



Session:	1/66
Date:	2 July 2019
No:	9

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

TUESDAY, 2 JULY 2019

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During Question Period of Friday, the hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford asked a question on abatement costs on carbon pricing. Further, there were questions on the costs and impacts associated with different approaches to reducing CO₂, specifically whether we would be willing to share and consider the information on different options available.

It was noted by the Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change in the debate surrounding the debate surrounding the proposed the amendment to the *Climate Leadership Act*, we feel a thorough examination is warranted.

In that debate, the idea of exploring and sending this to standing committee was suggested, this would present a great platform, to not only explore the costs, but to also to fully understand the impact on Islanders.

Lastly, I want to reiterate that we are open to sharing any information we have that we are allowed to share.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Chair: The hon. Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning, Environment, Water and Climate Change.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In Question Period on Friday, the member asked if George Coles bursary is being increased to \$3,000 for this upcoming school year and the answer is no. No, it's not.

The George Coles bursary will remain at \$2,200 per year for the 2019-2022 school year. But we are, of course, looking to increase this to \$3,000 as was in our platform and part of our mandate which is exactly what the platform covers.

I'd like to remind the member again, this is our first budget, we have a minority government, we are trying to attempt to accommodate everyone's needs and I did want to remind the member as well, that we

did have 32 new teaching positions, 42 new EA positions, 1.6 new psychologist positions.

This is a sort of thing that a government has to do, we have to make tough decisions, we have to decide are we going to increase the George Coles Bursary this year, or are we going to put more teachers back on the frontline in the classroom? That's the decision we made and we took your priorities in account while doing it.

I think it's a win all the way around.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Again, I want to start by acknowledging the timely response to the questions, even though they may sometimes be wandering into a ministers statement themselves, I do appreciate getting the information back.

I want to start by asking a question to the Premier.

Roles of Three Branches of Government

Premier: Can you describe the Three Branches of Government and their respective roles and responsibilities?

Premier King: I didn't realize I was going to get a civics lessons this early in the mandate.

But look, I understand how government functions; I've been around it for a long time. I understand that we have some differences sometimes of how we go about making this work. But I can reassure the Leader of the Opposition that I understand the function of government and how it works every day.

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

I have no doubt about that Premier. We have Three Branches of Government, the Executive, the Legislative and the Judicial.

The Executive branch, of course, is made up of the monarchs' representative here, Lieutenant Governor, the Premier himself and Cabinet.

The Legislative branch is made up of all of the other elected representatives of this House and one of the roles of the legislative branch is to hold executive branch accountable to the public.

The Judicial branch, of course, is a series of independent courts that interpret the laws that we pass here in this Legislature.

Executive branch of government

Again to the Premier: Do you think that it's appropriate for the Executive branch to interfere with the function of either of the other two branches?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you very much for the question.

I think it's always a very delicate balance of how we go about governing, especially in a small place like Prince Edward Island. We're obviously very mindful not to try to weigh into areas where we're not supposed to weigh into. But as members of the Legislative Assembly, we do have an obligation to get involved in some of the discussions that take place in here. We're obviously MLA's first, along with being members of Cabinet. Certainly wouldn't want to get involved in interfering at the judicial level in any of the decisions that go forward.

We do try to do the very best we can here every day to make the people of Prince Edward Island happy and proud.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: That's a slightly worrisome answer from my perspective. There's nothing about delicate balance here

when we're talking about the division of the branches of government. It's absolutely mandatory for the Westminster style of government to function effectively and properly for there to be very strict division.

I'm concerned about the Premier's understanding of that independence of the legislative branch of government and I offer as an example, the fact that he publicly announced he was considering a multi-party Cabinet, this is soon after the election, without actually addressing the issue of Cabinet solidarity, or the role of opposition to hold government to account – or for that matter – even speaking with the leaders of the other parties before making that suggestion, or in the throne speech recently we heard that he would like to restructure legislative committees even though he does not have any authority to meddle in the independence of those legislative committees.

