



Session:	3/65
Date:	30 May 2018
No:	53

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 30 MAY 2018

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Prince Edward Island continues to stand alone as the only Canadian province without an independent office of a child advocate.

Child advocate and best practice

Question to the Premier: How can you try and justify your refusing to create an office of a child advocate when so much evidence and best practice points in the opposite direction?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, this is something that we've discussed previously in this House. From the outset, we have said, and I have said, that our priority is to emphasize frontline services to address the issues that, indeed, may lie behind the initiative of the Leader of the Opposition to ask about a child advocate. Most recently, to put in place a children's lawyer.

Going back, there was the bridge program, which is a very robust effort across departments and with community organizations, with the very direct objective and the collaborative work that goes to protecting children in our province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Let me be very clear: a child's lawyer is not an independent child advocate. At its core, a child advocate is an independent voice from government that has a laser focus on the welfare of the child.

Independent child advocate

Question to the Premier: Which part of having an independent child advocate do you object to more, the focus on the child's welfare or your inability to control it?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, our government has been clear. Indeed, there is a clear record of our commitment to children's welfare and to the protection of children, and to building strong families. And, where families are broken to addressing those issues.

We put in place, in addition to the bridge program, in addition to the children's lawyer, the supervised exchange, which came out directly from the matters that have given rise to a lot of the discussion about a child advocate.

We have also introduced parenting coordination and alternative dispute resolution. These are all measures that together are giving children in our province protection.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The measures that the Premier speaks of, I would agree, they are good measures that he's brought in. We continue to hear from families and people working in justice and child welfare that the Premier's alternative is just not filling the void created by not having an independent child advocate here on PEI.

Question to the Premier: Why are you being so rigid about having an independent child advocate that could build on the measures that you have brought in?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we have, indeed, been flexible and taken a progressive and an evolving approach to the issues that we are talking about here and that has led to a collaborative effort across departments, with community, with families.

We've also made significant effort in strengthening families such as the Triple P program.

I believe we will also see that there will be significant benefits for children and families from the groups that are being put together in schools to support children.

From the outset what we have said is: First things first. Frontline services first. I believe that families and children in our province are benefitting from that approach and from that commitment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

First things first, a child advocate would be a frontline service.

Federal changes being proposed to the *Divorce Act* indicate a change in philosophy that will put greater emphasis on the best interests of the child. A change in philosophy that aligns perfectly with the goals and the agenda of an independent child advocate.

Question to the Premier: In light of the shift at the federal level, will you finally reconsider your opposition and once and for all put in place an independent office of child advocacy here on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the change, or the greater emphasis on the best interests of the child in divorce proceedings is one that we welcome.

It is one that indicates the – I will say – the good judgment in strengthening the team in the Family Law Centre, notably the children's lawyer. In other services in and around alternative dispute resolution; in working with families, and in being sure that in all of the ways that children are being approached, who are in family situations where there is – where there are broken families that we have in place the people and

the services and the coordinated effort that is going to ensure that the best interest of the child is looked after.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, making divorce proceedings less confrontational will benefit the welfare of the children.

Although, these changes are being made federally, it will fall upon the provinces to ensure that the proper support systems are in place to follow through. That's where our status as the only standalone Canadian province that still does not have a child advocate, an independent child advocate here to serve our children.

Question to the Premier: To give full benefit to Island children from these federal changes, will you commit, I'm asking you again, will you commit finally to establishing an office, an independent office of a child advocate here on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me say that when we go from the changes that are being made or being proposed to the federal divorce law to emphasize the best interest of the child, let us draw the line to the changes that were made here on the floor of this House and supported by all sides to bring forward an alternative dispute resolution process in our family courts to bring forward and put in place the resources for parenting coordination; to put in place a children's lawyer.

I believe what we can see is that Prince Edward Island is in a much stronger position. We've all worked together to put this in place; including, through our budgetary resources so that the best interest of the children in our province will be looked after.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

RFP process for PNP intermediaries

Question to the immigration minister: Do you believe the recent RFP process to select PNP intermediaries was run fairly?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We did have an RFP process and we engaged a number of new agents that are helping us to populate Prince Edward Island. We had a scoring grid that went along with that. It was a public tender and it was done very fairly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

RFPs that are run fairly usually don't end up in court, however, yours did.

