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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 28 JUNE 2019

Response to Questions taken as Notice

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

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On Wednesday June 26th, the hon. Opposition House Leader asked me to clarify details of a secure income pilot program that was announced, in both the Speech from the Throne and the budget address.

The secure income program is a recommendation of a Poverty Reduction Action Plan and will allow Islanders with barriers to entering the workforce, such as a disability to have their basic needs met. The program will aim to provide benefits above that of a short income or social assistance.

My department has established working groups to direct the roll out of a secure income program, which includes exploring best practices, determining eligibility criteria, developing policies and procedures, determining technological requirements and planning and delivering the necessary training to staff.

These working groups will report directly to the director of social programs, who will report progress to the deputy and myself.

We anticipate the program to begin in January of 2020 and have committed 225,000 this fiscal year to expected client support. The funding is not to support a commission or a chair person, this money will be going directly to our Islands most vulnerable.

I want to reintegrate that our government is still committed to a basic income guarantee pilot, but we do require financial support from the federal government to get this done. I have sent a letter to Minister Morneau to ask for that financial support.

As a government we did not want to wait. We wanted to ensure that the most vulnerable Islanders had their basic needs met. Our secure income program, well not a basic income guarantee for all Islanders, will support the Islands most vulnerable, those who have severe barriers to employment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So yesterday in the House I was asked about our renewable targets and our carbon emission targets are part of the climate action strategy plan and increasing our local renewable energy does not directly impact our emission targets and that's because we buy electricity from New Brunswick. So, any decrease in use or any increase in renewable counts directly towards New Brunswick targets, not ours.

That said, we are committed to increasing local renewable energy generation, it's good for the environment and it's good for the economy. The provincial energy strategy has recommendations on this and this includes expanding wind generation capacity by adding 30 megawatts in the near future and 40 megawatts in 2025.

We are certainly willing to discuss any future targets for local renewable electricity generation.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I had a question yesterday about the federal funds for green initiatives and this is what I have: investing in Canada infrastructure, program includes federal funding for PEI public transit and green infrastructure; \$27 million towards public transit, \$228.1 million for green infrastructure and this does not include any additional matching funds from the province or applicant.

The agreement was signed in August 2018. The first round for applications closed two months ago. We are reviewing 110 projects that have been submitted with a total of \$365 million.

Once the projects are approved by the federal government, I'm happy to provide an update to the Legislature on how these funds will be used.

The Low Carbon Economy Fund is a joint federal/provincial investment of \$47.8 million to PEI over four years, spanning from 2018-2022 and I'll table a list of the efficiency programs my department has

funded through the Low Carbon Economy Fund in the current budget.

It's in the handout but I'll name a few of them: our social initiative will be through there, we have business energy solutions are through there, Business Energy Rebates are through there, the Winter Warming program that I talked about in here before will be through there, instant energy savings is through there. The Energy Efficiency Equipment Rebates are all through there, Home Insulation Rebates are all through there, but this is everybody's book but I will table it through Tabling of Documents.

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

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot asked me how many housing units are planned for Summerside this year. I have gone back to my department and confirmed that nine seniors units were completed and tenants moved in on June 1st, 2019 and that an additional 32 senior units are currently under construction.

We are also working with a developer to create 30 mixed units in the Summerside area. The project has multiple funding partners which require additional coordination for a public announcement, but we do expect to be able to make an announcement on these units at a future date.

The hon. member also asked me to confirm how many of these units will be affordable and accessible. All new publicly funded housing developments are affordable with a rent geared to income at 25%.

As well, we have a goal that a minimum of 20% of publicly funded housing units will be accessible. We would also consider client needs as per the registry and would add additional units as required.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Questions by Members

Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

Once again, I appreciate the prompt follow up of the questions taken as notice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to follow up on the series of questions yesterday concerning the Partnership for Growth.

The Premier was absolutely correct when he stated that all political parties were approached by the Partnership for Growth and they asked each of us to respond, in writing, to their request.

In the PC response to the partnership, the Premier stated this and I quote: My Progressive Conservative team is set to work with the partnership and all Islanders to create an economic development action plan for our province upon taking office. This will be a priority within the first six months of being in government.