Restructuring of legislative committees

A question to the Premier: Can you explain, Premier, why these actions appear to show a poor understanding of that separation and of the Westminster system?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: I would argue just the complete opposite actually. I think that we're in a minority situation and what I was trying to do when we talked about having a multi-party Cabinet was to try to look at things much differently and to kind of give Islanders a style of governing that they wanted to.

Obviously, when I consulted both the leaders, I talked about some of the questions that might be around with a multi-party Cabinet, how we would go about Cabinet confidentiality and at that time the Leader of the Opposition suggested there was a way to do it.

So I wouldn't want to suggest he was meddling in the discussion either. I think that's his job as the leader of a party, as the Leader of the Opposition to make sure this government functions the way it's supposed to function.

I love the idea of having a multi-party Cabinet. I think Islanders will be very proud to have something like that.

In terms of how we strike the Cabinet committees, I wanted to make the suggestion because Islanders are telling me what they want from government, and they want a collaborative government and for the first time in the history of our government we have equal membership from all three parties in the Legislature.

I think that's something we should be very, very proud of.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Whether we have a minority or majority, a coalition or a loose agreement, as we have here in our Legislature, that does not change the fundamentals of the separation of the Three Branches of Government.

I'd like to follow-up my questions from last week concerning the role of the Government House Leader in working with the members of Partnership for Growth.

First, I want to make it absolutely clear that I did not intend in my comments at all last week to imply there was something sinister about the House Leader working on this project, or that government was somehow attempting to intentionally avoid FOIPP Legislation. Not at all; that was not the intention of my comments.

My concern is that in not respecting the strict divisions that we have been talking about for the last five minutes between the Executive and Legislative Branches, that there will be unintended consequences such as the one I described last week. Perhaps the Premier could put my mind to rest by providing a description of the role that the House Leader will play.

Last week when I asked this question, this very question, the Premier focused on the skills and the qualities of the Member from Morell-Donagh, which of course are indisputable, but the Premier did not

actually explain how those indisputably wonderful skills will be used.

Role of Government House Leader

Again, same question to the Premier: Can you provide the House with more details on the House Leader's role?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would be very happy to expand upon that. What we expect the Government House Leader to do is to meet with the group to try to champion ideas, to try to listen to input, to try to gather input from others to make sure our economy is on the right path, and our economy is moving forward.

The member doesn't come to Cabinet. We sit around as he's doing with the House leaders from other parties and we talk about collaboration, we talk about working together.

I'm sorry this is offensive to some people that we really want to work together, but it really is a genuine desire we have because Islanders want us to work together.

This gentleman sitting to my left has indisputable skills, absolutely, and they're fantastic. He does a wonderful job, and he's sitting down and he's listening to people, he's encouraging discussion, he's seeking input, and he's going to bring forward a report and a plan that we can build on, debate in this Legislature, and try to move forward on to make our economy strong.

The Leader of the Opposition's party had many demands that they wanted in the budget that cost money, and for that to be effective and for that to be doable, we need a strong working functioning economy to deliver tax dollars so we can spend. That's what we're trying to do.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Reporting of Government House Leader

In the Premier's last response, he talked about the member reporting and I have a question for the Premier: To whom does the member report?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: I would assume that the House Leader will bring his report here whenever it's finalized. He will table it in the Legislature, and I hope there's a spirited debate. I hope all parties can use it as a guiding light going forward to build a strong economy in Prince Edward Island to make Islanders proud and strong.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Additional pay to Government House Leader

Again to the Premier: Members of the Executive Council are handsomely rewarded for the large responsibilities that they carry as Cabinet ministers. Is there any additional pay or other privileges being offered to compensate the Member from Morell-Donagh.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: The Leader of the Opposition enjoys the very same remuneration as the Cabinet ministers here, which he failed to avoid. As for the remuneration going to my colleague next door here, absolutely not, its zero.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Role of Government House Leader (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

To the Premier again: Can you cite any other precedence where a private member of this House has assumed a similar role as the Member from Morrell-Donagh has in government?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker I would probably need a little while, to research to go back to double check, but I would again put forward that we are in a minority situation; we are trying to do things differently. Prince Edward Islander's voted in the election of April, 23rd and they sent three parties to the Legislature and they said we don't want one party to run everything. We want you to work together; we want you to work in the spirit of collaboration.

