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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 19 JUNE 2019

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive for bringing this forward. It is indeed to have good policy in government.

I can confirm that the staff in the department are in the process of drafting the policy is informed by Nova Scotia model to recognize that we will land on and we will work with our province. There is still work to be done and we need to look whether this draft will address the issues that have been taken raised.

We expect to be in the position to speak on the progress in the weeks to come.

Thank you.

Question Period

Speaker: For our first question, I will call on the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I firstly want to thank the minister for his prompt response when it comes to providing outside legal services in his department and using the Nova Scotia situation as a model. So I really appreciate the fact that once again you came back so promptly with that.

Thank you.

The throne speech had a compelling vision about improving engagement between government politicians and the public. However, as with many things in the throne speech, there were few details about how the Premier's actual plans would be in this regard. So I would like to dig down a little bit and see what the government is actually planning to do.

Since the election, the bulk of the dialogue between the parties has happened through the House leaders. This has worked really well for the purposes, at least of organizing the business of this House, but as government stated in the throne speech we

need to expand beyond this if we are to maintain an effective relationship between all members of this House.

Improvements to relationship within parties

A question to the Premier: What next steps will you be proposing for improving the working relationship between the parties?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Thank the leader opposite for the question.

I think what we would like to do is to build upon what we have been working on right now with the House leaders. I would like to – as was outlined in the throne speech, which the Leader of the Opposition took some time yesterday to suggest that I shouldn't have done, but I would like to see our standing committees work very amicably and very collaboratively on an equal footing to make sure that the discussions and decisions that take place within this Legislature are fair and equal.

So I would like for that to continue, and I would like for the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Third Party, and I to talk regularly as well, because I think it's important that we do that to make sure we are doing the best things for Prince Edward Island here.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The throne speech committed to a long-term vision for and I quote: "the fuller engagement and involvement of people and communities and the commitment to listen and respond as we work together on the issues that affect Islanders."

Greater public engagement within government

A question to the Premier: What changes does your government intend to implement in order to achieve this vision of greater public engagement?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well as it has been articulated here many times, we are about four or five or six weeks into this, so we are working to try to build some of these plans and to expand upon some of the goals and visions that we have talked about.

I have been very adamant that it's not something that we just do alone. I think consultation, real consultation means talking, listening, and hearing. So I think if we are really going to be here to represent the people of Prince Edward Island, we have to better consult our communities, we have to better consult Islanders, we have to utilize the services in here much better.

So I think what I would like to see us do is to sort of change the way we attack some of this issues and change the way we operated in the past. I am open to seeing how that works, I'm open to suggestions to make it better, and at the end of the day our goal here is to provide good government for the people of Prince Edward Island and we're all responsible to do that in here.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Each time I try and encourage the Premier to give us details on making this vision a reality, we end up not actually with any particular, hard concrete ideas so I'll try again.

The first step in dealing with this is to identify the current problems and challenges, for example, when government sets up the adversarial public meetings that we're all so familiar with. When government does not give people all the information that they need to properly deliberate on an issue. When government solicits input from the public without any transparency about how that information is used to make decisions. Or when government disrespects the very process that

they created and here I'm thinking about the debacle a couple years ago when it came to the school reviews and the schools in our rural areas.

Past practices within government

A question to the Premier: What are the past practices that you feel need to be either ended or reformed?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I have been very outspoken about many of those issues the Leader of the Opposition has just brought up and I have been very serious about trying to change the way we do business in here.

For the very first time in a long time, our ministers give briefings to the opposition. They invite them over and actually say here, this is what we are going to do. We've actually collaborated on the throne speech for the first time, all three parties talking about it. We are working towards a budgetary address with priorities from all three parties. So that is what we're trying to do here.

Also, I do – I am adamantly opposed to the former approach where you walk in to a community and say we are taking something from you. I would rather have a different discussion and try to work with communities. So yes, the Leader of the Opposition is right, we have to change, we have to learn from the past, and there are lots of examples from the past that we can look to learn from.

