by alleviating some of the added pressures that they have. Western PEI has a need for more beds. It's plain and simple.

Long-term care bed shortage in Western PEI

Minister, what is your department doing to deal with the long-term bed shortage in Western PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it would go without saying that there are needs for long-term care beds right across our province, in the west, in the east, in the central region. We are working to identify that, and with the new influx of 100 beds over the next two fiscals, we definitely see that the bed requirements will be met in all ends of the province. But, the review will show where they are needed.

The reviews will show where private sector can come to the table to help us with capacity and desire to be part of this. All of Prince Edward Island will be dealt with, with the new long-term care beds.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Update on adoption review act

My question today is for the Minister of Family and Human Services: Minister, there has been a renewed interest and public discussion on the opening of adoption records. Will you give an update on your adoption review act?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for that question, hon. member. Public attitudes around adoption are changing. We are hearing every day about Islanders, who are interested in having those adoption records opened.

A couple of weeks ago, there was a beautiful story, actually, on CBC's *Atlantic Voice* by Kerry Campbell; it was the story of a mother and daughter, who had been searching for 28 years for one another, and who were reunited.

We are very cognizant of the stories out there. We are very cognizant of the sensitivity around this issue. We are also committed to hearing all sides of the stories because we must balance the rights of all three parties in adoption, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, I understand that you have done some consultations around the Island. What did you hear from Islanders on the adoption review act?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, hon. member, we did have consultations that took place, beginning in February, concluding in March. We went out and we met with our community partners. We met with Indigenous peoples. We had public and private meetings. We had

stakeholder meetings. We heard from all three sides to this issue.

We have an advisory committee that is now compiling what they heard into a report, which they will be delivering to my department later on this summer. We are looking at, hopefully, rolling that out sometime this summer, as well.

Thank you.

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

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

Speaker: Oh, you're done.

Ms. Casey: Thank you.

Speaker: Okay, thank you.

Leader of the Opposition: You announced that last week.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last fall, our caucus raised the issue of a project that would see Northern Pulp pump 75 to 90 million litres of pulp waste a day from the Pictou County plant into the Northumberland Strait, and the concerns that many had around this potential environmental impact.

In January the Premier wrote to the premier of Nova Scotia, and the federal environment minister on this issue.

Response of letter to premier of Nova Scotia

Premier: What response did you receive to those letters?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I did hear back from the premier of Nova Scotia to indicate that Nova Scotia, contrary to the specific requests that had been made in my January letter would proceed with the 30-

day environmental review and that was announced publicly.

The request of the federal minister has been acknowledged, but there has not been a response one way or the other but I remain hopeful that there will be a federal environmental review.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This project has raised major concerns among the fishers in three provinces, all three provinces; among Indigenous communities; environmental groups and others.

Direct talks with premier McNeil and federal minister

Question to the Premier: Have you had direct talks with premier McNeil or the federal minister?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I did speak with premier McNeil in the first part of April, well, more like April 20th. I have not had direct discussion with the federal minister, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In February, Northern Pulp was here. A number of the MLAs were here. There were questions from all parties about the concern that we have about this project and the potential impact, both to the environment and to the economic impact of the province.

Direct talks with Northern Pulp re: project

Question to the Premier: Have you had any direct talks with Northern Pulp about the project?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, Northern Pulp is well aware of the concerns that we raised publicly, and that we raised in solidarity with the PEI Fishermen's Association and others.

In January, the Fishermen's Association signaled at the time that they appreciated that intervention.

Let me say, that we said, very clearly, in the letter to Nova Scotia and to the federal minister that we do not support the project as proposed and to be more further specific about that; we are concerned about both the effluent and the water temperature of what is proposed to be done on that project. We would not be prepared to change that view without a full environmental review.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Northern Pulp's corporate history leaves many, on both sides of the Strait nervous.

In 2014, the federal government fined Northern Pulp \$225,000 for *Fisheries Act* violations when 47 million litres of untreated pulp and paper effluent spilled into Pictou County harbour.

This violation of federal law landed Northern Pulp on the national Environmental Offenders Registry.

Full federal environmental impact assessment

Question to the Premier: Doesn't this history make it even more important that a full federal environmental impact assessment happen for this project?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as I have said, in response to the previous question (Indistinct) very clear: we have called for a full federal environmental assessment, and for enforcement of federal standards that pertain to this sort of activity

or discharge.

That is something that we're very firm about. Our Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries has been very active on this file. Our environmental people are very active on this file. We have been very, very supportive and worked together with, in particular, the Fishermen's Association, to ensure that these concerns are being brought to the attention of everyone concerned.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the Premier's answer, but we will keep pushing because this is far from over –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) resolution.

Ms. Compton: – fisheries' groups across the Maritimes have joined cause over the Northern Pulp project, including the PEI Fishermen's Association. These groups have retained legal counsel and environmental consultants.

Legal and technical expertise re: project

Question to the Premier: Has the province retained any legal or technical expertise for advice on this project?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we have been working with our counsel and our officials within government; folks in the departments of both agriculture and fisheries and communities, land and environment, who are well aware of the federal regulations and standards and the environmental review process that would pertain.

We've been very direct in relaying that request, a specific request and our concerns. I can say that we appreciate the collaboration of members opposite in sharing those concerns and indeed, in the proceeding that took place here in this Chamber earlier this year. We should be looking for every opportunity to keep

promoting our concern and seeking a resolution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Many people are concerned, as we both stated; both sides of the floor here. We know there is going to be a less rigorous review, is what we're told by the Nova Scotia government.

I'm concerned and we're all concerned that the fix is in here. Recently, it was reported that the Nova Scotia government and Northern Pulp are negotiating a cost-sharing deal for the project before we even know what the project is going to be.

Confidence in environmental review process

How much confidence should Islanders have in the environmental review process if the parties are already negotiating a funding deal for the project?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I think we should all be using what opportunities we have and what resources we have to encourage a federal environmental assessment of this matter and my own view is that given where that pipe is meant to be releasing that effluent, that that's something that should be considered to be in federal jurisdiction; that is releasing effluent.

I'll say again: We should always be alert to the temperature of the water. You know, Mr. Speaker, as a former lobster fisher, that the temperature of the water on the bottom is a very important factor, whether it's in the lobster fishery, or other shellfish, or other aspects of the long-term condition of that ecosystem and we should be very, very concerned and we should be wishing and expecting that the federal government will recognize the jurisdiction in this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Everyone in this House knows that there are many people who rely on the Northumberland Strait and the fishing industry in the Strait for their livelihood. They've been quite clear about how they feel about this. No pipe in the Strait.

Northern Pulp pipe in Northumberland Strait

Premier: What is this government – your government willing to do to ensure there is no pipe in the Strait?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me say that we totally concur in the way that this matter is being raised in terms of its economic importance. Let me underscore the ecological consideration and concern that we should also attach to this issue: for the fish, for the environment, for all of the ways in which that system is interconnected and ultimately have harm to Prince Edward Island – that Northumberland Strait is not very wide and everything is connected and I'll confirm – and I know our ministers would also confirm – that we will do everything in our power to ensure that there is a full and proper environmental assessment of this initiative.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]