I would argue what we put forward in a short time here has been nothing short of impressive and nothing short of pride for Prince Edward Island and how we've been able to work together moving forward.

As I said, the hon. House Leader, fantastic individual, community right to the core, focused only on trying to do the very best he can do every day for the people of his district and the people of Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Premier would seem to imagine the reality of a minority government is responsible for everything that's happening these days and that's not the case. You'd have to look a long while to find the precedent for the situation you have created here, Mr. Premier. As far as I'm aware, there is no – there has never been a role such as the one as you've created for the Member of Morrell-Donagh.

Again to the Premier: Have you asked the conflict of interest commissioner if he has any concerns about a private member, taking up a role such as this in government?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I have not.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Structure of government commission

Leader of the Opposition: In the press release sent out the day that Cabinet was

sworn in, the Premier stated that there would be a commission. Could he describe how this commission will be structured and again, to whom it will report. Is it a commission of the Legislative Assembly or is it a commission that will report to Executive Council.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, just for clarification, you're talking about the Partnership for Growth?

Leader of the Opposition: Yes.

Premier King: Okay, thank you Mr. Speaker.

What I have tasked the House Leader to take on is to work with the partnership with growth. A group of now 21 groups across Prince Edward Island, who are focused only on trying to develop and keep a strong economy here on Prince Edward Island. That's all they're trying to do. They're trying to give government some advice and some input of how we move together.

So I'm assuming when the member has these meetings when we move forward, I would see a commissioner or a group being put forward that could report back to the Legislature. We could have a spirited debate; we're absolutely not going to move forward on anything without the full buy-in from the Legislative Assembly. There's nothing sinister going on here, this is a good faith, good move by government, something all parties supported when they were asked by the Partnership for Growth initiative during the election. We're all on the same page here and we're all trying to do the very best we can.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I heard in that answer, two contradictory things. I said that the commission will provide government with advice, the executive branch and I heard that the commission will report back to this Legislature so I'd really like to know which it is.

Openness and transparency of government

On Friday the Member from Morell-Donagh stood on a Point of Order that you gave a ruling on earlier, Mr. Speaker, and defended his role and said that if we have any questions on this side of the House, I'm only 20 feet away, come and ask me directly. We should be more than happy to meet with any member, but such a meeting, Mr. Premier, is going to occur behind closed doors. A question to the hon. Premier: Is that consistent with your commitment to a full open and transparent government?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the impotence of the questions are and why the indication would be that something sinister is happening. Absolutely nothing could be further from the truth. You could have the meeting on Compass with the hon. House Leader, it wouldn't bother me one bit. I'm not trying to hide anything here. I'm a Member of this Legislative Assembly just like you are. I have an input and a vote into what we do going forward, that's my job. That's what the people from Brackley-Hunter River put me here to do. So we're moving forward, we're trying to do the best we can to collect information and I don't know why the Leader of the Opposition is being so opposed to this process, when you committed to the Partnership for Growth during the election that you would do the very same thing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, I'll try and explain clearly.

I am opposed to the process. I am absolutely not opposed to government or anybody else meeting with the Partners for Growth discussing this as part of a strategy towards producing an economic development plan for this province.

But, the whole purpose of Question Period is that private members can ask questions that hold government to account openly and in public. That's what we're doing right here. But, because the member is not part of government I cannot ask him questions directly.

A question to the Premier: Can you not see how this arrangement is completely unfair to the member and it undermines our ability to hold your government to account?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I completely disagree.

I don't see where the problem is whatsoever. The hon. member told you in his point you're free to ask him anything you want. You can write down everything you want. You can table it in here if that's your preference.

What he's doing is gathering information. He's got no legislative authority to implement anything here. He's listening. He's encouraging. He's working with, in partnership with. Isn't that what we're supposed to do? Isn't that what collaboration is? It's listening and it's hearing. Isn't that what it's all about?

I don't see any problem with it whatsoever and I encourage him to keep up the great work.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The current electricity rate structure in PEI, particularly the lower-rate second block for higher users, creates a situation where ordinary Islanders, small farmers and small businesses effectively subsidize larger and more industrial customers.