I'm here to learn, I'm here to listen and I'm here to do things. So yes, let us change the conversation. I think we've begun to do that, but I really hope in my heart that we're really just getting started.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

Involving people in decision-making is for me a really key component in how we improve our democratic institutions.

However, so far all we've had is a commitment to listen and respond, and again the Premier's answer provided us with really no details on how you plan to do that, which sounds really more to me like doing more of the same ineffective engagement that government has unfortunately become known for in the past.

Again, a question to the Premier: Do you intend to introduce new forms of more participatory and deliberative democracy or just do more of the same?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well I would suggest that the recommendations that I made in the Speech From the Throne, which seemed to have offended the leader next door, would be an exact example of what I would like to do.

Have you ever seen in this Legislature, in its history, where all three parties would have equal representation at the standing committee level? Have you ever seen in the history of this Legislature where the governing party gave up full control of these committees? No, you have not.

So that demonstrates what I'm serious about, absolutely, and I'm very genuine in that. We have to continue to move forward building upon that. I think we can look, and maybe you can suggest that we're not doing anything, maybe you can suggest that we're looking to continue doing the same. I think the actions so far would demonstrate otherwise, and I'm looking forward to continuing to show Prince Edward Islanders and this Legislature that we're actually serious about making significant changes.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I should be clear that at no point have I said you're not doing anything. I was just asking what changes we're going to make, and it's not regarding the deliberations between the parties. I am talking about public engagement – public engagement, not deliberations between the parties.

There are all kinds of tools and methods that have been developed to involve citizens in the decision-making, something that was promised in your throne speech – everything from crowd sourcing, to participatory, to budgeting, citizen juries, deliberative polling, open sourced government, citizen's assemblies, and many, many more.

Introduction of new participation tools

So could the Premier please give us some specifics about what new participation tools his government expects to introduce.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Some of the conversations we've been having at the Cabinet table have been about how we change and better engage.

You know what, the one thing I would give credit to, I think the Leader of the Opposition and his party, have been leaders in the political process when it comes to outlining interactions with Islanders through many of those methods and I think we have to learn from that and I would like to bring some of those into the government level in terms of how all Cabinet ministers, how all departments interact with Islanders and how we change that discussion.

I have been saying from the very beginning: this is the business of the people.

I think too many times in the past we've distanced people from the decision-making process and I think that is why many people are disengaged in the political process. I'd be very interested if one of the standing committees could make some recommendations on how we better do this. I would love that type of input and I'd like to see where this could go.

Speaker: Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Before I ask my question, I would like to assure everyone that I'm not listening to

CBC – this aid really helps me to hear every word spoken on either side of the floor.

My question to the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture: this government is entering into a contract to improve the speed and availability of Islanders for good Internet connections for all Islanders, particularly in rural areas.

The proposed contractors are Xplornet and Bell Aliant. Bell Aliant was a contractor that in the past promised and was paid to deliver high-speed Internet to all, but failed to do so.

Delivery of promises in Internet contract

I would like to ask the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture: What steps he is taking to ensure the promises in this new contract are in fact delivered.

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

Ms. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, member. Actually this was probably the first briefing I did get when I took over as minister.

About 24 hours into the job I sat down, reviewed the last RFP, which I will give credit where credit is due, government had actually been in the right line of sight with this.

I've met with the colleagues through the department. It's still not enough though.

We've reached out to the opposition party, as yourself, we've sat down, I've had some proposed ideas that I'd like to run by everybody and if you have any ideas yourself I'd certainly like to hear from you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Exclusion of Local PEI Internet firms

Mr. Hammarlund: Mr. Speaker, we did sit down and speak together and I appreciate the openness which is a new way government is being made, but I still have some questions – it seems like the minister was describing the solution as a: made in PEI solution. Can the minister explain to the

public why the many local PEI Internet firms have been excluded?

