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

FOR

TUESDAY, 18 JUNE 2019

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: Now for our first question, I'll ask for the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Since our recent election, the Premier and indeed many members of this Legislature from all sides, myself included, have talked a great deal about the desire to instill a more cooperative and respectful politics in this House and to make this Legislature and government work for all Islanders.

The Premier's election platform stated; an intent to, and I quote: "Foster a spirit of collaboration, inclusiveness, and respect within the political process and specifically here within the Legislative Assembly."

Collaboration within political process

Question to the Premier: How do you envision accomplishing these goals?

Premier King: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much to the Leader of the Opposition for the first question. It's a very important question and it's one that, I believe, he and I and members of the other party have actually been delivering on.

I think where I see collaboration and cooperation is what we have been demonstrating so far since we have actually been put in this position and that is to talk with individuals from all parties to make sure the issues of concerns to all of Prince Edward Island are shared and reflected in the business of the people of Prince Edward Island and that is what we do here. This, at the end of the day, is the business of the people of Prince Edward Island.

I think that to-date the Speech From the Throne that was delivered on Friday was an impressive document, and it was impressive, mainly because for the first time in the history of this province all three parties had input and collaboration into the creation and delivery of that document. I hope that begins the process of how we work together.

I believe the world is our oyster when it comes to working together, and I really look forward to listening, more importantly, to hearing others and to make sure what we're putting forward is in the best interest of Prince Edward Islanders.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Premier, of course, may be new to this House so it may be a little shocking for him to learn that it's not always been so lovey-dovey in here, Mr. Premier.

One of the less endearing practices of this House and one that is distinctly not respectful is that of heckling other members while they speak during debate and particularly during Question Period.

Golden sound of silence, Mr. Speaker.

End of heckling in Legislature

Will the Premier join me in calling for an end to the practice of heckling in this Legislature?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much for the question. This is an issue that the, now Leader of the Opposition and my friend and former dentist have talked about many times over the past number of years.

Absolutely, I think it's very important that the business of the people of Prince Edward Island is reflected in what the quality of the individuals of the Province of Prince Edward Island want to see within this government.

I have absolutely, full intention to support the motion being put forward and we have talked about it in our own caucus every time that we have met. We will be courteous, we will be honest, we will be fair, and we will bring a different decorum to this Legislature.

Yes, I have absolutely full intention of making sure that we remove heckling from this Legislature.

Let's show the people of Prince Edward Island the very best of this because we are serving the very best and that is the people of Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Of course, I'm absolutely delighted to hear that from the Premier and not surprised by his personal commitment to respectful debate because that's how we conducted the election campaign. But I'm anxious to see how the rest of government caucus also behaves in this House.

Question to the Premier: Has your caucus agreed to follow your lead to end the practice of heckling in this Legislature?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

That's an important question because, yes, I am the Premier, I am the leader of this party, but this party is made up of individuals from all across Prince Edward Island and I am not committing to the style of leadership that makes my way the only way.

We have discussed this in our caucus; we have discussed this at length. The individuals who are in this caucus believe, as we do – all of the members of this House – that this House is the House of the people, and it requires decorum and it requires us to act professionally. It requires us to act personally in a way that is reflective of the people of Prince Edward Island.

So, yes, I have no doubt that everyone in this caucus will be respectful of debate in this House and will absolutely adhere to the highest standards that we put forward.

Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

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

Requirement of ministers to answering of questions

The Premier's election platform made a commitment to and I quote: "Require ministers to answer questions promptly, directly, and succinctly during Oral Question Period, and if they can't answer, they must provide answers within a reasonable time."

A question to the Premier: Have you directly communicated this important priority to all of your ministers?

Speaker: Hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It's almost as if the Leader of the Opposition was sitting in the actual caucus, because it is something that we do talk about quite frequently.

Part of the development of that piece of document – that platform that the leader is reading from was actually generated by the people of Prince Edward Island; much like the opposition party's document was as well.

Those words mean a lot to us and yes we are actually very, very serious about that. We believe Question Period is a serious place to be. The questions that are being asked by the members of the opposition and members of the government caucus are important questions and they deserve important answers.

As you have articulated in your lead up to the question, many of us are very new in our portfolios. Some of the answers to the questions you may ask we may not have right now, but we have committed to making sure that we get back with the answers if not today, certainly by the beginning of day tomorrow to make sure those questions are answered fully and we can have the spirited debate that Islanders are expecting us to have in this Legislature.

