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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 1 JUNE 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.

Referral of referendum bill to committee

My first question is to the Premier: Premier, the referendum bill has been on the floor now for days with little to no progress. Will you refer this bill to the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal to work through this gridlock?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I would strongly defer with the premise of the question, which is that we're not making progress. We are here. We are working in committee of the whole. We are listening to each other. We are taking account of what we're hearing.

I don't think we're anywhere close to a gridlock on this and we appreciate the opportunity to be here as 27 legislators doing our job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Again to the Premier: Premier, the referendum bill is flawed, but it can be improved. Will you allow the all-party democratic renewal committee to consult Islanders on how to strengthen this bill?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I believe that what we've seen from the time this bill has been presented and, indeed, I read very carefully the report from the Attorney General of British Columbia that was released on Wednesday to see that there were strong similarities between the analysis

there and the direction that is recommended there.

Our bill and its architecture and its commitment to have an even playing field; to have a strong, publicly supported dialogue and to enable Prince Edward Islanders to make a clear choice on this question.

I believe that's what we are doing here in this Chamber and I look forward to that continued work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Following question again to the Premier: Premier, government has had two years to prepare for this bill, and clearly it's not ready.

Amendments on referendum bill

Will you send this bill to committee so that the bill's many amendments can be considered?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we are here as an all-party committee, committee of the whole. There are legislatures around the world that would envy the opportunity that we have to be here; to work together; to do it in a collegial fashion. In fact, I would say, anybody watching what we have been doing in this Chamber over the last week or several weeks would have to say that we're getting our work done; that we're taking it to heart. That we have, indeed, the referendum bill being an example of something that comes to the floor; that engages the public. There is time given. There is an exchange. There are amendments.

That, indeed, is the ultimate work that we have as a Legislative Assembly and I look forward to continuing with that work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Again, to the Premier. The stalemate and Green-Red partisan finger pointing is why I favour a more consensus approach.

Partisan gridlock and consensus style of government

Isn't this partisan gridlock a great reason that we should have a more consensus style of government here on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we've been trying to cut back on finger pointing, and I think we've done a good job of that in this sitting since we've brought this bill forward.

I just want to pick up on the characterization of the Leader of the Opposition. We are here as three parties with an important job to do for the people of our province and for the history of our province and for the choices that will be made in terms of our electoral system.

If the Leader of the Opposition feels that they're under engaged, then I welcome that further engagement –

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Premier MacLauchlan: – because we are here. That bill is – it's not actually all that extensive.

I believe that what has been done so far indicates that we are perfecting this bill and that is exactly our work in committee of the whole and I look forward to continuing with that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Again to the Premier: The bruised egos and the heated rhetoric in this debate will make consensus unfortunately very unlikely.

You have three choices. One, continue down this path of gridlock. Two, stifle debate by forcing closure. Three, find consensus by sending the bill to committee. Then, deal with it in the fall. Which will it be, Mr. Premier?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I would not use the word 'gridlock' whatsoever to describe, in fact, that seems to be what the Leader of the Opposition is concerned about is that there are, in fact, changes that are being made through the process of engagement here in this Legislature.

The public has had its say; or, is having its say on this. I believe that is the legislative process. It is, indeed, unfolding in a very active –

Mr. Trivers: Free-for-all.

Premier MacLauchlan: – sense. It is being – this legislation will be, when it is finally adopted, a bill that has been perfected through the legislative process here in this Chamber and together with the people of Prince Edward Island.

I believe that the result will be as the purpose clause says: it will be an opportunity and a vehicle for Prince Edward Islanders to express a clear view and to achieve an unambiguous result and let's continue working on that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Investor in Anne in China

Question to the Premier: How long were you an investor in Anne in China with Frank Zhou?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it's Frank Zhou. I was an investor in that until I became a member, at least until I went into public life. That would be until the winter, probably, February of 2015.

That likely started in 2011 or 2012, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Anne in China is a business venture that holds the exclusive publishing rights to *Anne of Green Gables* books in China.