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

Ms. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you member for the question.

Certainly, nobody is excluded. I've sat down with every Internet provider in Prince Edward Island, the last one this morning, we've listened to all their concerns, their proposals, some of them are in the works right now about putting proposals forward.

Some providers definitely are excited with the new form of government we're providing. I think there is an opportunity for them all on Prince Edward Island. We are looking at each individual community – we don't want to build on top of other builders. So we're just in the process stage of waiting for proposals to come in.

Within the next two weeks you're going to see more proposals come to light.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Delivery of promises in Internet contract (further)

Mr. Hammarlund: Mr. Speaker, that sounds wonderful, but I'd like to go back to my first question, what steps you are taking to make sure that the promises are going to be fulfilled by for instance, Bell Aliant, who didn't fulfill the promises last time.

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

Ms. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One thing we're doing is making sure that whoever does it, it doesn't matter if they're big providers or they're small providers; that the expectations are lived up to. Everybody will follow by the same rules. We're offering low interest loans, as well as 50-cent dollar grants to help some of these providers out.

In the next two weeks we're providing a map to all of the providers to show how it looks on PEI and for them to provide an

opportunity of input of how they'd like to see it as well.

So we are really looking forward to it, I think it's good. One thing we are going to do that I've mentioned to all the providers is that all contracts signed by me are going to be disclosed, every one is going to be public.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you for your response.

That was my next question, if you will table the full details of the contracts.

I appreciate your efforts thank you very much.

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

Ms. MacKay: Certainly, everything like I say, will be disclosed. That was a number one priority when I went in as minister.

We've seen what happened with us in opposition and some of the road blocks so all providers have been told that whatever we sign through our department will be public and disclosed.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* was created to protect our most precious resource, our land from excessive, corporate and non-resident control. Many Islanders are now concerned that the spirit of the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* is not being upheld and that we may be losing control of our land.

Upholding spirit of Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.

A question to the Minister of Agriculture and Land: Is your government committed to upholding the spirit of the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, thank you for that question. The spirit will be upheld. We are going to consult with our people working with the federation and the NFU, to come up with the land use issue to solve all the concerns out there and we plan to uphold with the spirit of the law.

Thank you.

Speaker: Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Executive council approves large numbers of land transactions every year, but a common name appears on many of these applications: Island Holdings Ltd.

Ownership of Island Holdings Ltd.

Question to the minister: Could you inform the house who owns this corporation and where they are based?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Island Holdings Ltd. is Cavendish Farms – is the company and they are under their land holdings and they are located in St. John, is their head office.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Island Holdings, as a large wealthy out-of-province corporation, is exactly the sort of land holder that the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.* is meant to protect us from.

You mentioned that the corporation is under their allowable limit.

Allowable limit of aggregated land

By how much is this corporation under their allowable limit of aggregated land?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, hon. member thank you for that question as well.

I can't give the exact numbers but – and I'm not sure if I'm allowed to give the exact numbers but they are – it's one of the first things that came across our desk as new government and through Cabinet we made sure that when that came across that we were following all the regulations and they were. So, happy to announce that everything has been in the spirit of the law since we've taken government.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: On May, 21st this new Executive Council approved applications by Island Holdings Ltd. to acquire control of almost 1,100 acres of land in various areas of the province.

Upholding spirit of Lands Protection Act, P.E.I. (further)

Question to the minister: Do you think these land acquisitions that your government approved were within the spirit of the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, hon. member, yes they were.

We did the due diligence of – we actually called in IRAC to give us a full detailed report on everything that we were approving that day and everything was in the spirit of the regulations.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Mr. Speaker, Islanders want to know who owns the land of Prince Edward Island.

