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

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 6 JUNE 2018

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, the Member from Borden-Kinkora asked me a number of questions about Island Waste Watch Management commission and disposal of rubber belts, specifically.

I'd like to just report that there are currently no markets for recycling rubber belts or other rubber products other than tires that are currently available. Island Waste Watch Management commission is constantly seeking recycling markets for all materials. However, at this time there is no market for recycling rubber belts.

As well, there were questions about asbestos material disposal. Asbestos materials require a special disposal permit issued by department of environment and require licensed disposal companies to remove and dispose of them.

Currently, any asbestos material received under a permit issued by the department of environment, is placed in special disposal bags and placed in the Island Waste Watch Management commission landfill. It is covered with material.

If there is any other information that is required, Gerry Moore, who is the chief executive officer has advised he'd be happy to answer any further questions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Test results from Three Oaks and Health Canada guidelines

My first question today is to the transportation minister: Minister, when did

you first learn that environmental test results at Three Oaks did not meet Health Canada air quality guidelines?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We began construction of this project back, actually, in the fall, I believe, of 2016. In March of 2017, we stopped work. There was an area that showed up that did not show up on the original drawings, so work was stopped. We did a number of tests. Then, we certainly work every day with the workers compensation and occupational health and safety.

Any time, I think there were three breaches during the whole process and any time a breach had occurred work has stopped. We are not allowed to work within that environment if there are any indications of levels that are higher than required.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

A further question to the minister of transportation. Your own test results showed asbestos contamination levels more than 50 times above acceptable levels. Contamination was so bad that WCB issued a stop work order in March of 2017.

(Publicly release of all test results from TOSH (further))

Question to the minister: Why weren't students, staff and parents told about these serious problems with your project?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, back in March of 2017, this was reported publicly to the school. It's not a new occurrence that has just occurred and is just being reported. It was identified. It was reported. Work was stopped. Nothing continued until everything was rectified and we got the go ahead to continue with work.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Further question to the transportation minister. It took two months of questions from our PC caucus and a freedom of information request from parents to pry these test results.

Minister: Didn't students, staff and parents deserve to know what they were being exposed to for the last two years at Three Oaks?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I go back to March, 2017, when that was identified that it was an area that did not show up on the original drawings. Worked was stopped. Tests were done. Nothing proceeded until everything was identified to be cleared and cleared off by workers compensation and occupational health and safety.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Providing safe environment for students

Again, to the minister of transportation: Yesterday, you said every effort was made to have a safe environment for the students. How can you say that with a straight face when 40 students, thus far, have gotten sick from spending two years in an open construction site full of asbestos?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, I would implore the member over there to stop scaring individuals with this kind of discussion. This has been identified –

Mr. Myers: No (Indistinct) inviting –

Ms. Biggar: – yes, back in –

Mr. Myers: – this (Indistinct) we've invented this, actually. Is that what you're saying? Give me a break.

Speaker: Go ahead.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) than that.

Ms. Biggar: As I said, this was an area that was identified in March of 2017. It was reported. It was, you know, continuously monitored. The area that was abated, we cordoned that off. We had daily tests. We're doing daily tests. We're putting the tests online. They're within Health Canada levels.

Everything, at this point, is going forward. We expect this work to be 75% complete by September of 2018 and to wrap up this project by the winter of 2019.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Students see what's going on around them at Three Oaks. I have seen videos shared by students showing wet, moldy ceiling tiles falling to the floor in classrooms. I have seen videos showing welding sparks flying across the hall from behind closed-door work areas.

Question to the minister: Do you consider that that providing a safe environment for students?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Students are not located, during the day, in the area where construction is happening. That is completely sealed off –

Mr. MacKay: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – during the day. There were breaches of those areas and extra security was put on so nobody could breach into those areas to do videos. Again, I want to reiterate, there are no students in a classroom in that area while

construction is going on.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Again, to the minister of transportation: Minister, you knew the facts and you actually hid the facts. Now, students and staff are getting sick because of it. Minister: Wouldn't you say that's the very definition of negligence?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Every day, on site at that particular construction site, we have daily meetings with the construction manager, with department of transportation; with the principal of that school. We have air quality testing individuals on site.

We have had workers compensation in there. We have done testing. We have released those tests to the public online now.

We've released those testing. We have an ad hoc committee that parents are involved in where we sat down; they have access to those.

We are continuing with that work so that 75% of it will be complete by September.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In law negligence is defined as: failure to use reasonable care resulting in damage or injury to others.

Mismanagement by government at Three Oaks

Question to the transportation minister: How is the shameful mismanagement at Three

Oaks not a clear-cut case of government being negligent?