Thank you.

Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

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

Well so far, so good.

A follow-up to the Premier on that; the reference in that, the last section of that platform commitment was that responses will be taken back in a reasonable time.

I think you may have sort of answered this in your previous answer, but I'd like to ask you again.

Timeframe for answering of questions

When we make a request of ministers in Oral Question Period, and we are instructed that they will get back to us in a reasonable time, are we talking about hours or days or weeks or what timeframe are we looking at?

Speaker: Hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I did allude to the first answer to the question.

I think that with the technology that we have, one of the great perks that you have in government as a minister is that you have ministerial staff that actually watches the Legislature and they can know immediately if and when something is needed.

So it would be our intention if it's at all possible to make sure that gets back immediately. By that, I mean within the session of the hourly session of when it's asked, but if it's a little bit more of a complicated answer, I would suggest that certainly by the beginning of Question Period tomorrow.

It would be the intention of this government, and we hope to be held to the standard, that you don't have to ask the question twice to get the answer that you need. So that would be the standard that we're trying to set forward. I know all of our ministers are trying to work hard to meet that standard.

So thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Premier's platform promised to create a provincial ombudsperson office. The last PC

government in which the Premier – should we forget, was a political staffer, voted down an NDP bill to create just such an office of the provincial ombudsperson.

I'd be much reassured if the Premier's commitment in the platform, if he could provide some details as to what his plan is.

Timeline for ombudsperson office

A question to the Premier: What is your timeline for creating the provincial ombuds office?

Speaker: Hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

A great asset to somebody in the political life is to have a background that you can look back on to leverage. A great weakness of that is people get to look back and say; you didn't do this or you should have done that.

I was a political staffer for the former premier, Pat Binns, who was a mentor of mine and is a big fan of mine and I, of his. I think a lot has changed since that documentation would have been tabled here in the Legislature. In fact, it would have been tabled next door. Here we are in the Coles Building in this temporary Chamber.

I think it's important for the people of Prince Edward Island that an office of an ombudsperson gets put in place. One of the things I hope our standing committees can provide a lot of guidance on as we move forward, is to develop that position, to create the policies around how such a position would be implemented.

I think it's very, very important and I would hope that that committee can get to work as quickly as possible.

Absolutely, it's in our platform. It's something that we stand by. It's something that we want to work toward, but I believe it's something we need all members of this Legislature to make sure we get right so that the people of Prince Edward Island can be proud of it.

So thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

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

Unfortunately, I did not hear a particular specific timeframe there. I will be looking for that from you, Premier.

After listening to last week's throne speech, I find myself in agreement in much of the vision that the Premier outlined in the government's mandate.

In our platform, we included 10-year goals and also a 25-year vision of this province – in all areas from housing to healthcare, from poverty to education, from economic development to agriculture.

Critically, we also had some very detailed policies and every one of those areas and all others that would have been implemented in the first mandate, in order to create the foundation that you need in order to reach that vision.

Long-term vision of government

Question to the Premier: In the absence of any sort of any immediate plan in the throne speech, how do you expect to make your long term vision a reality?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

I think it speaks to the collaborative nature of this Legislature and how we've conducted ourselves here that the opposition party's platform when it was released, received a lot of the same views that the throne speech did and that it lacks specifics, it was high on vision et cetera.

I think what has to happen here is that we all have to work together. I have a vision for what Prince Edward Island – what I would like it to be, so does every other member of this Legislature.

What do we have to do to work together to build that future? I believe that is exactly why we are here.

It's the soon-to-be 26 members of this House that represent the 140 some thousand Islanders that also need to have a say in that.

That is why our throne speech is broad in vision, it's because the vision has to be not just ours, but that which reflects all of Prince Edward Island and I want the input of the opposition parties in our vision. I want to know what you think is the best solution going forward because, as I have said and you've heard me say it a million times, I don't own all the good ideas. I don't care about getting all the credit. I want to make sure we put forward good legislation for the people of Prince Edward Island.

So the timelines, we have to get to work now. We have absolutely no idea how long this Legislature will actually sit, let's get to work now, let's roll up our sleeves, find the solutions to these problems, build on the vision that we've articulated in the Speech From the Throne.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is a lot of language in the throne speech in addressing climate change, which I very much appreciate, but the targets and timelines are absent.