Last week, the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy correctly pointed out that we have a process on PEI for setting electricity rates through IRAC. The minister also stated that his department would be intervening in the IRAC process to argue against changes to the second block rate structure.

Large consumers and electricity rates for Islanders

A question to the minister: Why is government willing to intervene in favour of large consumers, but not in favour of better electricity rates for ordinary Islanders?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to answer this question.

What I have said numerous times in this House is that we're going to intervene on the behalf of agriculture, which we believe in. To call them big consumers or to point out in this House over and over again that they're doing something that's untoward; that they're being – I don't know what you have against farmers. I don't know what you have against big business here in Prince Edward Island, or I don't know what you have against – you know, intervening to help save farms here on Prince Edward Island.

What we're doing and what we have stated over and over again, is what we don't want is for IRAC to rule and get rid of the second block overnight. We want an opportunity to phase in. That's exactly what we're going to ask for, an opportunity to phase in, because we're bringing in the solar plan and we're going to include farmers in it, because we have wind farms here on Prince Edward Island and we're able to lower our electricity rates using our own wind.

We're looking at battery – we're looking at a pilot for battery storage here in Prince Edward Island so we can store our own energy so that we can get off the peak times and put back onto the grid and Islanders can benefit from the work that we're doing.

Those are the things that we're doing. I just don't want it to happen overnight. I don't want to say to a dairy farmer overnight: You're electric bill is going to go through the roof and we didn't do anything about it.

We are going to do something about it. I wish you'd get on board. It's good for farming here in Prince Edward Island and we're going to offer them subsidies for solar. We're going to help farmers get into a renewable source of energy so they can lower their consumption off the grid and I think that's good for Islanders.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Two years is a long night.

In 2015, Maritime Electric applied to IRAC to phase out the second block but government stepped in and negotiated a new rate agreement with a company that preserved the second block. When the deal was approved in 2016, IRAC noted that the continued use of second-block policy is contrary to the principles of the *Electric Power Act*, specifically, that it's unfair and discriminates against certain ratepayers.

Question to the minister: Why is government still defending a policy that the independent regulator described as unfair and discriminatory?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I didn't sit in this chair in 2016. I only started here six weeks ago, and when I started here I told my whole department I wanted to be aggressive with our solar rebates; I wanted to make our solar rebates good so that people would take us up on it. I wanted to open it up so that farmers could benefit from it. I wanted to open up the net metering so that they could have more than one opportunity to pump back out on the grid through different metres.

That's what I've done here in six weeks, and that's what our government here has done in six weeks. All I'm asking at this point is to let us follow through on our plan because we're not going to ignore it.

What happened in 2016 is the government asked them not to do anything and then ignored it. What we're asking for them to do is to implement it in stages, and during those stages we're going to help farmers get into renewable energy. We're going to help some of these bigger users get into renewable energy so that it's not as big of an impact to their bottom line, and that we can do it all the while preserving the economy here on Prince Edward Island because I think that's important.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister said last week that this change in rate structure was being done in the middle of the night, without warning to farmers. However, Maritime Electric has been publicly trying to change the rate structure for over a decade in success of application. Furthermore, the current proposal submitted last November is to phase out the second block between now and 2021, providing about two years notice.

Phasing out timeline of second block

Could the minister clarify what would be an appropriate notice period for ending this unfair policy?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So like I said, over here we're trying to work with everybody when it comes to helping them get into a greener energy source, that's why we're being aggressive with our program. We want an opportunity for people to take us up on this. We want an opportunity for farmers to get into these programs. When we intervene and you can follow along and go here yourself, we will set a structure that we think is fair to everybody, that will help reach the goals that Maritime Electric has been asking for, that will help get rid of the second block but it won't happen in the stages that they're proposing. We're looking for a longer period, we're looking to implement with some of the things that we're doing are going to be part of our intervening. We're going to talk about the things that we're bringing forward, we're going to talk about the ways we're helping agriculture here on Prince Edward Island.