The Premier, Frank Zhou and their spouses have been partners in this venture for many years.

Anne in China and PNP program

Question to the Premier: Did Anne in China ever access the PNP program while you were business partners with Frank Zhou?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, if it did it was not to my knowledge.

Let me say a word about Anne in China. It was similar to other things I was involved in. It's to find opportunities for Prince Edward Island to do well through business ventures that will be an opportunity to prosper here on Prince Edward Island and for Prince Edward Island to do well on the world stage.

That's exactly what that translation; that new edition; that much acclaimed quality edition of Anne in China or (Indistinct) as it's known in Chinese did, and continues to do for Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The very seam of my questions are, in fact, what the Premier's talking about, that there was a significant amount of business growth during the time that he was partners with Frank Zhou in China. Unfortunately, it was just Frank Zhou's businesses that have grown, and while they were business partners in Anne in China, Frank Zhou's PNP files continued to grow and grow.

PNP growth in Sunrise re: selling Anne in China

Question to the Premier: Did the PNP growth in Sunrise help your business venture with Frank Zhou sell more *Anne of Green Gables* books in China?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I think the growth of *Anne of Green Gables* in China goes back to L.M. Montgomery; a great piece of work in our province, one that has achieved many successes on various fronts, including the recognition this morning of the opening of Chez Yvonne's Restaurant.

L.M. Montgomery's work has continued to achieve for Prince Edward Island, not just in an economic sense, but in a cultural sense, in building our identity. I celebrate all of that and I'm happy to have been part of the group that took that initiative to the world's most populous country of now on the order of 1.4 billion people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier doesn't want to talk about his relationship with Frank Zhou and the fact that while Frank continued to get more and more PNP files, their business in China that he had with Frank grew.

Presentation, which I have here, presentation that was made to your Cabinet eight months ago, and I'll table it in the House later today, says that between 2011 and 2017, Frank Zhou processed the second-largest number of immigrants through PNP in this province.

But, he has a success rate of only one in three.

Frank Zhou success rate

Question to the Premier: Why did government increase Frank Zhou's PNP market share when his success rate was so poor?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the matter that's now being raised was judged according to known criteria, to a scoring system that reflected the RFP process that the minister spoke about yesterday, that was assessed by officials in the agencies that are responsible for immigration; that reflected the improved program that has been spoken about over a period of time in this House, and by the time that comes to Cabinet, it is a proposition that is put forward by those officials.

I believe, and I believe the minister has spoken to this; this has been done in a rigorous way and in a way that will achieve the objectives of our province in terms of immigration and enhanced retention and success of immigrants coming to our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, this is all about the success rate and that's what these questions are now about, if you'd listen to my questions a little more carefully you would hear that what I'm saying is that according to a Cabinet briefing that your Cabinet received eight months ago, that only one third of Frank Zhou's clients are fulfilling their requirements through the PNP program. Which means, two thirds are forfeiting all of their money to the finance minister, which is probably what you guys wanted to happen anyways.

Sunrise's PNP success rate

Question to the Premier: Is that why you have taken the leave-it-be approach to

Sunrise's poor PNP success rate, because you're cashing in big time on it?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I understood from the line of questions from the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters yesterday that he was concerned that we weren't admitting or drawing enough of the business investor applicants, so I guess it comes back to which way do you want it?

Let me be very clear and it's been said here many times, this program is one that started back in the 1990s. It has been something that has evolved and developed and made better, and we are now, on an expression-of-interest basis, achieving a much higher rate of retention. We have a much higher rate indeed in the upwards of 75% who are people who are coming to our province as workers who are tied to, or coming because they have a job.

We are achieving – last year at 1.9% the highest rate of immigration on a per-capita basis of any province in this country and I believe everybody in this House should celebrate that and work to continue to improve it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's scary, the Premier's lack of depth on this issue and the fact that he's trying to trail back to what I said yesterday and turn it into something it's not. I wish he would follow along like a good student, way closer than he is, because he's not at all getting what I have said about PNP for this entire session.