Land ownership

Question to the Minister: How can a member of the public find out who owns land on PEI particularly that's owned of non-residents or corporations?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, hon. member, it's important to our government as well that the land is maintained in Islanders' hands as much as we can. We want the land, the resource land identified eventually as resource land; we want to protect that land for the farmers for our next generation.

We will continue to do that and as the months ahead of us, I believe, our mandate is going to be to protect that and uphold the legislation.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

List of corporate and non-resident land owners

Ms. Beaton: As the minister has just pointed out, it currently is very difficult for the public to actually find out how much land and we understand that you want to uphold the spirit of the act, but could the minister table in this House a list of corporate and non-resident owners, including the aggregate land holdings of each?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, hon. member, I better check with my department whether that is a matter that can be brought forth but I'll have that answer for you tomorrow.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture.

During the last provincial election, the PC party promised to introduce an annual \$1 million fund to be equally divided between Prince, Queens and Kings Counties to support community-based training and

programming by individual and non-for-profit groups.

Tourism funding to support not-for-profit groups

Could the minister advise the House as to when this program will be introduced?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you member.

I don't think that falls under my department but I'll do my best to answer it.

We currently fund non-profit based organization \$1 million that go throughout the province. If you include service delivery organizations such as QCRS Inclusions East, it's in the vicinity of \$10 million.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Designing fair supports for non-profit groups

Just one supplementary question to the same minister: In designing this program will the minister commit to treating Islanders fairly right across the three geographical areas?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and member.

Most definitely, that's why the program was designed. We want to make sure from tip to tip everybody is treated fairly and we're going to do our very best to do that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Robert Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Premier.

Premier, the PC platform building on the strong economic and fiscal management of the previous Liberal government made many

promises during the campaign. One such promise was related to the establishment of a working group on bridge and ferry tolls.

In 2016, the previous Liberal government in conjunction with Hope Air and Health PEI established a program to provide bridge toll assistance to low-income Islanders needing to attend to off-Island medical appointments.

Bridge and toll fee assistance for Islanders traveling off-Island

Premier: Will this program be maintained until this working group completes its work?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

There are two parts to that question that I'll do my best to answer both.

One of things that alarmed me more than anything in my journey to this office was knocking on doors to realize that the bridge toll was one of the most regular issues that I heard at the doors and Islander's frustration with paying for a bridge when one of the same value was being built in Montreal and there's no toll on it.

So we did commit to work with Senator Percy Downe, who has done a lot of work on that regard, and I've actually asked my staff to set up a meeting with Senator Downe hopefully by the end of this week so we can find out a little bit more of what he's working on and how we can help.

But I also want to commend the former government, the former minister as well. The Hope Air project is actually delivering fantastic results for Prince Edward Island. It's where we take a little bit of our money and it's matched with the national charity and that's providing access as the minister said and knows for Islanders to get transportation off-Island for medical service when they need it and yes we will commit to keeping that in place. I don't know what will happen when it comes to the bridge toll, I hope something can, but until such time we will make sure that program is maintained.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier it is good that I hear there are discussions going on, there are conversations, there's work being done but that's going to take some time. So, previous work that the government was working on before the election, was looking at extending bridge toll assistance to all Islanders, not just low income Islanders, all Islanders that need to leave our province to go to off Island medical attention in any other province.

Expanding assistance to all Islanders for off-Island medical travel

Premier: Will your government commit to following through on this work and providing assistance to all Islanders that need to leave our wonderful province to attend to medical needs in other areas and commit to doing that, while this conversation is going as well?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, we are working with the Minister of Health and Wellness and throughout his department to get up to speed and review some of the discussions that were on going.

I can't stand here today and commit to that just yet because we haven't fully costed that out to the extent that we feel comfortable with but yes, it is important that we make sure that more and more of these services are offered to Islanders.

The health care delivery system as you very well know hon. member that includes us getting services in other parts of the region and in other parts of the country. We have to be mindful of that and we have to help Islanders to the extent that we can to make sure that those services can be gained. So we're working towards it but I have to stop short right now to say that we will continue it. I hope I can announce here at some point but today I can't do that.