Question to the minister: Why wasn't the scoring process for bidders evenly applied?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A number of the staff of IIDI had scored the RFP. There was a scoring grid that was related to that. A number of agents were given a particular score. We took the very best scores that are willing to work in the new model that we have, which is largely based around the expression of interest model that we have with communities to help grow the population right across PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So court documents filed over your fair process include government documents that

show how applications were weighted and scored.

Location of office and scoring model

Question to the minister: Why was the physical location of an office weighted twice as important as the bidder's experience with immigration?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The location of the office was important in the RFP, which was important in the scoring model that we had laid out with the RFP. So, all bidders clearly understood that our goal here is to help with newcomers populating right across PEI and we're engaging communities to do that and agents knew that and everybody was aware of that when the RFP went out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, court documents say otherwise so your RFP documents did not tell bidders that they would get extra points for having offices outside of Charlottetown, yet bidders got extra points for having offices outside of Charlottetown.

Question to the minister: Why would your fair RFP process leave out such a crucial detail, other than to bend the rules for Liberal insiders?

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

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, our RFP process was fair. It was published; there was a scoring grade that was involved with that; a number of people that were engaged in the file had scored the various responses that we received; and we took the very best agents that were willing to work with our new model that would help populate newcomers right across PEI as we know immigration is a very important piece to help our economy

grow and a very important piece of our population strategy.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So the minister's own RFP stated it wanted to grow the number of intermediaries in Prince Edward Island from seven to 10, but when the dust settled, this government announced 12.

RFP and number of intermediaries

Question to the minister: Why did you ignore your own rules and name 12 intermediaries instead of 10?

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

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, we found some very good responses from agents right across PEI that were really ready to step up to help us grow the population across PEI and to help us bring in the very best newcomers to PEI that would help us to do a number of things: creating jobs, fill key labour gaps, and to help populate those newcomers right across PEI so that cultural diversity can be shared, not just in the center in Charlottetown, but right across PEI.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If the government had followed its own rules, there would have been several – at least two that wouldn't have made the cut – that don't belong there – one of them is Cox & Palmer.

Mr. LaVie: Rules? They don't have rules.

Mr. Myers: Cox & Palmer made the cut when they shouldn't and everybody on the ground who was involved with immigration knows they shouldn't be there. It just so happens that the Attorney General was still actively practicing at Cox and Palmer when this all went down.

Liberal insiders and RFP process

Question for the immigration minister: Doesn't it seem like an awful coincidence that Liberal insiders are able to sneak in through the backdoor of your fair RFP process?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are Liberal agents. There are agents that have leanings towards the Green Party and through the Tory party. That wasn't part of the RFP process. It was about engagement and helping us grow the population and bring the very best newcomers to PEI and that wanted to live in areas other than Charlottetown and help us to grow that population and take advantage of the tremendous assets that we have here in PEI.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well this Liberal playbook is getting pretty dog-eared. This government sets up a fair process, then they micromanage it and they meddle and they manipulate in the shadows until they get the result that they want and it usually ends up filling the pockets of some well-heeled Liberal friends of theirs.

Question to the minister: How does this give Islanders any more confidence that your government can be above board when dealing with immigration?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our RFP was published, it was evaluated by a number of staff members from the immigration office that looked at a number of criteria including: location, experience, ability to adapt to a new program that's helping to place newcomers right across PEI and we're very pleased that we're able to do that and we're working with a number of communities to do just that – to grow the population right across PEI.

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

Mr. Myers: In theory, Mr. Speaker, and if you listen to what this minister says, government is focused on attracting immigrants who will stay on Prince Edward Island and who will follow the rules of the Provincial Nominee Program.