Addressing climate change

Question to the Premier: Could you be specific on what you mean by addressing climate change?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much for the question.

For specifics, what I believe is Prince Edward Island knows better than most the impacts of a changing climate. I think we live it every day; therefore we have to be at the cutting edge of how we deal with that change in climate.

In terms of specifics, we talk about reaching the carbon neutral society, and we've talked about reaching a carbon neutral society – doing it in conjunction with Islanders, with solutions that include incentives for Islanders to continue some of the great work that they have done.

That's what we have been talking about when it comes to climate change but yes, the opposition party has also been very adamant about how we go about that. I'm looking forward to their input on how we develop policies to make sure address climate change in a meaningful way for all of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Since it is the most pressing issue of our time, I was pleased to see climate change explicitly named within a portfolio. I really hope we can look forward to seeing that matched with substantive action.

Tasks of minister responsible for climate change

Question to the Premier: Could you define the outcomes your minister responsible for climate change is tasked with working towards?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

It is important that you do point out that for the very first time in the history of this province; there is a department of climate change, so that shows you how seriously that we are taking this issue because it is the issue that Islanders want us to be taking seriously.

The outline and goals I have for the minister in that department are to actually create policies and plans that are concrete in nature that can help us reach the goals to reduce our greenhouse gases. There are targets out there that we have to meet. We are doing a good job in many regards to meet those, but we also have much more work to do.

I'll continue to say, I want to be collaborative in that approach. The opposition party has been very, very strong in this particular area and we look forward for them to be providing guidance to the government in this minority situation to make sure we are addressing these challenges to the point we need.

The minister's phone is always there. His door is always open. He's a very big collaborator; he's very bullish on how he wants to go about this with climate change. I encourage all members of this House to make sure they follow along with his lead. Let's develop something we can all be proud of.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Despite the importance of this subject, climate change isn't always well understood by policy makers.

Report on global warming

Question to the Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change: Have you had an opportunity to familiarize yourself with the IPCC's special report on global warming of 1.5 degrees?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for that question.

The member across from Member from Summerside-Wilmot and I, indeed, got to meet – and this is one of the nice things about a collaborative environment. She had pointed out to me that the IPCC document is one of the definitive reports on climate change in the world. Of course that's the first thing I did, was make sure that I was up on that document.

Our commitment is to, based on the existing legislation that was brought in by the former administration, is 1.4 megatons of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030 for the Island.

As the member across pointed out to me, in the IPCC report, in fact it's 1.2 megatons that would be required in order to meet the goals that they set out.

It's something we need to discuss and debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will be tabling a summary of that report later today.

Current climate strategy actions

Question to the Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change: Do you have confidence that the actions prescribed in our current climate strategy are enough to guarantee climate stability into the foreseeable future?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a really tough one, to guarantee that sort of thing into the future.

I think that the climate change action plan we have is a really good start.

I think although it's going to be really hard to guarantee anything when it comes to climate change, I think that what we need to do is work to change our climate change action plan, to adapt it and to listen to Islanders and listen to world experts and to make sure that we are taking appropriate actions so we reach a level carbon dioxide equivalent emissions that's going to allow us to continue to have a future for our children.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ensuring a stable climate

Question to the Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change: Could you tell

this house what is required for us to ensure a stable climate?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This of course is a subject of great debate, I think that there's a fairly decent consensus by scientists around the world that would be born out of the IPCC report and I believe that it's actually born out in the amendment that the member may bring to the *Climate Leadership Act*. In Prince Edward Island if we were to hit the 1.2 megatons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions by 2030, that would allow us to meet that target.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The science is clear that the dangers associated with more than 1.5 degrees of warming are substantial and we're likely already in excess of one degree of warming now.

We need to see a drop in greenhouse gas emissions of greenhouse gas emissions of 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, which is only 11 years from now – and we need to reach carbon neutrality by 2050 if we are to have any hope to holding warming to 1.5 degrees.

Impacts of climate change

Question to the Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change: Can you inform the House on the impacts we could expect to see if we exceed 1.5 degrees of warming?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've seen some excellent articles coming out recently by publications like the Toronto Star that have outlined some of the impacts we're already seeing on the Island. These are our costal erosions, these are raising sea levels, and the impacts are indeed dire. I don't have any numbers that are quantification off the top of my head.