We're going to talk about the way that we are making steps that are going to help people get to the states that you're asking for. All I ask is that you work with us, all I ask is that you care about farming here on Prince Edward Island as much as the rest of us do over here and that you give us a chance to get there because we're going to get there, because we have programs in place that are going to help people get there and I think it's important. I think it's really important to the farming community, I suggest you go out and talk to a farmer.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually on Saturday at the Farmers Market I talked to a bunch of farmers and they were all for having a rate structure that appropriately assigns costs. I absolutely agree that we need to support our famers and other small businesses on PEI, but we need to look at the full effects of policies.

The current rate structure disincentives energy efficiency whole making vulnerable Islanders pay higher rates. In other words, our electricity rate structure works against our other goals of fighting poverty and climate change and government has been intervening to keep it that way for years.

Rate structure for farmers and small businesses

Would the minister look at other ways to support farmers and other small businesses that don't involve this unfair and out of date rate structure?

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

Mr. Myers: Well I don't know if I have to answer this again because I think I said it four times in a row now, I do. I actually do and that's what we're doing and that's all I'm asking for, I'm asking for time for us to do this, I'm asking for you to – you've been involved with what I'm doing with solar from the start so you should support it wholly because you should understand that I'm trying to get there, you should understand that what I'm trying to do is make a positive impact right away in solar here in Prince Edward Island. I think it's important that we just take a deep breath here and let this program work.

We're going to have a really good program when we announce it, you know it and that's going to drive the uptake and that's going to help us all and once we're there, great, take away the second block but give us an opportunity to get there. Give us an opportunity to start taking us up on this so that they don't have to pay the price on their bottom line, especially some of these farms that are just having raised within margins

right now. Some of these farmers don't deserve to have this taken away.

You can talk to farmers; they're supportive. I should take you to all kinds of farmers who aren't supportive of it. They run big operations and they run big operations because they got there over a period of time to help them stay competitive in a great big marketplace. We are competing world-wide here now. This is something that a plight of our farmers is that they have to get up every day and compete with somebody that's 10 times the size of them in Ontario and the least that we can do is help them along. The least we can do is not have them get the second block snatched away from them overnight and give them a chance to move into some of these programs that I'm proposing that we're going to fund, that are important to Prince Edward Island, that are going to make us a lot greener, that are going to make us a lot more self sustainable, that are going to put a lot more green energy out on the grid. I think that's a great thing and I want people to support that and I think you should support that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness.

The PC party in the recent election, and I quote: "Make shingles vaccination free for seniors."

This was characterized in the Conservative platform as a first year commitment.

Free shingles vaccination to Island seniors

Minister, will the shingles vaccination be free to Island seniors this year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

The hon. member that just asked the question across the floor would be very well versed in this as well because he was the previous health minister. What he would

know, obviously, is that I'm currently working very closely with our Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Heather Morrison, and her cohorts to ensure that when we do put the program forward, it's the best program it possibly can be.

Right now there are several drugs, vaccines that are out there on the market and the research is being done as we speak and slightly into the future to determine which of the two vaccines is the best to use to vaccinate Island seniors.

When that research is completed, we will certainly be announcing our intentions to put this forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. member does realize that I did not write the PC Party's platform.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Chief Public Health Officer recommends persons over the age of 60 – over the age of 60, receive the shingles vaccine. The PEI Seniors Federation has asked that it be covered, and the PC Party platform promised to spend \$2.75 million so that it would be covered.

Priority of shingles vaccine

Minister, why did your government decide it was not a priority for this year's budget?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Again, we're working very closely with the professionals, with the clinicians that know and that work in this field. Dr. Heather Morrison, I hold her in a very, very high esteem and I take her word and her recommendation very seriously.

Again, until the research is in and we know what the best, absolutely the best vaccine is

to provide to Islanders, that is when we will move forward with this commitment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Certainly there is significant fear in our senior population about contracting shingles. It can be quite debilitating if you do get it.

The cost of the newest vaccine, Shingrix, is approximately \$240, which many low-income seniors just simply cannot afford.

Minister, when can all Island seniors expect the Shingrix vaccination to be available at no cost to themselves?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Currently there is no province in Canada that is currently providing Shingrix as the vaccine on a vaccination program free to their residents.