Government and rules of PNP program

Question to the minister: How is your government pursuing this objective?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad you asked because it's the expression of interest model that we're working with a number of communities across PEI who are interviewing newcomers on their business plan that would come to their various communities. So they're endorsing those newcomers to come to their community, to set up their business practice, to bring their families, to be involved in the community. So we continue to work on that and the agents are a very important piece of that – to work with our newcomers to make sure that they can identify opportunities right across PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well we're hearing from Island communities that are already quitting or drastically cutting back the amount of work that they're doing for this government because they're doing all the work and government's pocketing all the money.

In a presentation made to Cabinet in October 2017, it was made clear that the percentage of immigrants who followed the rules and had their escrow deposits returned – broken down by intermediaries.

Previous track record of intermediaries

Question to the minister: How is the previous track record of intermediaries factored in on your latest fair RFP?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our evaluation process had to do with who was able to respond to the new model that we had. Some of those were returning agents and some of those were new agents. We continue to evolve the program. Every year it continues to get better. We continue to bring newcomers to PEI and some of the agents are able to adapt to that and scored very well on the RFP, and some others may not have scored as well as they would have liked. We had a fair process. It was evaluated by staff who have a lot of experience with the process. We're happy the population's continuing to grow right across PEI.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You know what they say? Past performance predicts future performance. In the same presentation to Cabinet, it shows that Sunrise Immigration and Investment had only 32% of immigrants follow the rules and receive their escrow deposit refunded to them.

Question to the minister: Do you consider 33% an acceptable success rate?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've evolved our process so that we continue to identify areas that we can continue to grow and 32 is not a good number. We want that to continue to grow and we've identified issues and we work very hard to increase that because we know the intent of the program is to have newcomers come to the Island, to bring new ideas, to fill important labour gaps for us, and bring their culture here to PEI. So we're continuing to work on that and I don't know

if we'll ever be satisfied until we get to 100%.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We all know retention is an important part of the immigration process. It was the Premier himself who said that as part of the retention strategy, he was going to diversify the places that immigrants were coming from. Sunrise has nearly 100% Chinese immigrants coming in – 33% of which would stay – all according to a Cabinet presentation.

Sunrise re: diversity and retention

Question to the minister: How is Sunrise helping diversity and retention as outlined by the Premier?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some of those stats may be old because we have immigrants coming from all over the world, and we have various agents that have relationships in different places and they are bringing new people here to PEI and we're very happy that they're working with communities right across PEI to continue to grow the population and bring those new ideas here.

Our department will continue to work to evolve our program, to continue to make it better so that we can have the very best immigrants coming here to PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, between 2011 and 2015 Sunrise pumped through one of the highest numbers of immigrants through this program out of any of the intermediaries at all, and it's funny how this government continues to feed

Sunrise. The Premier himself has a really cozy relationship with Frank Zhou. It's because of Frank that his book made it to China, in the Anne in China project that the Premier partnered with Frank Zhou from Sunrise on. This is the Premier who continued to let him do this after he became Premier.

Premier and Frank Zhou re: immigration in PEI

Question to the minister: Do you think the relationship between the Premier and Frank Zhou has created a cozy and uncomfortable practice in immigration here in Prince Edward Island?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our immigration program continues to grow, continues to get better. Last year, actually, most of our newcomers, I believe, came from India so it continues to grow and our various agents are reaching out. They're expanding their networks. They are responding to what we were really looking for in the RFP, and they were able to deliver on what we're looking for, and that's why we were able to get a number of agents that responded to the RFP that were successful and they continue to help us grow the population and we're very happy to have them, and we're going to continue to work on our retention rates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Last Friday in the House the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment tabled a media article which he used to defend this government's opposition to carbon pricing. The article claimed that despite carbon pricing in 2015, which is the most recent year for which we have figures, British Columbia's carbon dioxide emissions actually rose.

However, if we look back at the history of carbon pricing in British Columbia from 2008, we see that not only has it accomplished the goals it set out to achieve; lowering emissions, maintaining a robust economy, and creating employment, it actually surpassed them all.

Carbon tax increase in BC

A question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: How much did the carbon tax increase in British Columbia in the two years preceding the figures that I cited, 2013 and 2014?