Speaker: Leader of the Third Party, second supplementary.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier, in the spirit of your parties election commitments on tolls and consideration be given to those tolls, would you please ask your Minister of Health to review the programs and with a review of expanding coverage for all Islanders, that work will begin on that?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Absolutely, and matter of fact, we had a conversation today just about each one of these ministers, as you can fully appreciate, you were in the position we were in once. There's a lot coming down on each one of us, my briefing book here, I can barely lift. We're trying to deal with a lot of programming.

There are reviews taking place within all of our different departments. If you know anything about my colleague, the Minister of Health and Wellness and I know you do, he's very, very dedicated to his job and he's very, very committed to doing the very best he can for Islander's in this regard. So if you can just stay tuned and stay with us, I really think we can get there, but I think it would be disingenuous to say that it's done today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member of Morrell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have questions for the Minister of Fisheries and Communities today.

Rules for wearing PFDs while lobster fishing

The issue of wearing PFDs while fishing lobster has been in the news and I would like if the minister could clarify the rules in Prince Edward Island for wearing PFDs while fishing lobster.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. member for his question. I had been out around the wharf and I've been talking to the industry about the use of PFDs on the water and around the workplace and I've also had briefings with OHS and Workers Compensation Board beyond use of this equipment when engaged in such activities.

I can say something that our department is looking at, when there is a fall or a risk of falling then PFDs are required to be used in the workplace, whether they are on the wharf or on the fishing boat, they are covered under the occupational health and safety or workplace rules.

Speaker: The hon. Member of Morrell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've had recent tragedy on the waters this spring and I, with hundreds of other people spent a day looking for a young fisher who went overboard and it certainly makes you rethink the way you do things. I've seen many people dawn PFDs since that day and it's been heartwarming to see.

But, on the news recently I heard a member of the government talk about heavy fines and shutting down businesses and that kind of talk about enforcing PFDs and I think an education program is a much smarter way to go about it.

Education program re: PFDs

Me, myself, honestly I thought the rule was you had to have PFDs in your boat but you didn't have to wear them. Some people thought you didn't even necessarily have to have them. So I think the talk of an education program, can the Minister explain or commit to using much more of a softer approach with educating people, versus a top down heavy, you know the talk of shutting down businesses?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can confirm that, hon. member.

I have spoken to a lot of fisheries and I have spoken to OHS. We have recommended that we need to have a very strong education plan across the province when dealing with workplace scenarios as PFDs apply, and I believe that there needs to be and educational on a very broad front.

The department and I are talking about that and we're talking about a campaign coming out in this fall.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh, your second supplementary.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, minister.

As you can be aware, when people hear about it literally for the first time it kind of causes some consternation around the wharf and there's a lot of talk and a lot of feedback.

Future Fishers Program and PFDs

One idea I wonder if the minister would consider – we have a really fantastic program within his department, the Future Fishers Program. What would be the thought around a good idea of any fisher that enrolls in that program – what about giving that person to Transport Canada approved PFDs so that they have them, they wear them, they're in the boat? They set the example right off the bat as a future fisher.

It's not that big of an expense around that. I wonder, would the minister entertain the idea of giving that new entrant into the industry to new PDFs?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thank you very much.

The hon. member alluded to a program which the department is very proud of and that would be definitely something that we could look at. Personally, I would support that. I have no problem that if you're engaged in that Future Fishers Program, that we could provide PFDs to these future fishers going onto the water.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrook.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Since becoming an MLA, I have been genuinely impressed by the level of openness and collaboration I've received from most government departments when contacting them with a range of questions. In fact, there has only been one issue I have asked about several times, both via email and phone calls, and received no response.

Use of highway staff/road crews for festivals

Question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Why is it that no one responded to my request for more information about the road crews for music festivals and specifically, the not-for-profit Rock the Boat Festival?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I love the opportunity to get up and talk about this topic.