Again, I go back to the fact that we're working with the professionals, we're listening, and we're waiting for that actual hard evidence to come back, and the research to come back, so that when we do unroll this commitment to provide a shingles vaccination to seniors, we will have the best program in all of Canada to do so.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Agriculture and Land. Farmers are working hard to meet the many new challenges in regards to climate change impacts while growing crops, and being as energy efficient as they possibly can be.

Premier keeps saying that he's going to commit to all these campaign promises, and

the PC platform has also stated over 120 promises of which one is to quote: “Expand the marked diesel program to allow farmers to access marked diesel for more farm-plated vehicle” usage.

Expanding of marked diesel program to farmers

Question to the minister: Has the minister advocated to his colleagues on this particular promise and does he have any sense of when this particular platform commitment will be implemented by his government?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That’s a great question from the Member from O’Leary-Inverness, but our government is committed to expanding the marked diesel for all vehicles and we’re going to do it soon. We’re consulting with the finance department now and seeing when we can do it and there’s Legislation of course that has to be changed, and we’re working on it as we speak.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness, your first supplementary.

Mr. Henderson: Maybe the minister might want to correct just this, all vehicles or all farm-plated vehicles, but I’ll continue on here a little bit on that.

Numerous provinces have implemented and expanded fuel tax exemptions for their farmers over what PEI has. This does not have to be studied; it does not have to be researched for such an exemption to be implemented.

It can be implemented by the stroke of a pen, an allocation in the PEI budget, and members of this caucus would certainly support you, so the issues of minority don’t seem to be any particular issue in this.

Implementation of platform promise

So minister, what would it take for the minister of agriculture to implement this platform promise?

Some Hon. Members: Oh.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It’s a pleasure to get up regarding this, definitely a campaign commitment we made and we’re going to follow through on that.

It was brought to my department and we’re working on legislative changes that need to make that there are implications on doing that so we’re working on that right now.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness, your second supplementary.

Mr. Henderson: This might go to the Minister of Finance, the second supplementary on this based on that part of it but in provinces where the Carbon Tax is imposed by the Government of Canada, farmers can apply for a rebate, .537 cents per litre, including for on-road vehicles.

Prince Edward Island has entered into an agreement with the federal government thus avoiding the federal tax being imposed and is not eligible for the rebate federally.

Marked fuel exemption program and carbon levy

Minister, instead of the province does collect a 1 cent carbon levy from farmers which contributes to provincial revenues as stated in the budget recently: Minister, how do PEI farmers with on-road vehicles get the 1 cent carbon levy back given you have not expanded the marked fuel exemption?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Premier King: (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: Well yes, thank you very much –

Premier King: It’s your (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: Yeah I believe it was the hon. members third part there that put that in place, so maybe you can share your

information with us but we are working to work together to make sure that the legislation that we need is in case. If there's probable cause, that we can actually dip tanks and ensure the regulations are being followed, we want to be as carbon neutral as we possibly can and we are going to ensure that compliance is there, we want to make sure the legislation is there before we implement it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week I asked about a deferred maintenance project to replace the gym floor at Montague Intermediate School, which is in my district.

Process for determination of projects

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Can you explain what the process is to determine which projects go ahead and don't go ahead?

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for that question member.

It's really the public school branch as well as the CFLF, *La Commission scolaire de langue française*, the two boards that do determine the priorities and believe me, there are a long list of priorities and the \$2 million runs out very quickly.

What they did in the case of the Montague floor, in fact, was they looked at tendering the design and that was the tender the member referred to yesterday and then by the time it got to time to implement it, all the money was gone and that's why it didn't happen.

But, it is on the priority list and it is near the top and if we can get a little bit more money maybe we can get it in next year.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We want it done this summer not next year. I appreciate that you did clarify who sets these priorities.

According to the infrastructure priorities submitted to the government from the Public Schools Branch, the gym floor replacement at Montague Intermediate School was assessed as the 11th top priority, according to the project list funded by the department, the Montague Intermediate School's gym floor all of a sudden became number 18 on the priority list.