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

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

I thank the member for this debate because the more we can debate this topic; I think it's better for the environment and better for Islanders.

I have a report here that indicates that Vancouver, right now, is experiencing \$1.60 in gas prices. CTV has reported one of the major reasons it is at \$1.60 is because of the carbon tax.

I don't know why the Green Party is so against helping Island families here, and to live an affordable life here on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Well, the answer is the carbon tax didn't rise at all. For five straight years following its inception in 2008, it did increase up to an accumulative total of \$30 a tonne, and then the government stopped increasing the price. So, the fact that emissions in British Columbia actually started to rise when they stopped increasing the tax actually supports the argument for carbon pricing.

PEI plan for carbon pricing

Minister, given that you tabled a document that adds to the weight of evidence in favour

of carbon pricing, when will we see details in this House on PEI's plan in order that we can comply with federal rules, and do so in a way that protects low and middle-income Islanders?

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) the budget.

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

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

I thank the member for his question.

British Columbia and Prince Edward Island have the fastest growing economies here in Canada. But, British Columbia also has the highest fuel prices.

Our plan has included reducing prices on electricity to move to a less-carbon economy. We are already 10% there. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are close to their 30% reduction without a carbon tax. Like I have said, we can meet our targets. If this is about reducing carbon in the atmosphere and not about taxation, we will meet our carbon requirements and reduce carbon in the atmosphere. I believe we can do it with the plan we have.

Thank you.

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

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

Successive Liberal administrations on Prince Edward Island have made a habit of saying that they won't do something prior to an election, and then completely reversing that position. Of course, implementing the HST back in 2013, and then raising it again by a point in 2016, come to mind.

Government position on carbon tax

Minister, how do you expect Islanders to believe that this Liberal government – I'm sorry – how do you expect Islanders to believe this Liberal government when you say you won't impose a carbon tax on Islanders leading into the next election?

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

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I'll table later on a CTV report and the headline is: BC carbon tax helps push gas prices to record heights. That is April the 2nd, 2018.

I will also be tabling a chart here showing the 120-month average retail price of gas prices across the country and you'll see that BC is at 100 and Vancouver is at \$1.55, and the rest of Canada is at \$1.30.

I cannot understand why the Green Party wants to hurt Island families here on Prince Edward Island. As we have heard earlier, vehicles are important in Prince Edward Island because we have a diverse or spread out population and our cars are needed. Why does the Leader of the Green Party want to tax families, Mr. Speaker?

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the finance minister. We have talked in this Legislature about the importance of retaining our youth and keeping Islanders as Islanders. People truly are our greatest asset. If we are able to find ways to keep them here, I'm all for it.

When it comes to buying your first home there's anxiety involved, whether it's financial stress, uncertainty, or simply confusion.

Incentives for first-time home buyers

Minister, what incentives or credits is there for young people looking to buy their first home and to stay on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know how important it is to keep young Islanders here on Prince Edward Island. Just from our most recent budget, the incentives that we've put in place to try to retain them, but the hon. member is exactly right.

We are at a crossroads for home buyers and vacancy rates, especially in our city centres; Summerside and Charlottetown. There are different programs available to those individuals that want to build homes. First-

time home buyers' tax credit, we have GST/HST new housing rebates and there's one that was implemented October 1st of 2016, which one of the only provinces in Canada that does this, is the provincial tax exemption.

Those are some of the incentives, basically, that new home buyers or builders should be looking at, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for that answer, but last month the City of Charlottetown released a report on youth affordable housing which found there is a need for more affordable housing for youth within the Greater Charlottetown Area, and I'm sure that has a lot to do with the young people here in university.

Affordable housing for youth

How will the province help to address this particular issue?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I was actually there and attended that and kudos for those three young people for taking that on. I think it was an exceptional presentation.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) the question (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: But, provincial housing strategy; being released so there are certain ways. But, there are also communities on PEI that understand about wanting to maintain people and bring new people in to rural PEI and there are incentives in some of those communities, or there was at least. I can't remember, but I believe Georgetown was one of those communities that were providing land for new builds. So there are things like that.