PC party campaign promises (further)

It's now over two months since the election and a question to the Premier: Can you give the House an update on the progress you have made towards that commitment?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you hon. member for the question.

Obviously on the day that we were sworn in as the government, the first thing we did was appoint my colleague from Morell-Donagh the Government House Leader to serve as the head of that Partnership for Growth initiative to go about building the economic action plan that we talked about in cooperation with all of these individual groups across Prince Edward Island – chambers of commerce and tourism industry associations and so many others.

The hon. House Leader has already met a number of times, I believe with the group, we're formulating some terms of reference, we're going to put some supports in from government, things are well under way long before the six months that we had suggested.

Many of the commitments that people are questioning that aren't in the platform, this is certainly one from our platform that has been implemented and is in action.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

During Question Period yesterday the Premier said that it would be a mistake to refer to the Partnership for Growth as a lobbyist group, but several members of the organizations there that are listed are on the government's own lobbyist registry and if you visit the partnerships website they clearly state, and again, I quote: the PEI Partnership for Growth is comprised of business organizations and industry associations who have come together with a shared vision for our economic future. We invite all political parties to support this unprecedented private sector alignment of our vision.

I find it troubling that our Premier cannot actually recognize a lobbyist group, even when he's being lobbied.

Business and private sectors re: lobbyist group

Question to the Premier: Why would you assert that an organization that represents 21 business and private sectors and organizations isn't a lobbyist group?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well I guess where I see the difference is that I see them as partners. We're sitting here as partners to develop an economic action plan in the best interest of Prince Edward Island to fund the economy, to make sure our economy continues to perform, our economy is shared with Islanders across Prince Edward Island, and our economy is shared throughout rural and urban Prince Edward Island.

I see them, as I'm sure individually as they're duty bound by the lobbyist act that we've put in place in this Legislature that they have to lobby individually. But I see them when they come together in this group for the strategic partnership, I see them as

partners with the government, and I'm very happy to lead a government that wants to work with all Island groups to build a strong economy, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday the Premier described Partnership for Growth as 20 community groups, but the reality is that it represents the interests of the private business sector. Now don't get me wrong, I believe that government absolutely needs to listen to the private sector, but it should not let the priorities of a single sector dictate economic policy.

We have a partner there; there are many other potential partners across this Island who are contributing hugely to the economic success of our province. In addition to the private sector, government needs to engage with labour, with the non-profit sector, and with all citizens.

I'm profoundly concerned that the new government is taking a very narrow view of economic development that puts the interest of private profits over the public good.

Organizations and economic plan

Could the Premier tell us what other organizations beyond the Partnership for Growth he intends to consult with over the next four months to develop this province's economic plan?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That is a great question.

From my understanding, the 21 groups that have worked to develop the strategic partnership group have worked with 50 community groups from all across Prince Edward Island. They are collaborating, they are working, and trying to bring more people involved.

But a very fair point being raised by the Leader of the Opposition, we can't just have

one singular or individuals try to guide this plan. Many individuals should have access to this and should have input to it.

I would be encouraging the Government House Leader and all the members of the strategic growth partnership to make sure that all Islanders have a say in this because it's all Islanders that we're trying to serve. It's the economy we're trying to build for all Islanders.

I appreciate the encouragement from the Leader of the Opposition to get involved because to fund a lot of the programs that we want to fund in here, we need a strong economy, we need a strong tax base, and we need everybody working.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Nice words and I could not agree more. We need to involve everybody.

Since taking office, the Premier has publicly announced a very strong alliance with the Partnership for Growth. He has appointed a registered lobbyist with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business as the Deputy Minister for Economic Growth, Tourism, and Culture, and he apparently even failed to attend a scheduled meeting with the PEI Federation of Labour. The PC campaign slogan was: "It's about people."

Economic plan and Islanders

Could the Premier explain why so many people – workers, the third sector, the poor, Indigenous organizations, and seniors, to take a few – are being left out of his economic plan?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well I would take exception to someone suggesting that I didn't show up for a meeting. I have never turned away a meeting, and if someone is suggesting otherwise, I'd like to see what that is because that is inaccurate information. Anyone who sets up a meeting with the Premier of Prince Edward Island gets a

meeting with the Premier. So I would like to have that corrected and (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I'm very open to the concept that others should have input into this. Absolutely; I think that's what we're supposed to here in the Legislature.