This Premier is allowing a crooked program to remain crooked because he's cashing in on it. That's the problem. It's not about how many people – if the minister of economic development ratchets up the program and let's more in, we want them to stay and not default. That's what immigration is. It's supposed to help Prince Edward Island by growing its population. That's the things

that you have talked about. It's not about stealing immigrants' money and putting it in your coffers so you can spend it wildly and pretend that you balanced the budget.

Premier, you and your spouse, and Frank Zhou and his spouse, have been business partners for a long, long time and you know this. You took *Anne of Green Gables* to China with Frank Zhou. He is the one who is pushing through the most immigrants who aren't staying. So, 33% of his clients aren't staying and he's putting through the second-highest number of immigrants in the program. Think of that and you let him stay there.

Money to province through PNP

Is your cozy business relationship with Frank Zhou the reason why you allow him to stay there, or is it because you're desperate for the money that he is bringing into this province through crooked dealings?

Ms. Biggar: What was the question?

Speaker: Hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, I heard you saying that somebody was stealing money and putting it in their own coffers. That, to me, is a serious accusation and I would think you should withdraw that recall.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't recall exactly saying that, but if that's what I said, I'll paraphrase and say that they're allowing immigrants to default so they can feed their wild spending habits.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it's been said before and I'll say it again; indeed, it does seem to be the very track that the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters followed yesterday, that indeed there is a more select group of investor immigrants who are coming to Prince Edward Island under this upgraded, advanced, evolved program that was evolved and reformed in 2016 into 2017 with the advice of outside reviewers. There was a study by, was it Grant Thornton – and we had acted on those. We have had the Auditor General look at this. We've acted on those.

What Prince Edward Island is achieving today in immigration through workers, through people who are coming here with particular skill sets, for people who are coming as investors and settling throughout our province and staying, is a model that has benefitted from the program that has been in place, and from the fact that people around the world know about Prince Edward Island and it is actually a very big part of what the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point was talking about, and that the opposition doesn't want to hear about, and it's the prosperity and the success, and the increasing global position of our province.

That's exactly what Anne in China was about, and I'm very proud of that too, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have been told that road workers across the districts are in limbo because the allocations have not yet been finalized.

Roadwork allocations across province

Question to the minister: In your district, apparently the allocations have been taken care of. Why have you been allocating road work to your own district but not other districts across Prince Edward Island?

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

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) soapbox derby (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have started with some road work, which is under the 50/50 funding that we made application through, which went out to tender for different segments of that 50/50 new Build Canada funding. That work has started. There's a notice out today that yes, Grand River is started; Urbainville is started. There are some other sections across Prince Edward Island. Those were all tendered out in the middle of the winter for work that

would take place under that 50/50 eligible funding.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Well Mr. Speaker, I'm being told the districts cannot get a handle on what roadwork is going to be done in their districts.

Yes, the minister is right. Work did start in Grand River with a 1.5 resurfacing project in the minister's riding.

Question to the minister: What made this project so urgent that it had to be done right away?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, as I have pointed out, these are projects that went out to tender in the middle of the winter so that work could get started as soon as the spring season was upon us.

We're working in Urbainville. We're working in Grand River. We're working in – I'd have to go back and look at all the other lists that's out there.

We will be moving forward, in addition to that, with other roadwork based on the priorities we get across the province from different districts. The road supervisors are out there working across the districts looking at the other road conditions.

These were projects –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) Twitter so no one could –

Ms. Biggar: – that were identified –

Mr. Myers: – see them.

Ms. Biggar: – last fall that we had to apply for to Build Canada for approval and those tenders after that approval came out went out to tender and these are all across Prince Edward Island and we're glad to have that new funding.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have Twitter tenders and we have Facebook tenders. It has been said urgent – it must have been an urgent priority because the minister was on Facebook saying that the paver was coming through.

Finalized allocation for road paving

Question to the transportation minister: Has your district's riding allocation been finalized yet, or is it just totally minister's discretion when other ridings need paving done?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, actually our paving staff have just come back on –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – our maintenance and workers have just come on for the season starting the end of April. We'll be moving forward with work.