But, there are also issues relevant to Airbnb, for example, that we're also dealing with but

it's also investing in housing. We've shown through our last budget up to 1,000 new low-income housing units. There is a trickledown effect. Hopefully, that'll open up some new of the lower-level apartment rentals and housing possibilities for our youth coming forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's been suggested that there is a specific area that we're dealing with here. It certainly has to do with the younger people that are trying to find accommodation or build accommodation.

Incentives for first-time home builders

Minister, would you ever consider implementing new incentives, such as rebates, when young people under a certain age decide to build their first home?

Mr. MacDonald: I think, Mr. Speaker, our whole emphasis in this government is growing the population, repatriation, and trying to ensure that, especially our youth and graduating students, stay on Prince Edward Island; work at a profession of their choice. We've seen it with what we've done with the rebate reduction in student loans when they return to Prince Edward Island up to \$14,000.

More so, I think if there's a possibility there that we could create something relevant to a rebate program for first time homeowners or builders, I think a government that's in the economic position that we're in right now, and leading the country in the fastest-growing economy, we have to ensure the infrastructure is there for these young people. It would be more than opportune for us to take a look at it.

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 Minister of Communities, Land and Environment, and it has to do with the land. It's one of the most, greatest assets that we have here on PEI. It's certainly a hot topic every time it comes to the floor.

I know the minister recently asked IRAC to do a report on land ownership, not only of the corporations, how much land they own, but also for non-residents.

IRAC report on land ownership

I'm wondering if the minister could tell us what led him to move on towards this report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

There has been a lot of concern or questions about land ownership on Prince Edward Island over the last number of months, in the last number of years.

It also goes back a long ways, these questions. The Boylan report of 1990, also questioned it. The Carver report that was — came out, one of the recommendations was that IRAC institute or do a study on land ownership here on Prince Edward Island so Islanders can see the facts of who owns what land and its distribution across Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

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

Mr. McIsaac: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During this report, I know when the topic comes up, whether it's in the rural or whether it's in the city area, people love to have their input on it. I'm just wondering if there is a possibility to have comment before this report is finalized and how the members would go about making comment towards this report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Prince Edward Island is an Island and we have a limited amount of land on Prince Edward Island. Due to climate change, we're losing some of it each and every year. It's important that we protect and we use our land the best we can.

With agriculture being our most important industry on Prince Edward Island, it is crucial that we protect agricultural land on Prince Edward Island. It's important that we protect our view-scapes here on Prince Edward Island. We have one of the best islands in Canada and I'd say the world. Our tourists come here to Prince Edward Island to see those beautiful view-scapes so we have to protect them.

The IRAC report will set out the statistics and a bunch of numbers on land ownership and the distribution of that land ownership. I see that as a beginning of a journey for Islanders to get involved in developing policies towards land use and how we protect that land use on Prince Edward Island.

I've met with the agriculture community. I've met with the National Farmers Union. I've had a lot of a number of conversations. Once the House closes, I will be concluding my discussions with them to see once we get the report where to go from there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. McIsaac: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad they're going to have the opportunity to have input into this report. There's already some rumours going around about more trees being planted, reforestation and that, and when there's some concern that that may happen on the very best land. I think reforestation is a great idea.

I'm just wondering if the minister can look at, if we are going to reforest, and I'm not against that in any way shape or form, that, maybe, we put it in perhaps the second-grade land, not so much the (Indistinct)

cultural land. We don't want to lose any of that, at all.

Results found from IRAC report

Again, another question: Again, what are we expecting to find from this report in the end?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

There's also another report. You see a number of reports coming out: How PEI's salt marshes could join the battle against climate change. We have salt marshes. We have watershed groups out there working.

These people are at the frontlines of climate change. They see what's going on. Whatever we can do, and take their recommendations when the watershed groups talk about land use on Prince Edward Island.

As for forestry, I have a dream that we will get rid of the oil tanks here on Prince Edward Island and we will heat our houses with local supplied locally-supplied renewable energy including wind and biomass –

Mr. Trivers: I have the same dream –

Mr. R. Brown: – and we'll have our –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – cars on electricity. I think Prince Edward Island will be one of the first places in the world to go with a no-carbon economy and Islanders (Indistinct)

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, the minister of health talked about Health PEI running multi-year deficits.