Minority situation that we're in, the collaboration, the consultation, whatever 'c' word we want to use, that we're working together to develop a strong Prince Edward Island for all.

It is about people, and if the Leader of the Opposition has groups or individuals that he suggests should be part of this or should have input into this, we would be very welcome to those suggestions. He can hand them off to me, and I can hand them off to the Government House Leader or he can do it individually himself.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The government's throne speech made reference to social enterprise. Of course, the last time social enterprise was mentioned in a throne speech in 2016, one of your Cabinet colleagues asked what it was while another claimed it was made up.

Social enterprise

So a question to the Premier: Could you explain what you mean when you say social enterprise?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well thank you very much for the question.

I worked for many years with the Mi'kmaq Confederacy and one of the key components of the development component of the confederacy was working through social enterprise.

What I would describe social enterprise as, is working in partnership with a number of

people, but ensuring that individuals from within the community have the ability to develop capacity, to have an ownership stake, and to eventually assume the ownership of these projects and that's what I see as a social enterprise.

I think there are many good opportunities that have been developed through our First Nations and other individuals. I can't be responsible for everything – my former members of my party said – but I believe that's what I see as a social enterprise and I'm really excited to see what we can do working together to develop it further.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Social enterprise is often used to refer to business ventures operated by non-profits, whether they are societies, charities or cooperatives, where profits are returned to the business and have a social purpose rather than just maximizing profits to shareholders. This is part of the social economy.

The throne speech says that we're seeing social enterprise take off, and that through social enterprise young people are helping to keep our communities strong while contributing to the overall quality of life in our province.

Government support for social economy

A question to the Premier: What is your government doing to support the community sector and the social economy of PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are lots of initiatives that we've outlined in the budget that actually do exactly that.

The Reach Foundation is a classic example, but there are so many others.

But as I've been saying here for many days in this Legislature, what we've developed together, what we've presented as a budget is a first opportunity. This is the first opportunity to present it to get things going, building on the priorities from all parties and priorities that represent all Prince Edward Islanders.

I'm certainly open to the opposition. I know the Opposition House Leader is a compassionate leader in this area. I would like to have much of her input to make sure we're on the right track and I would encourage the discussion to continue.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, last year, to encourage innovative approaches to persistent and complex social challenges, the Government of Canada created a social finance fund of \$755 million on a cash basis over the next 10 years which will give charitable, non-profit, and social-purpose organizations access to new financing that will implement innovative ideas and connect them with non-government investors and these (Indistinct) support projects that drive positive social change.

There's also an additional \$50 million which starts this fall for social-purpose organizations to improve their ability to successfully participate in the social economy. But, unlike other jurisdictions, PEI does not have a legal or regulatory framework for social enterprise or social financing, and we will risk missing this opportunity.

Development of social finance strategy

A question to the Premier: Will this government commit to consulting with regional experts from the community sector who can provide recommendations on the development of a social enterprise and social finance strategy for the province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I think that is an absolutely wonderful recommendation. I think it's something that we really should look at and dive deeper into.

As we were talking about the other day when the minister for economic growth was doing his budget estimates, I think we need to start to change how we look at

investments in businesses, small and large. We've been chasing a lot of big fish over the years and it's been helpful, but a lot of the new economy is in one and two and three-person jobs and it's in the social enterprise, as the hon. member suggested.

I would be very open to that recommendation and I would encourage one of the standing committees maybe, or maybe a group of us could work together, to actually build on that recommendation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During discussions last week on climate change, both the opposition and the government raised concerns about the potentially high costs of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. One way or another, Islanders will have to shoulder these costs, either directly or via government expenditures.

Cost of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

Question to the Minister of Finance: Do you agree that we need to take into consideration the costs of the measures we use to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much for the question.

We most definitely have to look at all aspects of climate change and what we're going to do to change the way we act in this province.