All that tender work for recap also goes out to tender to the construction companies, which hire individuals right across PEI to give them jobs for the summer.

We've got new funding arrangements with the federal government. As I noted, those went out last fall. All those areas were identified last year. We went through a public tender process for those.

We will be doing our priorities across PEI for other paving now that staff are on.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, let's tell you the truth, okay?

They've always tendered out for paving. It's always been done for years and years ago – the different companies and say, what's your

best price on paving across the Island. That's all that's been done.

What we're talking about here, minister, is the priorities. Who makes the decision? It looks like the more than 250 that turned out at the District 23 nomination got your attention.

Road work held up across province

Question to the transportation minister: Do you think it's fair to have district roadwork held up across the Island – and that's exactly what we're talking about– while you try and shore up support in your district with a paver?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I noted, it's great to have people all across PEI come to my district and spend money there. I'm glad to have them.

Again, going back to this process in regard to putting tenders out, the actual recap is tendered out, public tenders to those construction companies –

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct) priorities.

Ms. Biggar: – that then go out. When those allocations are looked at as to what –

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – priorities are in need based on the traffic on that road; the winter breakup on that road and, the locations of those roads, we will then go forward. Now, that the Budget is finally passed and we get out of the Legislature, we'll be able to move forward on – we just passed the final appropriation act the other day.

An Hon. Member: Oh, yeah.

Ms. Biggar: We can't start spending money on that particular side of the budget –

Mr. Fox: Weeks ago.

Ms. Biggar: – which is operational –

Mr. MacKay: You have the paver there (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – until we get out there out and get the Budget passed, which we're finally –

Mr. Fox: We're talking operating budget here –

Ms. Biggar: – able to do.

Mr. Fox: – not the capital.

Mr. Myers: The capital (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Hon. leader, you do have my good graces (Indistinct) for a little longer preamble.

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

Yesterday, during debate the justice minister stated that there have been media and social media reports that show and I quote: Concern or inaccuracy over some of the discussion.

I pulled up the exchange from Hansard to see where the misunderstanding came from. I asked the Speaker's indulgence. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I feel it's really important that we have – that we read back the entire exchange.

I asked the justice minister, "So does that mean that a newspaper or another media company would not be able to produce, for example, a special issue on the referendum if they wanted to? If it was a particular issue specifically about the referendum? Or an insert, for example, which often happens on these things, would they be allowed to do that?"

The minister answered, "It would depend on the circumstances."

I said, "Okay, so perhaps not."

The minister said, "Perhaps not, yeah."

I said, "Okay."

The minister said, "And perhaps they would."

I said, “And do you think those sorts of limits, if indeed that is a limit, you think that’s justifiable under the charter?”

Minister, “Yeah.”

Me, “You do?”

Minister, “Yeah.”

Me, “Okay. Can I ask Gary...” Gary Demeulenaere “...if he feels the same way?”

The minister, “I just answered the question. Gary’s here to assist in our answers and that’s the position that we’ve put forward.”

Attack on right to free press

A question to the minister of justice: How could a rational person not interpret that exchange as anything other than an attack on our right to a free press?

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

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

Perhaps, the hon. member should have asked for a few more minutes to go right back to when I said: anybody that’s doing business in their ordinary course would have nothing to worry about.

What we are putting forward here is a program that will allow for a fulsome, open and transparent debate on this subject. We value freedom of the press. That is what we are saying. We have made provisions for the press to be able to do their jobs. We value their job in a free and democratic society.

We are putting forward a great program that we feel will allow Islanders to express their wishes, their desires to sharpen their understanding of the options that are available to them, including through the help of the press.

We feel that the program that we are putting forward will allow them to do that without having the ability of outside money or big money to come in and unduly influence the debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Minister there are currently 14 amendments. You might refer to that as a fist full of amendments proposed for this bill and you plan to introduce even more.