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: What caused this project to go from 11 to 18 and put on hold this year?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, all of these priority settings, all of the budget allocations, all of those decisions were inherited by me in my position here but what I will do is I will get that document for the member and for the House and I will table the document so everyone can see what all the priorities are that are being talked about and lift this veil of secrecy that the former administration has put in place.

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

Mr. Deagle: I wasn't looking to play the blame game; I just wanted to get a new gym floor in Montague.

It was on the list to get done, and now it's not. The gym floor is too hard, it's over 20 years old, and it needs to be done.

The scope of the project to me didn't change so I guess I'm scratching my head as to why this work got bumped so far down the priority list, it doesn't make sense it was at 11 and now it's at 18. You said the Public Schools Branch sets the priorities list so why the change?

Replacement of Montague gym floor

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Can the minister assure that this gym floor will get replaced this summer like it should have been?

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Good question!

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks for the question.

So first of all, what I want to do is, I want to find out if indeed, as the member alleges, it has dropped to 18.

In the document that I have in front of me on my laptop right now it says it's still at number 11 and when I talked to my department – because I take this issue very seriously – I think that our school infrastructure is so important for the education of our youth and what I was told was simply, they ran out of budget when they to priority number 11 but they did tender the design.

So, I said this last week and I said it now: I'm going to go to my Cabinet colleagues and I'm going to ask them if we can find this in the budget, and it's the 11th priority so we're going to do that; simple as that.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister seems to think that in order to help farmers we have to do it in a way that's punishing to the rest of Islanders, so I would just like to – and he knows I'm fully in support of helping farmers to do to the transition, and all other Islanders, but IRAC states that: The commission fully expects that Maritime Electric and the government will work together over the next two years to develop a proposed rate structure that is fair and non-discriminatory for all ratepayers.

This indicates that the commission feels that indeed, government should be involved in deciding how our rate structures are arranged here in PEI. A fair rate structure would be one where the cost of expenses are absorbed by those who drive the expense. Currently, it is not a rate structure that is designed to be fair.

I quote IRAC again: The residential second block is not based on cost of service. In effect, it is a method to subsidize electricity costs for certain classes of consumers.

Subsidization of electricity rates to high-end users

Does the minister feel that subsidizing the cost of electricity to high-energy users on the shoulders of our most vulnerable is a fair rate structure?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's a lot of political rhetoric in what the member is saying over there about 'on the shoulders of' – I'm not trying to put it on the shoulders of anybody. What I'm trying to do is slow this process down.

What I've said five or six times here today, five or six times last week, and I think five or six times the week before, is that I'm trying to work with farmers through our programs that we're offering and we're about to announce publicly here shortly.

When we put that program out, the expectation is that farmers are going to take us up on it because they should see how important it is to help themselves produce some of their own energy, become greener and lower some of their own costs. We're going to help them do that.

We're also going to bring in some legislative changes that are going to change net metering, that are going to also help farmers and because of that, all of those things that I talked about, I want them to slow it down.

I'm not here to talk about the political rhetoric of whose shoulders you think I'm trying to put it on. I already said in this House, three times probably now, that we're fully in favour of moving out of the second block, but we want an opportunity to implement some of the things that I've talked about, some of the things that we're currently working on, some of the things that we have budget for, some of the things that we have planned, some of the things that we are just about to announce here in this House, because it's common sense.

I think it's common sense and I think we need to work with anybody, regardless if you want to call them – elude that they're

energy pigs or whatever it is you're trying to elude to over there. We still need to work with them. They are the people in the province who are employing people, who are creating wealth in our economy, who are making sure that we have the tax base that we need to do to fund the other things that we're all talking about in here, fund the important things like the gym floor in Montague that needs to be done. That all comes from money and it all has to come from somewhere.

So, in order to have any amount of money in the coffers of the province, we need to have some sort of success out there. We can't take the success away by being shortsighted to the fact that I'm asking them to move slowly while we implement some of these great ideas that we have that are going to help everybody here on Prince Edward Island; every single Islander will benefit from the program that I'm putting forward.