It's something that came forward – we know it's an important part of how this province can mitigate their carbon footprint and we will work together to ensure that we do that. It's early days. We talked about it a number of times already in this Legislature and we'll continue to do that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If we are going to find the least expensive ways of reducing emissions and to make fiscally-responsible decisions, we need to be able to compare our options.

Measuring cost of policies to lower carbon footprint

Question to the minister: Do you have any suggestions on how we might measure the costs of different policies so that we can choose the lowest-cost option?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

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

We definitely have to when we're looking at anyway of mitigating our carbon footprint, we need to look at the cost and that's something we've started to do, whether it's through solar programs, whether it's through the carbon levee that has been basically pushed upon us through the federal government. We have to look at the cost of each and every one of those programs to ensure that we remain fiscally responsible. It's very important economically that we do that, but it's very important environmentally that we can continue to work on our carbon footprint.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Abatement measures for reducing carbon emissions

One of the key metrics we can use to evaluate the cost of different measures for reducing carbon emissions is to look at the abatement cost; basically the dollars per ton of CO₂ avoided. Is the hon. Minister familiar with this sort of measure?

Speaker: **Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will have to admit, I'm aware of the measure but I can't really elaborate on it, so I will bring that back to you for sure.

Speaker: The hon. Member from mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If we are going to make fiscally responsible decisions, we need to be fully informed about the full costs of what the different options available to us are.

Reduction of cost per ton

Will the minister commit to providing the cost per ton of reduced CO2 so that we can make informed and fiscally responsible decisions?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, we will for sure. We do every day, I mean every decision we make in this House affects all Islanders. Whether it's about the environment, health or education, the impact is both, environmentally, but fiscally, something we need to look at for sure.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: So in order to make fully informed decisions, we also need to ensure that we know the abatement costs of all the measures available.

Providing of abatement cost re: carbon pricing

Will the minister commit to providing the abatement cost for all the available options, including ones the government may be less comfortable with, like carbon pricing?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We definitely will. Carbon pricing is just one part of this. We've got wind farms, we're talking solar, we're talking any type of renewable energy that we can. For sure,

we'll bring back the cost of mitigating any one of those things.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to solving problems, I believe there are two equally important roles for government to play. We need to be reactive to acute needs as they arise and we also need to be proactive and anticipate problems that are coming in plan for the future.

This week, we heard that farm gate sales are down and that the budget will include an additional \$5.7 million investment into agriculture insurance rates and premiums.

This amount of money is more than we're budgeting for the housing crisis. I realize this is absolutely necessary this year, but if we genuinely want to protect farming into the future, we need a plan.

Sustainable farming future for PEI

Question to the minister of agriculture: Seeing the numbers on this, do you believe the steps we are currently taking are enough to be proactive in planning a sustainable farming future for PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, thank you hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

It was a tough year last year and we did have to put some more money into the insurance program. But that money isn't cured money, that's insurance programs, so that's how insurance works. You have to put in when the premiums get higher and that's how that's working.

Our farmers are working hard to sustain their farms and they too, are worried about their future. This is something that is true to my heart, as well. Soil quality monitoring is something that we're doing now, alternative land use is another thing that we're doing. There's steps and were going to keep doing those steps, we're going to step that up a little more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier has committed to direct answers and I credit him and many ministers with having followed through on that to this point.

When I asked about following the climate labs recommendation on commissioning, a comprehensive study of crop opportunities and challenges under warming conditions on P.E.I, the hon. Minister of Agriculture and land said, quote "... We take all considerations in and for the betterment of the soil, the farmer. We will be looking at different things as they come and we will continue to..."

Comprehensive study on crop opportunities

Question to the Premier: Do you feel that I've received a direct answer on my question on whether the minister is willing to commission a comprehensive study on crop opportunities?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

I would suggest as the hon. member has suggested in the preamble to the question that what we're seeing here in these early days is a complete difference of what we've seen in years past in terms of questioning, trying to provide the most accurate information we can; keeping in mind that we are a new government in transition trying to get up to speed on many of the files.