Flawed bill re: complete overhaul

When will you admit that this bill is too flawed to proceed on the floor and it needs a complete overhaul?

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

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

We had an interview this morning on CBC and I made this comment then, and I, maybe, will even expand on it now. I marvel at the suggestion that any legislation is, quote-on-quote, too flawed to proceed.

This member went out of here last fall saying that everybody in here had the job to come to the table everyday to work professionally towards an outcome in terms of the legislation that we have before us on behalf of our constituents.

It’s in that spirit that we have brought these amendments forward. We are very happy to work with the third party and the official opposition and the Member from West Royalty-Springvale to be able to put the best bill possible forward for Prince Edward Islanders.

It’s our intent and it is the objective of this process to establish a process that Islanders feel confident that will result in a fair and equal playing field and result in a clear, unambiguous answer to a clear question.

That’s what we’re trying to achieve and we hope everybody else in here will help us out with that process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, at any time, it's difficult to deliberate and debate legislation. It's particularly difficult when an amendment comes forward in the middle of debate. It's particularly difficult when you have 14 active amendments on a single bill and that's what we're faced with here.

With our next election a year-and-a-half away, there is absolutely no rush to pass this bill immediately, at all.

Referral of referendum bill to committee (further)

To the same minister: Will you send this bill to the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal for review and public input and ask them to report back to the House in November of this year?

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

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

I'm happy to see all of the members of this Legislature here working on behalf of their constituents.

The hon. member had two and a half or three hours to open the debate in respect of this bill. We were all very patient. We all listened to what he had to say. We went on debating the bill at length. We've been at it for four or five hours at this point in time. We've been listening to Prince Edward Islanders. We've taken the input. We've begun to craft amendments based on the input that we're getting, and this is all the work of the Legislature.

It's a point that the hon. member himself made last fall. It's one that we certainly abide by, and we are very happy to be here doing the work of Prince Edward Islanders. Who's in a rush? We are in the second-longest – we might even be the first longest, as far as I'm aware of, but we're in the second-longest sitting of the Legislature and we're content to be here until we get this work done, and we're content to get that program in place so that Prince Edward Islanders can move forward and have

confidence in a fair and equal process to take them forward to a referendum.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Casey: Mr. Speaker, my question today is to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

At the beginning of the spring session, I asked the minister about the department's work in assessing the suitability of Province House as the future long-term home of the Legislative Assembly. At the time, the minister said the staff was cataloguing current and future requirements, and it was the department's intent to have Province House meet the needs of the Legislative Assembly now and into the future.

Cost to re-establish LA in Province House (further)

I'm assuming the timeline is tight for this important project. Has the department made a decision whether or not Province House will meet the future operational needs of this Assembly, and will substantial provincial investment be needed to meet those requirements?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to see the work that's happening next-door to us to proceed going forward.

As we know, but maybe Islanders don't know, the legislative precinct is made up of the Legislature, the Coles Building, the J. Angus MacLean Building, and also, we're using the rectory.

We feel that we have those facilities to work towards making sure that we meet the needs of staff, of Legislative Assembly members, and we are working towards that goal.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Timeline for work on Province House

Minister, what is the timeline for decisions to be made, and has any consideration been given to other options given these tight deadlines?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The work, the schedule of work that is happening is on schedule, working towards completion. We have moved forward with taking steps to move the public archives out of the fourth floor of this Coles Building, so that will free up more space for the third party and for Elections PEI. So, those things are on target to move forward. We've taken immediate steps to start that process and again, the schedule of work for Province House is on target and we will work towards those targets for completion.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, I was pleased to hear that you have put \$3 million in your budget to start the process for the demolition of the Prince Edward home. The site, which is adjacent to the residence of the Lieutenant Governor, and across the street from government buildings and it has great potential for a number of uses. I'm sure there will be great public interest in this property.

Former PE home property re: location for LA

Should it become clear that provincial costs to reinstate the Assembly at Province House due to operational compromises, would your department consider the Prince Edward Home land as the future home for our legislative operations?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We had this conversation when I was at the table and the member from that area asked me this question. We made a commitment, yes, to put money in the budget to have that there for the demolition process.