Mr. Fox: Yes.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'll go back to say that there are daily testing going on. We have engaged with an air quality specialist, we are working with Occupational Health and Safety, with workers compensation, with the school, with parents to ensure that everything meets all the guidelines under Health Canada. Any work that is outside of those guidelines is stopped and would not proceed until all testing is clear. We are proceeding, we have gotten those tests, and as again I will say, all that work will be 75% complete by September and we expect completion by the winter of 2019.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On April 10th you told me and all Islanders that, and I quote: Again, I want to ensure everyone that's listening: parents, staff, students that the air quality at the school is safe.

Apology for misrepresentation of facts

Question to the transportation minister: Clearly you're going to have to walk that statement back. Will you apologize to students and staff for misrepresenting the facts?

Mr. Fox: Yes.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We did air quality testing during March and throughout the project, we started extra testing in March, April, and May. We will continue with that testing. Students, obviously now, are out of the school, we'll be able to accelerate construction in those areas. Now that the students are not in those

particular areas, we'll be able to accelerate that work so that 75% of it is done by September and we'll be able to get that project done, again, by winter 2019.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On May 25th you told me that, and I quote: As was just mentioned by the minister of education, the air test for April has certainly come back clear in regard to Canada health standards.

Question to the transportation minister: Are you still sticking to that statement you made?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All of those tests are online. We are doing daily testing, again I will reiterate. Any anomalies that are there or any concerns, work would be stopped. We have posted those, we're continuing to work with Occupational Health and Safety, workers compensation are on site, we have an air quality test specialist on site, we have extra security on site so nobody can breach the construction area and we will continue with our work to get it to completion.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Test results from April showed readings above recommended asbestos exposure guidelines for both annual and 24-hour periods. Particulate levels were also noted to be consistently above the guidelines during the test period.

Test results above recommended guidelines

Question to the transportation minister: Were you just guessing when you said that, or were you deliberately making up alternative facts to fit your spin?

Mr. Fox: Yes.

Mr. Myers: You just got yourself blocked on Twitter.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, we are moving forward, we're accelerating construction so that majority of the work will be done by September and we'll complete that project by 2019.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the transportation minister: Has there been anything that you told Islanders about this project that was accurate or truthful?

Mr. Fox: Yes.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can assure you that we have constant communication with the ad hoc committee that's in place.

Mr. LaVie: Answer the question.

Ms. Biggar: We have been able to complete a great majority of the work there that is going to increase and enhance the experience of students at that school. We're continuing on accelerating the construction period during the time now that students are not there. We will have the majority done by September and we're looking forward to providing a new, reconstructed facility for those students.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If I were a parent of a student at TOSH or I had a loved one working there, I'd be hopping mad about the negligence of the government on this project.

School project and health risk to students

Question to the transportation minister: This is the biggest school capital project in the province. How did you and your government let this Three Oaks project fly so far off the rails, putting our children's health at risk?

Mr. Fox: Yes.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, first and foremost, health and safety are at the forefront of any project that we do across this province.

Mr. Fox: Can't be, or we wouldn't have kids sick.

Mr. Myers: So true. Good point.

Ms. Biggar: All of the guidelines that are necessary to follow within workers compensation –

Mr. Fox: Forty children.

Ms. Biggar: – within Occupational Health and Safety are rigidly adhered to. We meet daily to ensure that if there's construction going on in a particular area, that there are no students located in that area. We will continue with that protocol and if there's any concerns, work will be stopped. However, we are working towards getting completion of that project by 2019. It is the largest reconstruction and school project that has ever been done. It is \$23 million. We are working within that footprint because to replace that facility of that size would be \$40 million and we are working within the footprint that we have to reconstruct a facility for the best service to the students in the area.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I bet if there was asbestos, mould, and water quality issues found in any Cabinet minister's office, they wouldn't stay working in that environment for three years.

Mr. LaVie: Three days.

Mr. MacKay: If those types of conditions wouldn't be good enough for you and your Cabinet, why are they good enough for students and staff at Three Oaks.

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Mr. Fox: Forty kids.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, there's been no indication of mould. Any time we test for mould, it's because it has a history of water leakage or breach of water coming into the system. So we should be very careful on what we're saying that is in a particular area of any building and we will continue with the project to ensure that we get as much done by September – again, 75% will be complete. There are no students –

Mr. Myers: The issue is you won't tell the truth. Or you can't.

Ms. Biggar: – in any area where any construction takes place.

Mr. Fox: Then why are they sick?

Mr. Myers: Or you don't know the truth.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mould testing at Three Oaks

Minister: Can you confirm that you are doing mould testing at Three Oaks School?