I believe the answer that you quoted there was an answer, was it as complete as maybe you would have appreciated or whether it could be? Perhaps, not, but I do think that the minister would be committal to making sure that answer is presented here in a way which is at least somewhat satisfactory to the opposition and to all those watching.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Comprehensive study re: crop opportunities

Question to the minister of agriculture: Will you commission a comprehensive study to examine crop opportunities and challenges for PEI under warming conditions projected over the next 30 years so farmers can plan accordingly?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: That's something I'll have to discuss with my department, of course. So that's 30 years time.

I'd also like to – oh Mr. Speaker, sorry – I'd also like to have a discussion with my counterpart from Summerside-Wilmot on her future of the agriculture on PEI. How she sees the future down the road.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Two points on that. I don't think I'm actually able to answer questions in this period, I think I'd have to be a minister for that to be the case.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Lund: To clarify, I also am not suggesting that we start a study in 30 years. I mean one that takes into account 30 years of warming opportunities.

I've spoken before on how climate change will impact a number of portfolios. I genuinely believe that the Premier understands we need to address climate change. To do that, we need to understand that climate change doesn't exist solely in a single portfolio. It's a lens in every portfolio.

Include climate change planning in decision-making and budgeting

Question to the Premier: Will you be proactive, anticipate the problems that are

coming, and issue a clear directive to your departments to incorporate climate change planning in all decision-making and budgeting?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

That is a good question, and it's an important question.

I think as our climate changes, as we've been saying for many months now, Prince Edward Island being an Island climate we have to be more aware than most about the change in climate and the impacts that it had.

I do believe the premise of the question is accurate as that it isn't just an issue that can be dealt with in climate change. I think as we continue to evolve with our operations of government that that is a very real expectation that will be implemented over the course of time.

Just to follow-up on the comment from the minister – I believe input from individuals, like yourself, on these matters are very important. I don't think he was asking you the question here, but giving us the opportunity to elaborate on what your thought process are and what impacts it can have going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

I was a little unsure who I was going to ask my question to today until I got in the House as the Premier advised yesterday that that's actually not the government on that side of the House. I do see his title still on his pocket there.

So my question today is for the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning, and it's regarding the PC party's pledge to increase the George Coles Bursary to \$3,000. The throne speech and the budget is silent on this pledge.

Increase to George Coles Bursary in Budget

Minister: Is the bursary being increased to the \$3,000 for this upcoming school year?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll have to get back to you on that.

An Hon. Member: What?

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

Mr. Henderson: Not ready.

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

It's good that we have students that are in the gallery today to hear that at least you're going to check into that.

The surplus in the budget was \$1.8 million. The bursary pledge, according to the PC platform, would cost \$1.4 million. This promise could have been more than covered by that surplus.

Minister: Why did your government choose not to honour the pledge in this year's budget?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Premier King: I think that question really is to be addressed probably to me, because as the Premier of the government, what I was trying to suggest yesterday in my answer was we're all the government.

We're a minority government. We didn't just have one person or one group running the whole show. We have to try to work together.

What I've been trying to say for a number of days is, a platform laid out by every party has to outline things that aren't always going to get done in the first few days or the first year of a mandate.

I would like us to have a little bit of time to implement a number of these things, anything we can do to make it easier for students to get a quality education here on Prince Edward Island we have to be mindful of the fiscal restraints and that we can't give everything to everybody – we're trying to do the very best we can. 85 percent of this budget is yours hon. member and I think you should be proud of it as all members of the Legislature are.

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

Mr. Mitchell: It does appear unfortunate that a number of students will have graduated before this bursary is increased to your \$3,000 level.

Timeline for bursary increases

So to the Premier or the minister, whoever would like to answer it: Could you inform this House of when that platform pledge will indeed be honoured?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well like most pledges in our platform and most of the pledges in the opposition's platform and most of the pledges in your platform, I really, really hope that we are in a position to do that as soon as humanly possible.

We'd like to be able to develop a budget that treats all the priorities of Prince Edward Islanders equally and fairly – keeping in mind that we wanted to remain in a surplus situation and to do the very best that we can.

I sincerely hope that sometime very soon we are in a good position to be able to do that and when we do that I hope we can get buy-in from all members of this House to make sure it's good policy.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was reported that a deceased right whale that was found off the coast off the Magdalene Islands was brought into (Indistinct) shore in Norway this morning

around 3:00 a.m. for a post-mortem and an onsite burial.