But the other thing is, if we are going to mitigate climate change and truly reduce our levels to those numbers as laid out in the IPCC report, it is going to take tremendous sacrifice by Islanders. That's really the debate we must have and that's the point of view that all members of this house need to bring forward to make sure that we do the will of Islanders on this file.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Premier.

Earlier this month the federally and provincially-mandated national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls was released.

The historic report entitled *Reclaiming Power and Place* deserves proper consideration from government.

Response to historic report on Indigenous women

Premier: Could you outline for this House how your government intends to respond to this report?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you very much, Mr. Speak and thank you, to the hon. member, for the question.

I will be reading a House statement, a member statement, following Question Period here on this particular topic.

It is a very serious issue. It's one that I came to know quite well when I served for a number of years with the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island. I have seen first-hand the impacts of this on Prince Edward Island and it's a report that I think has been well received across our departments, or across government, and it's our intention to dive into this and to work with all of the Indigenous groups across Prince Edward Island and beyond to make sure the key components of this report are taken seriously and implemented.

This is not something that our society can turn an eye to any longer. This is something we have to take head on and we're prepared to do that as government.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is important that federal and provincial governments respond in an effective and timely manner to this report and as an appropriate response should also come from this House, which is why the Third Party has also tabled a motion on this subject asking for further debate at a standing committee in the future.

Premier: Have you had any other communications with your federal and other provincial counterparts on responding to this report?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad to hear the news that the Third Party will be introducing a motion for debate in this House. It's very important that we all have a chance to discuss and learn more about this issue when we move forward on it.

I have had some conversations with some of my counterparts across the country in terms of how we move forward. Our staff in our senior staff and Executive Council and beyond have been working with their counterparts across the country, but also across Prince Edward Island, to make sure that the key elements of this are actually taken seriously and put into action so that we do not ever – that we are never in the situation again where this is repeated.

So yes – I thank the hon. member very much for the question and I look forward to debating this further in the days ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, the Indigenous community has been widely anticipating this report, Premier.

Premier: Could you give more specifics on how your government has reached out to representatives of our Island Indigenous community for input in regards to your work on this report, please?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As one of the portfolios that I retained as the Premier of Prince Edward Island is to be the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs in Prince Edward Island, we are setting up some meetings in the days ahead to speak with the Mi'kmaq Confederacy and other Indigenous groups in Prince Edward Island.

The contact that we have had right now since the report has been tabled has been through the senior staff – with a lot of the senior staff from those First Nations representatives, et cetera, going forward. So we're really at the point where we're diving into this and it certainly will be a topic of discussion when I attend the council of the federation meetings in Saskatoon in early July.

There's hard work in this report and it's work that has to be taken seriously, and it's very important that we do that here in Prince Edward Island and our government is very intending to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This question is to the Premier as well and since we're on the topic of platform commitments, building on the record of solid economic growth, as the Premier has stated in many of his speeches – and good fiscal management – the PC platform made 120 promises, one of which was to reduce the small business tax rate from 3.5 to 1%. At the Charlottetown and Area Chamber of Commerce annual meeting in May you said and I quote: We will probably phase that in

a little bit more than maybe we would have if we had a majority situation. That's part of the give and take we all have to put forward. So, instead of seeing a full point in the budget this year, you'll probably see a half a point.

Reduction of small business tax

Premier: Could you inform the House who you had the give and take conversation with that prompted you to renege on this election promise within days of taking office?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question.

Yes, it is a commitment that we put forward and it's one that we will be phasing in. The give and take that I talk about is that other parties in this Legislature want input and to drive the agenda of things that are important to them, which we are trying to afford the opportunity for them to do so, and those initiatives obviously come at a cost.

If we were to put everything in that we wanted to put in and everything in that the opposition party wanted to put in, and everything in that the Third Party wanted to put in, we wouldn't be able to maintain a surplus situation.

We made a commitment to remain surplus and that's what we're trying to do. So there is a natural give and take that we have to implement here. All of us are doing that. I think we're doing it very well. We're not all going to be happy and we're not always going to agree, but it's important to the people of Prince Edward Island that we remain in a surplus situation.

If you've attended any of the events that I have been talking about and celebrating for government, I do tip my hat to the former minister across and the former government. We have inherited a healthy situation and it's our intent to be responsible and to stay in that situation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank, your first supplementary.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There was no communication or collaboration with our party in relevance to this, because if you need support to do what you promised in your election campaign, we'll give you that support today.