Mr. Fox: Yes.

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, I'll go back and get that information, but the member brought up mould.

Some Hon. Members: You just said it.

Ms. Biggar: The member brought up mould and I said there is no testing that is needed unless there is an –

Mr. Myers: You got caught in that (Indistinct) lie.

Ms. Biggar: – indication of any kind of a breach for water or anything that would cause mould. We have not indicated that. I will go back and get as much information on that.

Mr. Myers: There was one question about it. How did you forget it?

Ms. Biggar: Just to quell the misinformation that is going out there to the public from the opposition.

Some Hon. Members: From you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A week or two ago, there was a 911 call came into police to respond to a mental health crisis in Eastern PEI. This man was presenting as very suicidal. He had to be taken down by force, actually. Thankfully, in this case, the person did receive care, eventually.

Progress on mobile mental health team

A question to the health minister: What progress has been made on adding a mobile mental health team to our frontline services?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Certainly the mental health landscape on Prince Edward Island is definitely changing. Obviously increasing mental health services is key to our government. There's been a number of measures that have been put in place over the last number of years that are contributing to mental health, I'll say, successful outcomes for Islanders, beginning with early intervention for our young

children now with our school resource teams.

We have our youth programs – both INSIGHT Program and Strength Program that are proving to be great successes when we're dealing with our youth –additional walk-in clinics for other Islanders and our senior help programs are all providing successful outcomes. We continue to enhance those programs moving forward.

We've dedicated up to \$3 million for this fiscal to be put into mental health. I'd say a fair number of work is being done in mental health care needs for Islanders right across our province, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister didn't even come close to answering my question.

Mobile mental health teams, as we have been reminded many times in this House, bring together a range of health and law enforcement professionals to provide a collaborative service. Social workers, nurses, law enforcement and others work together to provide care to someone in crisis.

The example I just raised is real and it's a textbook case of something that a mobile mental health team could take care of.

I'll ask the minister again: How close are we to putting in a mobile mental health team here in PEI?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) need some action.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier in this legislative session I alluded to the fact that there is a fair amount of work going on with our mobile mental health response team and how it's being put together.

Recruitment of four new psychiatrists earlier on in the springtime, along with Dr. Heather

Keizer, and the experience and the expertise that they have, how a program of this nature should look, has been instrumental on the work thus far.

I am very hopeful that we will be able to be moving forward with this in the very near future. I, like the member across the floor, do understand that there are mental health needs out there that need to be addressed. I do not have any information on the case that he referenced. I know nothing about that particular case, but I do know that Islanders are dealing with mental health issues every day.

As Minister of Health and Wellness, I take that very seriously. I am committed to work with those individuals. I'm committed to developing new programs, and a lot of work is going on and we'll continue to make investments there.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The mental health strategy called for this team. The suicide prevention strategy called for this team. The minister says there are things going on.

Timeline for mental health crisis team

What is going on and when will we see this mental health crisis team?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As early as a couple of weeks ago at the table there on budget discussions we alluded to the fact that this is a commitment of our government. We know that these needs need to be met, and we are working collaboratively as a team to develop –

Mr. Trivers: Any idea when?

Mr. Mitchell: – what that should look like, to determine what it looks like in other jurisdictions across Canada, and other areas internationally.

We are going to adapt the best practices so that we can move forward in the best possible way to ensure that Islanders' needs are being met, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Prince Edward Island is the only Atlantic Province without this valuable frontline service. The health accord that was signed with Ottawa doesn't even provide funding for these teams until year three of the agreement. That's a long ways out, minister.

Acceleration of funds

Question, again, to the health minister: Can this funding be accelerated so these teams can be in place sooner and deal with the examples that I just raised and the hundreds of others that we see online every day?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is a significant amount of work going on on this program, but as minister of health I am quite proud of work that's going on in mental health areas all across the province.

Currently, what is happening in Prince Edward Island is we have added community-based investments, adding family supports for people struggling with mental health, we are partnering with CMHA for a PEI Suicide Prevention Strategy. We have our mental health walk-in clinics that are being introduced and enhanced; student well being teams in the school. We recruited four new psychiatrists, commitment to establish these mobile response teams.

Planning is well underway and master planning and programming for a new mental health campus is underway at the Hillsborough Hospital area.

A lot of work is going on. We are very proud of the work that's going on, and we continue to work with all of those in the health care system and the mental health field, and with Islanders to ensure that we

are doing the best job we can possibly do Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Browsing through Hansard, I found the following quote in reference to fixed-date elections, and I quote: I believe a governing party preoccupied by partisan concerns should not control the timing of our most important democratic function –

Mr. Myers: Robert Ghiz?