Cost of disposal to marine carcasses

Question to the Minister of Fisheries and Communities: Could you inform the House as to what approvals are required by government for this and if the taxpayers of PEI are paying for this and if it's in your budget, what is the disposal for marine carcass?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The events in the last 21 days have actually been tragic and it's something that I've been dealing with on a daily basis with the briefing from DFO, from our department and from different agencies and I will confirm there was a whale that is being brought in this morning. I am being briefed on it this morning.

It will not be a cost to the taxpayers of PEI and the hope is to have the scientists on site as soon as possible to try and determine what the cause of these fatalities are.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Local residents have voiced a number of concerns to me such as the order that can come from this, not having access to the beach, environmental impacts it may have to the wildlife, to the habitat, to the sand dunes.

Environmental impacts of diseased marine carcasses burials

Minister, what steps will your department be taking to address these concerns?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Over the last two weeks I've had several conversations with the federal minister, also

the ministers of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick on this. We know of the concerns and I was brought up to speed on the concerns on the last burials that were taken place and mediation factors have been put in place to make sure that these are limited to the best of our ability.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Whenever events like this happen, it's very important that community residents are informed; kept abreast of what's happening.

Yesterday I received a phone call from residents that a Hymac had landed in the area and they went down to question it and it was a contractor from Kinkora that they were burying a whale this morning. So they phoned the department of environment, they phoned the department of fisheries, they were told by their departments to call their local MLA, that's how I found out about it.

I'm not even sure why they went to Kinkora to get a contractor when there was one less than a kilometer away that has a Hymac that's quite able to do it.

So what efforts have your department or will your department to engage community residents on this matter?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: I don't know who was contracted to be honest, what you're telling me is the first I'm hearing about it. I will take your concerns back the department and we will make sure that we will do the best to inform the public to the best of our ability. I will also pass that on to the department of fisheries and oceans.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Delay of replacement to Montague Intermediate School

Question to the hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Can you explain why the gym floor replacement at Montague Intermediate was delayed when it was ready for tender only two months ago?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's something we're still looking at within the department. The construction season is far from over. You know it's really difficult when you have \$2 million in an infrastructure budget to address all of the maintenance and repairs for schools and so I'll commit to you here today as the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning, I will be lobbying for increasing that funding for infrastructure projects so we can address even more of the small school repairs across the province.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The problem is, is that it was ready to go. It was ready to be done this summer and then all of a sudden it was just gone, no where's to be seen. The work was estimated to cost about \$100,000, so we're not talking about a multi-million dollar project.

A question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: When will the gym floor at Montague Intermediate be replaced?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would love to stand here today and say that would be replaced next week. I need to go back and check with my department, I need to work with the rest of Cabinet; it has to go through Treasury Board. It's a lot of fun as a minister learning about the different government processes. I do commit to the

member that I'll have that information back to him as soon as possible.

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

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That sounds a lot like the old hon. minister of education. This project was set to go and ready for tender only two months ago and then all of a sudden it was gone. Replacing a gym floor is the kind of project that can be done over the summer while school is out and won't interfere with classes.

A question to the education minister: Minister, will you take action and get the gym floor replaced at Montague Intermediate this summer?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Aren't we having a lot of fun here today?

I mean, the member that looks after Westisle wants to have the roof replaced. We had questions earlier in the week from the Member from Evangeline-Miscouche that wants us to look at École Evangeline and I bet we can go around to every single member here and almost every one of them has a school in their district that has a repair that needs to be made.

I will tell you that I know the Premier well, and I can say that your school in Montague will be one of our priorities.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Recently the minister commented that he'd be willing to intervene on behalf of farmers to ensure the rate structure would not unfairly punish them. Our current electrical rate structure has power costing more units the less you use. Kilowatt hour for a residential customer costs 14.37 cents until you get over 2000 kilowatt hours per month

and then it becomes 11.42 cents. This in effect rewards those who use more and punishes those who use less.

Electricity rate structures for farmers

Does the hon. minister intend to work to rectify this issue?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No I actually I don't because we don't set the price of electricity, it's done through IRAC. That's a process that's going on now. The part that is said I was going to intervene on was the part where they were taking the second block away in the middle of the night, without warning farmers, putting their bottom line at risk, putting farmers at risk, putting the economy here on Prince Edward Island at risk.