Again, I indicated we have to look at the energy from waste/heat system that's connected to that building. We made a commitment also, that we would consult with the community. So that's where we are. We will honour that commitment before anything is used on that particular property.

Again, the project for the Legislative Assembly, Province House, is on target and we will be working to incorporate the needed space for the work of the Legislative Assembly into the existing precinct that we have.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

Minister, I have six incorporated municipalities within my district and some are concerned that the changes in the *Municipal Government Act* is pushing the smaller communities in rural PEI to amalgamate. Some of these constituents have expressed concern over whether or not this is the best option for them moving forward.

Forced amalgamation in West Prince

Minister, will these communities be forced to amalgamate together? Can you please tell me whether they'll be forced or not?

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

Mr. Trivers: Good question.

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

Communities are the backbone of Prince Edward Island. They are what makes Prince Edward Island the unique place it is today, and that's why we have over one million

tourists coming to Prince Edward Island each and every year, to see our uniqueness in these areas.

I can say right from that first: No, we are not going to force municipalities to amalgamate. No, we're not going to force communities to amalgamate. There is a process in the *Municipal Government Act* where people can get together, study the options of coming together. But, it is in their way – it is in their hands and when a decision comes to go, there is an opportunity to go to IRAC to hear the hearing and to make a recommendation to Executive Council.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm so glad to hear that they won't be forced into it.

But, these communities just feel that they're getting along fine just the way they are now – some of these communities feel like that.

The regulations that are in place are expecting communities to get their affairs in order within five years of the act being proclaimed.

Requirement and timeline of act

Minister, what happens when the five years are up and some communities have still not met the requirements laid out in the act?

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

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for that question.

I know he works extremely hard for his communities, as all members in the Legislature.

There's a five-year transition period. We're working with the communities. We're working with the federation of municipalities to assist communities to meet the requirements of the act. But, if some communities cannot meet the requirements

of the act, in no way are we going to force them into it.

We're going to continue to work with them. If it's meaning that the department or the federation of municipalities set up some sort of a centralized system to assist communities in their accounting or in their telephone inquiries, we're open to those options.

What we want to do; we have great communities right across Prince Edward Island. We want to work with those communities and make Prince Edward Island the great place it is, to live, work, and play, and raise a family.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the requirements includes hiring an administrator for 20 hours a week, in other words, to hold all-day elections.

Administrators and election expenses

Minister, what will happen to these communities if they are unable to afford both the hiring and the election expenses involved under the act? Will government help them?

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

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

That is another question I'm asked quite often when I'm out and about.

There are new technologies, there are the computer systems now, there are telephone systems – there are all kinds of technology out there that it could be a virtual office. We're not going to force municipalities to hire somebody for 20 hours a week. If we can come up with solutions that communities can work together – or if one community wants to share an office in another community's area, we're open to anything.

Our objective here is to work with the rural communities right across Prince Edward Island and continue to make Prince Edward

Island one of the best places to live, work, and raise a family, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's come to our attention that there was an urgent emergency memo sent out yesterday that details the lack of ER coverage at the Kings County Memorial Hospital in June.

Closures at KCMH emergency room (further)

Can the minister of health confirm if this is true?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Over the past, I'll say, number of months there has been situations where the Kings County emergency room where we haven't been able to provide physician coverage. I met with a room full of people a couple of Friday nights ago, and Dr. Scott Campbell from the Montague area, he's an ER doc; he's a doc from that area who met with the community to inform about a new process moving forward where there will be a triage of patients at a particular time of the day if the room has so many people in it where the frontline staff, the nurses and the doctors, will triage patients to determine the urgency of their illness. If they can come back the next day, they will be asked to do so.

What we're trying to do is provide sustainable ER coverage for the Kings County region. There's a vast amount of population down there that we're trying to provide health care service to in a very effective way. So, this is a process that's been in place for some time and we're going to move forward with a new plan after today, June 1st.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't hear of other places in PEI with this many closures and I hope that the minister knows how important this is to Eastern PEI.