Timing of democratic function

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – whether that be Liberal, Conservative, or NDP.

A question to the Premier, and it's a multiple choice question: Can you tell me who said that? Was it A, the current Minister of Communities, Land and Environment? B, yourself? C, as my hon. member to the left has already indicated, premier Robert Ghiz? Or, D, none of the above?

Mr. Myers: I've been following politics for far too long.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I expect we'll hear the response to the question when we get to the supplemental so I'll wait for the answer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

Well, indeed it was premier Ghiz.

It's interesting as – congratulations, you win a prize.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Dr. Bevan-Baker: It's interesting that during premier Ghiz' final year-end

interview with *The Guardian* he described the fixed-date election as a mistake. But, he also said in that interview: If you do have a fixed-election date, you should stick to it.

I have to admire his consistency.

Fixed-date election law

Again, to the Premier: Do you agree that the Premier is obligated to stick to the fixed-date election law?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, yes I agree that all of us in this Chamber and all Islanders are obligated, to use his words, to respect the *Election Act* and I believe we reviewed that at some length here in this Chamber last night to the point where everything that the Leader of the Third Party has said about this has been proven to be incorrect.

That is to say that 4.1 –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) the question.

Premier MacLauchlan: – sub (1) of the *Election Act* makes very clear the role of Lieutenant Governor and that is exactly what we have done.

If you read through 4.1 sub (2), 4.1 sub (3), we will have a very clear understanding of what exactly the *Election Act* says.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Premier, you've been in office now for almost three years and if you think that fixed-date elections are a bad idea, wouldn't it be much more open and transparent to amend the *Election Act* and publicly explain why rather than make an executive decision that the law should not apply to you personally.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) election (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the law applies to all of us and the law, if the Leader of the Third Party would take the trouble to read it and to permit himself to follow it, would understand that 4.1 sub (1) has a certain meaning and 4.1 sub (2) and sub (3) have a certain meaning and indeed, the Leader of the Third Party has been arguing vociferously that Islanders should go five years between elections, and we have never done that in our history.

The average period between elections in this province has been 42 months, and the very heading under which he is making that argument speaks to four-year elections. I recommend that the third party leader spend some time reading the law.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Minister, in other provinces if a firefighter or a fire investigator is diagnosed with prescribed cancer and meets certain employment durations and additional criteria for the prescribed cancer, then the disease is presumed to be an occupational disease due to the nature of the worker's employment unless the contrary is shown.

PEI is the only province which does not have occupational cancer coverage.

Occupational cancer coverage for firefighters

Has your department been made aware of this type of coverage and how it can benefit our Island firefighters?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, hon. member, I'm aware of this type of coverage and I do want to point out to this

House and everyone that firefighters, like all workers, are covered under workers comp for injury or sickness and I do want to make you aware – the hon. member's reference to the question about cancer, if they were covered. We do need to maybe look at this and make some improvements to firefighters in terms of process for their claims and I'd like to commit that we will look at expanding legislation on this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well minister, it's good to hear that.

On a follow up to that, can the minister inform the House as to whether your department would be open to implementing such coverage in PEI, for PEI firefighters on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I had indicated previously, we do think this is very important that we will be in collaboration and discussions with the workers comp board to put this at the top of their legislative amendments for the fall session.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister: Will your department commit to going out and working with firefighters on PEI on this additional coverage?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Absolutely. We'll contact the Firefighters Association as soon as we can and see where

we can come up with ways to help them with this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Family and Human Services. Back in December, 2017, the health and wellness committee recommended that all multi-unit dwellings on Prince Edward Island become smoke-free.

Provincial multi-use dwellings smoke-free

What has your department done with this recommendation to consider that multi-unit dwellings, owned by the province will be included in this *Smoke-free Places Act*?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Currently, many of our social housing buildings are smoke-free. However, we do have some of our buildings that do offer smoking units for those clients, who have been unable to quit smoking.

We follow the current legislation of the *Smoke-free Places Act*. If, indeed, that act would be changed in the future, we would most definitely follow that legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The province is the largest landlord on the Island. Minister, your department is now in the process of developing a provincial housing strategy and I'm pleased that you've just awarded a 44-unit housing unit to Charlottetown.

New housing units be smoke-free

Will you ensure Islanders that any new

housing units built on the Island will be required to be smoke-free?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You are correct, hon. member. We do work with various community partners and private-market partners in the development of affordable housing across Prince Edward Island.