So I will defend rural farmers here on Prince Edward Island. I'll defend them through intervening against electricity prices and I commit to that to all Islanders. We're here to protect you, we're here to protect this economy and we're here to protect farming community

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

Mr. Howard: It's a step in the right direction to make sure that efficiency behavior is not steered in the wrong direction. Steering it in the right direction is what we really need however. A flat rate for all power is a half measurer in this regard providing no market incentive to use less. Removing a second block and making all power at the higher rate is punishing to all.

Usage of less electricity for Islanders

Does the minister feel we should encourage all Islanders to try and use less energy?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, first of all we do have programs through efficiency and we do just those vey things.

We're not going to suggest to Maritime Electric or to IRAC how their rates should be structured. We're going to intervene through the process as everyone's legally allowed to do. This is the legal process for how rates get set here on Prince Edward Island. I'm not going to interfere with the process; I'm not going to interfere with how the business of Maritime Electric happens. We're going to intervene on behalf of Islanders.

We believe in protecting business here on Prince Edward Island, we believe in keeping farmers farming here on Prince Edward Island, we believe in keeping the manufacture sector here on Prince Edward Island open. I don't understand why the Green Party is against business here on Prince Edward Island.

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

Mr. Howard: Certainly not against business, I'm a businessman myself.

It's the high-energy users that end up pushing the grid infrastructure to the limit, and require expensive upgrades. Maritime Electric asked to spend \$70 million, and Summerside's utility wanted to spend \$23 million on new diesel generators.

Currently, our two options for more generation capacity is to purchase more from NB Power or to install our own here, traditionally diesel fired peaker plants. Both options send money off-Island every year either to NB Power or to the diesel suppliers.

Incentives for rate payers to use less energy

Will the minister commit to encourage the behaviour we want to see by pursuing an inclining rate structure that incentivizes rate payers to use less by making energy cost less for a unit if you use less?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So I know that the Green Party that was here during the last assembly would have

admonished government for trying to interfere in something that they were legislatively not allowed to interfere in.

I won't interfere at all with the way that rates are set on Prince Edward Island. I won't interfere with Maritime Electric. I will intervene on behalf of Islanders, as we're legally allowed to when the time comes, and the time is now. The time is now to protect Islanders.

What we are doing here on Prince Edward Island to help bring greener electricity here to Prince Edward Island: we have a wind farm, we're adding wind energy to it, we already provide 24% of the total electricity through wind. We're going to increase that capacity this year. We're going to increase that capacity again in 2025.

We are doing great things here in Prince Edward Island. We are helping green the economy here in Prince Edward Island. This is something that the PC party has shown leadership on in the past, and will continue to show leadership on.

All the while protecting our industry here on Prince Edward Island, all the while protecting farmers here on Prince Edward Island, all the while manufacturing here on Prince Edward Island, because I believe that's the right thing to do.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the minister is confusing intervene with interfere, but carrying on here.

An inclining rate structure would create less expensive first block of power. Everyone uses the first block of power, farmers included. In most of Canada, and indeed the world, there's not a declining rate structure as we have here on PEI for obvious reasons. Those who have less ability to pay power bills tend to use less power, and therefore pay for power only in the first rate block.

Developing a new rate structure for residential rate payers

Will the minister commit to pursuing a rate structure that works to relieve the burden on

our most vulnerable, specifically an inclining rate structure for our residential rate payers?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, again, for the fourth time: No.

I'm not interfering with the way the rates are set here on Prince Edward Island. I refuse to. I'm not even sure that it's legal for me to.

We're going to intervene with the proposed rate structure, which is how it works. They propose their own rate structure, then it's up to the public. They can decide whether or not they want to intervene on their behalf and present to IRAC or in this case the department is going to act as an intervener and intervene on behalf of Islanders because we believe in business.

We don't believe that we should hurt farmers. In the middle of the night go to a dairy farm and say guess what? We're taking away the second block, we know you use a lot, but we don't care we're going to hurt you. We don't believe in that.