Why have you chosen to go with the tax reduction of a half point proposed by the official opposition as opposed to what you've promised in your platform?

Mr. Premier, you fully understand the economic growth of this province is based on the back of small and medium enterprise businesses? If they're successful you're going to be successful and if you're successful, that allows us reinvestment into health care, social programs and education.

Mr. Premier: Why have you chosen to go with the tax reduction of the official opposition?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure it's fair characterization to say that we've adopted the model of the official opposition. I think it's one of the discussions that we've had internally, as well as to try to accommodate some of the other additions that we have to make to the budget in this minority situation – that it's one of the things that, as government of a minority situation with only 12 members in this Legislature, I wouldn't feel very confident to bring everything I wanted to this budget and to ignore everything everybody else wanted and to have any type of hope that it would be supported here in the Legislature.

As I have said before, and as I have told the members of the CADC and the business community, we certainly appreciate the business community. We think it is the business community that creates jobs, not the Government of Prince Edward Island. We're moving that forward in a way that is responsible. We've moving the small business tax reduction ahead in a responsible manner.

Would I like to get there faster? Absolutely. Would the opposition like to get there

faster? They likely would, but you have to make decisions when you get here and the decisions that you have to make are that you have to weigh business, the environment. You have to weigh all of these things, and I think nobody in this House would know better than the Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank as to the weight that goes into those decisions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank, your second supplementary.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, Mr. Premier, it's about \$7 million to reduce it to your election promise.

Election promises

There's 119 promises that you also have – is there any of those that you're also going to renege on in the next coming days, Mr. Premier?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, if he's counted to 119, I would say there will be a lot of promises that are in that platform that we're not going to be able to do the first time – absolutely.

But you know what? You're document's full of them as well and you're not going to get them all done either, and the opposition's document isn't going to get all done this first time.

But, we're in a collaborative environment and we have to be in a collaborative environment. We can't do it all one way. That's not what Islanders voted for here. Islanders said – come into this Legislature. There are three parties, work together. That is exactly what we're doing.

Many things we will agree on, many things we won't – but isn't that the spirit of debate? Isn't that why we're here? We will present a budget after the Speech From the Throne has been concluded and we will have ample time here to sit down and debate that budget and there will be many, many questions as to why this is that and why this isn't here.

That's what this Legislature is supposed to do.

But, I'll be very proud to table a budget in this province which will, once again, be in a surplus situation.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: The family of schools district advisory councils, known as DACs, are mandated to help shape an education system that is focused on and meets the needs of individual learners. They advise the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning on such matters.

The goals of district advisory councils are to identify education priorities within their own district, engage school community and discussions, foster collaboration amongst school councils, home and school associations and the community.

Goals of district advisory councils

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Do you agree with the goals of the DAC?

Speaker: The hon. Member of Education and Lifelong Learning.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park. It's a very good question. I think it's hard to disagree with the goals of the district advisory council and if that's the question, I would say yes, I do agree with the goals.

I think that there is a lot to be discussed around the district advisory councils, the makeup of the councils. When I met with the home and school federation, for example, they had some good views on that. When I meet with the teacher's federation, they have some distinct views on that and I look forward to discussing the composition and the goals of the district advisory council's with you.

Speaker: The Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: The people who sit on these DACs include; one parent from each school council, home and school association in the family of schools, two students from high schools within the family of schools, a regional director of the PEI Home and School Federation of the Family of School's.

Representation of teachers on DAC

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: What do you think of the fact that there are no teachers or school administrators on the DAC?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, and Lifelong Learning.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you Mr., Speaker.

That is a fantastic question because that was one of the items that came up in early conversations with the new deputy minister who is doing a fantastic job with our government as well and the member across, we've met. I don't know if we've approached this subject, exactly, but I have to say that, when I talk to people it's almost unanimous that we probably should have a teacher representative on the district advisory councils.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I hear chatter here and there about the return to elected school boards and there was a motion passed by the PEI Home and School Association to bring them back. I would argue there are ways that we could work together to find a more suitable form of governance, such as improving the DACs by giving them greater autonomy and resources by adding teacher's to their membership.

Future of school governance

Question to the Minister: What are your plans for the future of school governance?

Speaker: The Hon. Minister of Education, and Lifelong Learning.

Mr. Trivers: Well thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to school governance, those are conversations we've just started and I'm really looking forward to more input from the member across. But there is definitely a duplication of effort going on right now, between the district advisory councils and the home and school associations, and also the principal's advisory council.