When these units are created, we take the various needs of Islanders into consideration, including those who have not been able to quit smoking. We will continue to monitor these needs and work with our partners in the future as we move forward with the housing action plan, as well as the legislation that could, or could not be, changed with the *Smoke-free Places Act*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Research has shown second-hand smoke is known to be one of the biggest causes of cancer to our population.

Smoking cessation program for seniors

As the minister responsible for seniors, would you consider a program for smoking cessation for those already living in provincial housing and who want to quit smoking?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We do understand, as a government, that quitting smoking can be very difficult. That's why, through the department of health, we do offer smoking cessation programs.

We also offer cost assistance for Islanders, who want to quit smoking through things such as the nicotine patch or the nicotine

gum. Islanders can also call an Island helpline to access other programs that might help them quit smoking, as well.

We will continue – our staff at housing services, to help applicants and tenants to connect with community partners, also, who may be able to help them in their journey to quit smoking.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Audiologist services help Islanders young and old, who may be having hearing issues.

Vacancy in audiologist position

Question to the health minister: What progress has been made to fill the provincial audiologist position that has been vacant for four months?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hearing services are offered to all Islanders through our Public Health services. Currently, there are vacancies that we are trying to fill through recruitment and retention.

I believe that there has been some work done there, but we are still looking to fill those vacancies at the present time.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe the position has been vacant since February. The vacancy is not advertised on the Health PEI website or among audiologist job boards.

I understand that there may be someone starting late in the summer. Minister: Can you confirm that?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can't confirm that off the floor today. I'd have to go back and do some requests on that.

There are some of our audiologist services that are provided by private audiologists. In order to be seen by a private audiologist, you do need to be referred either by your family doctor, nurse practitioner, public health nurse or a language speech pathologist in order to get that referral.

There are several that are available to do that service. But, we are continuing to look at needs and go out and recruit audiologists to come and work on PEI.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The former minister of health acted on a suggestion by the Leader of the Opposition to improve access and allowed a greater role for private audiologists. You mentioned that some are being used.

Wait times for private audiologists

Can you tell me what the wait times are and how much it has been cut by the private audiologists?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Currently, there are, I'll call, quite a few wait times. Hearing screening is also often carried out through our public school system.

Back in 2016-2017 there were three hundred – almost 375 screenings done, which meant that 33 or 34 of them had to be advanced into audiologists.

Currently, wait times, we have auditory processing disorder assessment. We have 120 clients waiting there. We have hearing assessments, 123 waiting there. Auditory brain response, 42 waiting and some of these times vary from a few months up to 16

months. There are wait times. That is an issue that we're certainly concerned about.

We are looking to recruit audiologists. We are also referring to private audiologists where we can. It is something that is on the radar and we're trying to deal with it.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Access to specialist service

Anyone with hearing issues can't wait up to two years for a specialist. With the vacancy that we have, can you tell me: What is the best way for anyone with hearing issues to access some type of specialist service?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Islanders that may have concerns about either their health or their children's health can request an audiology assessment through the provincial audiology clinic, which is located in Charlottetown.

Obviously, this goes right up to age 21 if you have hearing needs with hearing aids or anything like that. There is a broad range of work that they do there. Just contact the provincial audiology clinic and they will be able to direct Islanders as to the best possible way to get their assistance, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Wait times and role of private audiologists

Extended wait lists have been going on for years with Audiology Services. To the minister: Will ongoing delays to access audiology service mean a bigger role for those private audiologists going forward?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Until we can recruit audiologists to come and take in the vacancies that we have, obviously, that will create a bit of a more load on the private audiologists that exist today in our province. Obviously, we want to support them where we can, but we also need to continue to recruit. We need to continue to identify needs that we need to have met when it comes to audiology needs.

Obviously, Islanders – the wait times are a little longer than we'd like to see, but we are going to try to do our best to ensure that those vacancies get filled as quickly as we can – as quickly as we can identify people to come and work here and hopefully that we will have some resolve there in the near future, Mr. Speaker.

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

Advertising for provincial audiologist position

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know there are wait times. We know it's an issue. Why are you not advertising, minister? Why is there no advertising for this audiologist that's really needed and when is the earliest we can expect to have a provincial audiologist working for us again?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not certain why it's not being advertised on the website. I will look into that when I go back to the office. It's important that the word gets out that we are definitely; indeed searching, but our recruitment and retention team would be looking as well when they have conversations with available audiologists.

The group at Health PEI would obviously be out trying to find people to fill these vacancies. It is a concern. It's a concern to anybody that's waiting to have any tests done. It's a concern to families of small children that are having hearing problems when it comes to their learning abilities. This is a very serious concern. We take it

very seriously and we will try to have those vacancies filled as early as we possibly can. This is something that Islanders have at their forefront and we do as a department as well, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]