We believe that those businesses are the backbone. It's the backbone of the district I live in. I believe that those farmers deserve to be treated fairly, and that's exactly what we intend to do by intervening on their behalf.

We're not going to ask to set rate structures. We're going to intervene against the rate structure that is currently being proposed.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Currently the rate structure costs those vulnerable Islanders more per unit of energy than someone with a 5,000 square foot electrically heated home. An inclining rate structure alleviates some burden on our most vulnerable, and it would encourage high-power users who tend to have the ability to invest in efficiency and self-generation measures to modify their behaviour.

Furthermore, in our *Electric Power Act* it states in the preamble that, and I quote, "WHEREAS public utilities should utilize energy efficiency and demand-side resource measures whenever it is cost-effective to do so." The rest of the act falls after this statement.

No-cost solution to rate structures

Does the minister agree that a no-cost solution like using rate structures to reward lower energy use is a cost effective measure to encourage efficiency in demand side management?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So what we do through the office of efficiency is we offer people the opportunity to bring efficiencies into their own home. Some of those efficiencies will help reduce the amount of electricity that people use.

We helped people move into heat pumps in their homes, electric heat in their homes. We're going to help people get solar energy into their homes. All of those things together we're going to help bring down our carbon footprint when it comes to how we produce electricity here on Prince Edward Island and we use electricity here on Prince Edward Island.

The part of the rate structure that bothers me that's currently proposed is immediately getting rid of the second block.

I believe that's going to hurt business. I believe that's going to hurt farming. I believe that that's an anti-business movement. I believe that it's an anti-farming movement.

Proposing that we do anything but intervene on this behalf will only hurt farmers, will only hurt manufacturing here in Prince Edward Island. In order to have the money that we need to offer things like solar programming, to offer things like our housing programming, to help vulnerable Islanders, we need money and we need people to make money here in Prince Edward Island.

We need to support our farming community. We need to support manufacturing and together, we can all do this. We can't do it if we make moves that are going to negatively impact the people that are making money here for this province every single day.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As you may be aware, the community-run Lower Bedeque Schoolhouse Museum will not be open to the public this summer due to a lack of resources and volunteers.

The schoolhouse not only offered a fascinating and educational look at an important part of Island life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it also attracted hundreds of tourists each year looking for places connected to the great Island author Lucy Maud Montgomery who taught at the schoolhouse in the 1890s.

According to the museum chair, the volunteer operators of the museum approached the government to see if there was any interest in taking over the museum. The province supposedly expressed interest, but no action was taken to keep the museum open.

Support for Lower Bedeque Schoolhouse Museum

Question to the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture: Does the province intend to take steps to ensure that the Lower Bedeque Schoolhouse Museum remains open to the public for the 2019 tourist season?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, hon. member.

The first I had actually heard about that was in the paper here a couple of days ago when I read the article. So, since I took over the department nobody has come to me with any ask but I'll certainly sit down with them and do my very best.

I know there's a schoolhouse in my own district, Fanningbrook Schoolhouse, that I met with last Saturday that are experiencing the same issues as well and we're working to an end goal with that as well, so I'd be more than happy to meet with the people in Bedeque.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, your final question.

Mr. Hammarlund: Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the challenges faced by the Lower Bedeque Schoolhouse Museum are all too familiar to community heritage groups.

Indeed, the operators of the museum also approached the Bedeque Historic Society about potentially taking over the museum but they, too, have insufficient resources and volunteers for such an undertaking.

The preservation and support of Island culture was an important part of this new government's election platform. However, the level of overall funding for heritage preservation and museums in the 19/20 budget remains unchanged from last year.

Increase of support to museums and heritage

Question to the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture: Does the government intend to increase its financial support of community museums and heritage institutions?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, hon. member.

As you're going through department and you see things like this, it definitely needs to be looked at.

This is our history and our heritage of Prince Edward Island. They need to be preserved. We need to work with the groups to see what we can do. The big thing when I came in here six weeks ago was to go through the department completely to see where the wasteful spending was happening, to do a complete review.

I think we're going to look at that in the future because there's a demand for it. We need to preserve our history and we'll do whatever we can to work with these groups to help to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]