I understand this memo details that we are lacking coverage on June 3rd, 4th, 5th, 9th, 11th, 12th, 16th, 18th, 19th, the 22nd, the 25th, the 26th, and the 29th of June.

Mr. Myers: Holy smokes.

Mr. MacEwen: It's serious. We don't have walk-in clinics down there.

Minister, what are we going to do to cover that amount of time?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the past, there have been indicated days where physicians were unable to fill their requirement in the ER. Physicians from other regions, from the Queens County region, have stepped up and covered those spots for those physicians from that area.

The member has indicated a fair number of spots, but those are out the road, down into the future. We will be dealing with other physicians from all over Prince Edward Island to determine if anybody can step up to fill in the needs that are there.

This is not a unique situation. We have had several in the past where there would have been a run of three or four or five, but physicians stepped up to fill them in and we might have ultimately ended up with one uncovered. This is not uncommon.

I would anticipate that other physicians from other areas, including the QEH, will step up to fill most of those spots, Mr. Speaker, if not all.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly isn't down the road. We're talking about Sunday, Monday and Tuesday

to start with. That's not down the road. That's this weekend.

I had mentioned before about scope of practice for pharmacists and looking at other options, and I hope the minister is taking some of these suggestions to heart.

There is a nursing staff down there at the Kings County Memorial Hospital that is going to be working these shifts. They're going to be there. We all know that nurses aren't using their full scope of practice either. In fact, in Ontario RNs are now prescribing medications as well.

Expanding scope of practice for RNs

Is the health minister looking at expanding the scope of practice for the nurses down in Montague?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

The situation that is in Kings County Memorial is unfortunate. But, at that meeting that night Dr. Campbell talked about physician burnout. We don't want that to occur. Doctors are working significantly long shifts per day when they are their ER duty, so we're looking at adjusting those hours for those physicians so that it's not a 14-hour day. It will be a seven-hour coverage split in two.

There was a lot of conversation that night about nurse practitioners being a potential possibility. There was also discussion on walk-in clinics as being something that could be looked at down the road. None of those options have been turned away or shut down. But, currently as of today, we will be providing those split shifts for the ER physicians. We will be providing opportunities for frontline staff to triage those that their illness is not of an urgent nature that can come back tomorrow. They will be prioritized.

But all in all, it's about maintaining our physicians – are not burnt-out. Our frontline staff is not burnt out, that when you go for your ER experience; you're being met by

not exhausted doctors, by doctors that are well rested for your patient safety.

It's something that we will continue to work on. This will be the first stage to see how this works out. All options are still options. We are looking at everything, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is no walk-in coverage in Souris for the next two weeks. There is a nurse practitioner in Morell one day a week for the next two weeks. The ER has a lack of coverage. We know the percentage of non-emergency people that are going to the Montague ER because we don't have the physician coverage in the rest of Kings County.

The minister keeps talking about it's hard to get doctors, and they're meeting, and this kind of stuff. We know. Sometimes, that stuff is out of your control. But, guess what's in your control? Guess what you can actually go and do as minister?

You can work on the scope of practice of all these health professionals that we have been talking about. You can actually go and listen to our ideas here. You can listen to the professionals' ideas that they keep meeting with you all the time. You can actually effect change that could change this right now and get these people the help they need, if you take the leadership.

Minister: Will you take the leadership and do this?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, I take my role as minister of health quite seriously. I have met, in the past, and will continue to meet into the future with frontline RNs; frontline BNs; frontline LPNs. I've met with pharmacists about expanding scope of practice.

Everybody is very passionate about the work they do that are working the health care system now; all frontline staff have a

primary focus on patient health. I will continue those conversations to see where we can strengthen scope of practice for all frontline professionals.

There are issues that are out of our control. That is for certain, but we can work with the frontline people how best we can provide safe, quality, efficient health care for all residents of Prince Edward Island, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]