Across Prince Edward Island, we have road crews that have a responsibility to keep the roads safe. They cut along the ditches. They patch holes. They do numerous things that are required of them in the public right-of-way.

When I first came to office I noticed that there were some requests that had come in where people were looking for them for things that didn't have to do with highway responsibilities and had more to do with concert-type activities. I asked my staff about them and as we're moving through the process trying to get answers, we got to the end result and I decided that wasn't a good use for highway staff.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrook.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Rock the Boat is an annual festival in Tyne Valley put on by a non-profit organization operated by volunteers and watershed groups. Since 2014, the organizers have been able to rely on government assistance for setting up and facilitating the festival.

After months of questions to government about support for this year's festival, the organizers received no answers and only learned that government had pulled their support when they were contacted by media.

A question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Do you think this is an appropriate way to treat a hard-working community organization?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's absolutely untrue. A letter was sent from my department to the organizer. I will table it here later today. They are fully aware of what I have committed to.

What they asked for, they wanted loads of crushed asphalt to be put on the site. They wanted highway crews in there for 10 days. They want us to put up snow fence. They want us to create signs for them. I said the only thing that we would do under my watch would be to lend them the snow fence and we would fix up any of the signs that they had from a previous year through our sign shop in Tignish to make sure they had adequate signage that they needed.

I will table this letter later today.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrook.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I have stated is absolutely true.

You did send a letter, that's true, dated June 12th and that was received the day after the media contacted the organizers of Rock the Boat.

At this late date, the event organizers have no time to explore other funding or employment support options to supplement this loss, and most workers seeking seasonal

employment are already committed elsewhere.

A significant amount of preparation work goes into the event grounds, getting them ready, and the amount of pedestrian automobile traffic during the event could pose serious traffic concerns if a sufficient number of trained workers are not present to manage it.

Implications for festivals in communities

Question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Did you consider the implications for festivals in communities if they are unable properly staff road crews for these events on such short notice?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Across Prince Edward Island we have many great summer events.

I know, Mr. Speaker, in your own district you have the Fiddle Festival, which has been going on for 40 or more years. We don't provide them any assistance through highway crews. I know Montague has Montague Days, we don't provide them any assistance through highway crews. In Georgetown they have the Georgetown Days; we don't provide them any assistance through highway crews. In Murray River they have the fisheries festival; we don't provide them any assistance through highway crews.

The Rock the Boat Festival, through my department prior to my time, has received over \$40,000 worth of in-kind services and it's done.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrook.

Ms. Altass: The pulling support only weeks before a festival is inappropriate and unprofessional in any case. I can somewhat understand this decision in the context of a large, private festival, but Rock the Boat is a not-for-profit event that in past years, has used proceeds from the festival to support local charities, pay off the mortgage on the local rink and install solar panels on the

rink, making long-term financial and environmental gains.

A question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Why would you make a decision that hurts a community organization doing valuable work in rural PEI?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Like I said, there are community groups raising money for many things that highways does not contribute highway crews to help do. I think that's probably an appropriate measure for us to not do.

What I said when I talked to CBC about it is if I can't afford to do it for everybody, I can't afford to do it for anybody. The day of fairness is here. The day of the people is here.

For the record, Rock the Boat received their next year's funding from tourism already in March so they have \$45,000 to spend this year – so they have enough money to hire a crew if they need to.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrook.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I mentioned, one of the major issues here is the late notice that was given to this festival that they now need to scramble to find a way to make this happen, which is very challenging for this volunteer organization.

Recently, the community has discovered that the ice surface in the Tyne Valley Arena has cracked requiring major repairs estimated at over \$900,000. Rock the Boat is a not-for-profit event that is a critical source of funding for needed infrastructure in the community.