But while I'm talking about the most vulnerable, we have a winter warming program where we pay for all of the upgrades to a house. We will do it –

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was pleased to hear about the government's commitment to follow through on the secure income program as announced in the Poverty Reduction Action Plan last year. We had also committed to this in our platform and it could be an important program to help more Islanders live in dignity.

However, I want to focus on this government's lackluster support for a wider-ranging basic income pilot as discussed during multi-party negotiations.

The Minister of Social Development and Housing confirmed last week, that despite continued unanimous support from all parties, all this government is willing to do is to write another letter to Ottawa asking for help. This does not speak to a firm commitment to basic income.

Support to development of basic income

A question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: Why are you not willing to do more to support the development of a basic income in PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I, too, was disappointed to read some of the comments last week about this situation because our government is very committed to working on a basic income guarantee.

What the minister was explaining to the House was for this to work; we need to have the federal government as a partner, not just as a supporter, but as a financial supporter.

When you talk about a basic income guarantee, you're talking about an overhaul of the social delivery system, which could include Old Age Pension, it could include EI, it could include so many things that we need to have the federal government partner with.

When I spoke to both leaders in my office when we had a meeting, I think this is a great idea for a standing committee to take this on and give us some direction going forward. I have talked at length with Dr. Hugh Siegil who is one of the visionaries on this. I've listened to Dr. Evelyn Forget. I believe very much that this is a good idea and I believe very much that Prince Edward Island is the perfect spot to start this but we need the federal government to partner with us.

So as a positive first step, we put in place the secure income pilot to help some of the most vulnerable on Prince Edward Island. I assure the member from Charlottetown-Belvedere, we're not at opposite on this at all, we would like to move forward on this and I think we can continue to move forward together, but we need the federal government to buy in.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: In the budget address the finance minister stated that: we are not going to wait for our federal partner, but rather propose that we undertake to do what we can here on PEI. There is indeed much work we can do now, which is why we have proposed a two-

to-three-year commission to do the ground work of engaging local experts and stakeholders, gathering research and doing the necessary policy development.

Development of a basic income pilot program

A commission to develop the basic income pilot would cost about \$500,000 spread over three years, which is a pretty modest cost to provincial government and until this work is carried out, the provincial government has no idea of the scope of a basic income pilot, nor the potential investment required provincially or federally. Why is this government not interested in doing the ground work and its homework to develop the basic income pilot program that will work for PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I would reiterate what I just said to the previous question, that is: we actually want to do exactly what the member from Charlottetown-Belvedere is suggesting. That's why I think that's a perfect location in a standing committee to bring this together to start the bones of this to build it, to figure out what we can be doing to move forward.

We're in support of this but we need a federal partner to make this work. Prince Edward Island is the ideal location to launch a pilot on this, we have a perfect size to do this and what was in the budget was a very positive first step, putting hands into the Islanders who are the most vulnerable who need it the most. It's certainly not enough and I really believe truly in my heart that this is going to only go forward, we want to work together on this, we are not at opposites on this at all Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To be clear, as I clarified last week, a secure income pilot has nothing to do with a basic income pilot. During the negotiations on the budget, one of the priorities from the official opposition was to establish this commission

to develop a basic income guarantee pilot. Government led us to believe that the official opposition priority would be addressed in the budget, but as we found out last week, that commitment was not made.

Including of pilot program in budget

A question to the Premier: Why did you lead us to believe that this priority would be included in the budget when it wasn't?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying here on the floor of the Legislature, in front of all of the Legislature and in front of all who are watching, is that we very much want to get to that situation where we can develop a basic income guarantee. We want to work together, we're not trying to stone wall this. The secure income pilot is a positive first step to put money in the hands of the people most vulnerable on Prince Edward Island.

Certainly, nobody is against that. When you say you're voting against the budget, you're saying I don't want Blooming House to have \$100,000 and I don't think anybody wants that.

What we're saying is we have to work together and we need the federal government to help us. When I go see the prime minister next Monday I'm going to ask him again, point blank, could we have the federal government partner in this because this is the perfect location to have this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier King: We're working with you, not working against you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: End of Question Period.