So, what we need to do is we need to take all of that into account. We have to see how we can efficiently engage communities and teachers, as well as the students and come up with a governance model that allows us to do what is best, of course, for the children.

Speaker: The hon. Member of Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Adoption is a very personal and emotional issue for the people involved, the adoptee, the adoptive parents and birth parents. Open adoption records have been the subject of a long conversation in this province that deeply impacts many Islanders.

Open access to adoption records

My question today is for the Minister of Social Development and Housing: What is the current status of government efforts to allow people to have open access to their adoption records.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

It certainly is, as you pointed out, it's certainly an emotional issue. It's one that – and I do give credit to the former government, the former administration for the consultation that they had carried out on this very matter. With regard to the hon. member's question, we will be bringing forward legislation on the opening of adoption records.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are many practical reasons why people are looking for access to their adoption records. After public consultation of stake holders last year, the former government announced plans to amend the *Adoption Act*.

Amendment to Adoption Act

Supplementary question for the Minister of Social Development and Housing: When does government plan to amend the *Adoption Act* to allow for open adoption records?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development and Housing.

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

This is, it's an item, an issue if you like, that I have had detailed talks with the ones in my department on. With that, we are committed to bring forward this legislation in the fall sitting of this year.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I understand that this is a complex issue and governments desire to be responsible and not act in haste, but for the parties involved, the adult adoptees, the adoptive parents and the birth parents, the issue is much simpler and much more personal.

In the *Adoption Act* review, government proposed changing the law to allow both, a veto option and a no contact preference. Most provinces have open adoption records, with a no contact option but not a veto.

Include a veto option in Adoption Act

Supplementary question for the Minister of Social Development and Housing: Will you reconsider any plans to include a veto option in changes to the *Adoption Act*?

Speaker: The Minister of Social Development and Housing.

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

I do thank the hon. member for that comment, he is absolutely right and it is one of the reasons that we will not be bringing forward this legislation until the fall sitting.

At the end of the day, we want to make sure that we have this legislation right and that we take into consideration and feedback all of these issues, items and suggestions and to be able to work in consultation, not only with the hon. member, all of our caucus and all of the caucus' across the way here, whether it's the Opposition Caucus or the Third Party caucus.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Over the past few years, the current Leader of the Opposition has repeatedly requested that government develop a policy on the procurement of outside legal services.

In section 13.04 of the Treasury Board policy and procedures manual, which sets policy for the selection of contractors, legal services are explicitly exempt. Two of the fundamental principles of good governance are spending public money wisely and upholding the rule of law. This exemption from Treasury Board serves neither of those two principles.

New policy on contracting legal services

The question to the Minister of Justice: Is your department working on a new policy to ensure stricter oversight on contracting outside legal services?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety and the Attorney General.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member that's a great question and yes we are looking into drafting new policies

and it's going to take a little bit of time but we are working on it as we speak.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Providing of legal advice to government

A question for the Minister of Justice: Do you believe that as Attorney General you have unique responsibility to uphold the law and provide legal advice to the government?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and Attorney General.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, hon. member, yes I do. As the Attorney General, the law is important and I'm in an outreach of the government at arm's length to advise the government on all issues involving the legal system.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member of Summerside-South Drive.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It will always be necessary to hire outside council. There are many instances where government lawyers may lack the specific expertise needed or may be in conflict where there are simply not enough resources to respond to all the demands. Individual departments do not have the expertise to establish when in it is advisable to contract outside, if the price is reasonable or if the advice received is of high quality.

A question for the Attorney General: Do you think that every contract for legal services should be abetted and approved by legal experts in the department of justice?

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

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, hon. member that is a great question too. It's very important that the legal expertise is qualified and that we can't always have the right people, but this legislation, or the act that we

are going to follow is going to review that and we're going to make improvements on it as we speak, so thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive, final question.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In 2017, the current Leader of the Opposition tabled the Nova Scotia policy that requires the minister of justice to approve all contracts for legal services and sets out when outside advice can be sought.

A question for the minister of justice: Are you familiar with the Nova Scotia policy, and, if so, do you think it will provide a good model?

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

Mr. Thompson: Ms. Speaker and hon. member, I am not familiar with that model, but I will be briefed on it and I will have an answer back to you in the morning.

Thank you.

[End of Question Period]