Use of highway staff/road crews for festivals (further)

Question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Will you reconsider the decision to provide one – just

one – road crew to ensure the event is successful and safe for everyone?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I spoke to the staff over in my office about this. We've talked about our responsibility when it has to do with the public right-of-way. We totally accept any responsibility that happens on the road, as we do with Cavendish Beach, as we do with any festival that has a large number of vehicles either entering or exiting the site.

The responsibility for what happens on the 60-foot right-of-way belongs to the department of highways. We will take care of that. Anything that happens on that right-of-way, we will be there to make sure that we signal or put traffic cones down if that's what necessary to keep the people safe on the public right-of-way. I've committed to that, as well as committing to sending forward some of the products that the chair of the event has asked for, like the snow fence, like the signage and quite frankly, that's more than we've offered to other organizations.

But while I'm at it – and I talked to my department about this this morning – I said: What we have offered to do this year for Rock the Boat Festival, I am now going to offer to any community group here in Prince Edward Island. So if you need signage, we'll print it. If you want to borrow our snow fence and we're not using it, you can.

What I said, and I believed my whole life, is we have to be fair to everyone. We can't do for one and not do for the other. So from here forward, it's going to be fair right across the board regardless of where you live.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrook.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to hear that there will be supports for other community organizations. I think in terms of fairness, leaving something like this to the very last minute so an organization does not have sufficient time

to make plans to find people to take on these extra tasks and to consider it in terms of their overall budget of the festival, which is very small compared to, say, a large for-profit festival compared to Cavendish, that doesn't seem very fair to me.

This decision is clearly disadvantageous to the cultural sector, yet the Minister of Economic Development, Tourism and Culture has been silent on this issue.

Funding to festivals

A question to the Minister of Economic Development, Tourism and Culture: What did you tell the minister of transportation when you heard this decision?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, when we were elected and took over the role as minister one of the first things I seen was the funding to each festival, and I believe there are approximately 60 festivals in PEI, so as you are going through them you are comparing the numbers and so forth.

What I did find, though, was that the 2020 budget from the previous minister was given to Rock the Boat this year other than \$5,000. So they had an additional \$15,000 going into this year.

So when the minister come to me, obviously we are dealing with the Cavendish Beach Festival as well, he had expressed his views and I agree with him. Of course, the festivals are an important piece of tourism, we need to support them.

I will do whatever I can to support them, but cars are getting beat up on the road every day. We are getting calls every day from people hitting potholes. We need the crews on the road to keep the roads – they are in the worst shape they have ever been, and I do support the minister's decision.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrook, your final question.

Ms. Altass: Again, the Rock the Boat Festival is asking for one road crew for a few days around the festival, which would make a world of difference for them. If it's going to make such a huge impact on the quality of our roads, I would suggest that there might be something wrong with what we're doing in terms of maintaining our roads that that would such a huge issue.

Clearly, there are disadvantages in terms of rural sustainability in development as well.

Removal of supports to community initiatives

Question to Minister of Fisheries and Communities: Are you supportive of removing supports for this and other community based initiatives?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will take the opportunity to talk about the shape of the roads in Prince Edward Island. The hon. member brings up that maybe we are doing something wrong.

I believe maybe the roads have been drastically underfunded in the last 10 years, and needed major input and that's what I have told my department. When I went in there I said we need to get these roads fixed up. It's important to me because it is important to Islanders.

When I went door to door, I heard from Islanders that said the roads are terrible; I am scared I am going to lose a tire every single day of the week when I try to travel anywhere. It's important to me that I do what's good for Islanders.

I believe that the decisions that we're making in the department today are best suited for the department of transportation. I believe that under my watch we're going to do what's under my responsibility in the department of transportation, and one of those responsibilities is the roads, one of those responsibilities is the road crews.

I'm going to merge those together and make sure that the roads are in proper shape to fulfill my commitment, to fulfill the

Premier's commitment to be here for the people before anything else.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.