Cuts in spending in health system

Minister, what cuts will you make to bring spending under control now that you've taking the decision-making authority away from Health PEI board?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, one of the roles of the whole department now will be to develop a strategic plan going forward. Obviously, the part of that – there are several parts to a strategic plan.

The first part is vision. A vision for, not only today, but for a year out, five years out, 10 years out, so we'll be looking at that big picture. It also tells us about our mission and our purposes. Are we following the wishes of the Islanders when we're looking at this new piece of work?

It also talks about values; values of keeping Islanders in health care facilities for the appropriate amount of time until their ready to go home. Other such things as making sure their needs are met both with quality health care and efficient health care. Those are the things that contribute to efficient health care on Prince Edward Island. That's what we're working towards, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know that this government always talks about wanting to spend tax dollars wisely. The big thing in health is spending tax dollars efficiently. Industrial engineers or system engineers take large systems, they analyze them and in turn they create efficiencies.

We had an industrial engineer in our health care systems a few years ago that was basically solely dedicated to projects that saved money; improved work flow; created efficiencies. Her and her team realized significant improvements in the department.

Current status of industrial engineer team

Now, she left to take on new responsibilities in a new position. What is the current status of this engineering team?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am not aware of every member that works at Health PEI. I do know that every person that works there are very great worker with great backgrounds with great credentials and training to be in the roles they're in.

As we move forward, we will be taking a look at all of those needs. Obviously, when you look at an entity the size of Health PEI and when working with the department of health; absolutely, we need to take in those areas of accountability and transparency.

We have teams and team groups that are working towards that now; have been working towards it in the past. We will work cooperatively with them in the future when it comes to those matters, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll tell you what, if I had a government that had a department of health that took up a significant portion of the budget, as we do here on PEI, I would certainly make it my business to get to know this group, this team within Health PEI that actually creates efficiencies that will save hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars over the long term.

I understand that now the current person that's in health optimization is not solely dedicated to it and has many, many roles to fulfill.

Finding efficiencies in Health PEI

Can the minister of health tell us why this important job is now rolled in with other ones and isn't a dedicated specialty to find efficiencies in Health PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

It's exactly what the hon. member is talking about for the recent – some recent changes. Up until last week, I wouldn't have the ability to investigate the concerns that he's bringing forward today.

As we move forward collaboratively with a vision for extremely high quality, safe health care for Islanders, I will now have that ability to go down and research exactly the comments that the hon. member's making. And I will work with those people and I will look into the situation that you brought forward to ensure that the right people are doing the right jobs so that health care for Islanders is the best it can be.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Health departments all across the country have industrial engineers in them and they have whole divisions of them. These are the groups that make the tough decisions and find the efficiencies. They're the ones that can find those efficiencies; find that money, so that we can afford those new cancer drugs; we can make things work better.

Employment of system engineers

Why don't we employ system engineers to help make these tough decisions and improve our service?

Mr. Trivers: Great question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, again, the hon. member talks about other provinces. Other provinces did have the ability where their minister could go in and look at those types of situations. We will now have that moving forward and I can commit to the fact that, yes, I will get in there; I will look at teams; I will look at teams that need assistance and if we need to hire other staff, I will now have the ability to see that; and I will work so to ensure that

Islanders are protected when it comes to their health care.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid, your final question.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Measures in place for health cards

My final question is to the minister of health: Have you found any other residences in PEI that have hundreds of health cards addressed to it?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly I'd had an opportunity a few days ago to bring forward – when it comes to health cards – all the measures that are put forward: where people have to show up, they have to prove who they are, they have to prove where they live. Obviously, the hon. member probably would have liked that tabled document and I can look forward to bringing those comments back to him in a document form, but when it comes to the health cards on Prince Edward Island, there's a lot of work goes on to ensure that those that need them, get them, but those that don't qualify, don't, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[End of Question Period]