



Session:	1/66
Date:	10 July 2019
No:	14

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 10 JULY 2019

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Social Development and Housing about the new secure income pilot proposed by government. In this pilot, government will invest \$225,000 providing 400 people with additional funds over a three month period, January to March 2020 with an average of \$187 per person, per month.

As I expressed, I am very concerned about this approach. When I got home I received an email from a constituent who has been working with a case worker to receive support under the current accessibility program.

During the intake interview, this pilot was mentioned and it was indeed presented as a lottery by the case worker who said: we don't have any information on who will be selected yet but there's always a chance.

My constituent had a number of questions that I am unable to answer, so I thought I'd just read them to the Minister of Social Development and Housing to see if he can provide an answer.

Development of a basic income pilot program (further)

First, the constituent asks: What I don't understand is why there is a need to pilot this at all. Is there some question about providing more money to people that needs to be answered?

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

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

Thank you to the hon. member for the question.

It certainly a valid one: why do we need to pilot a program such as this?

As mentioned previously, I think going forward like we are in the process of developing the criteria for this program for this pilot, we want to make it as positive as possible that we do get it right, but at the end of the day too, once that pilot is being rolled out over the first three months of January to March 31st of 2020, will there be other changes that we will see? Criteria that should be added to it; there very well may be.

So that's why we're looking at it as a pilot.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: The minister has made it clear that this is a pilot despite the commitment in the Poverty Action Plan to a program.

My constituent also wanted to ask: Even if there is a need to pilot, is doing so via a *Hunger Games* style system anything other than cruel?

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

Mr. Hudson: Well as we look forward, you know after the period of the end of this fiscal year, March 31st, 2020, moving forward after that, there is an additional 900,000 that this program will be budgeted for and that this program will continue with, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: I'm encouraged that every time I ask questions we find a little bit more money, so maybe I'll just keep going and we can fund the whole program.

\$900,000, though, will not help maintain this program much longer with the 400 people already on it – that will take us forward for probably another six to seven months. So it's still a pilot, minister.

Pilot program of small business tax rate

My constituent's final question, which I think really speaks to this government's priorities: Given that you're committed to only a pilot, why isn't the decrease in the small business tax rate also being piloted in the same spirit?

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

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to thank the member for the question.

As far as the small business tax goes, the decrease is just the beginning of that decrease that we have promised during the election campaign. I know you all have the platform over there.

We will move forward with that, this is early days and we've decreased it by 0.5% and we'll continue to do that.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The first week of this sitting, I asked the Minister of Agriculture and Land by how much was an Irving owned corporation under their allowable limit of aggregate land, and the minister responded: "Happy to announce that everything has been in the spirit of the law since we've taken government."

Irving's allowable limit of aggregate land

Question to the Minister of Agriculture and Land: Is the minister still prepared to stand behind this statement?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, thank you for that question.

I know your concerns are for the best interest of Prince Edward Island and the landholdings and our job here is to protect

the land. We are going through to review the land act, of course, and I hope to make you a part of that land act.

According to IRAC, every week when I review the IRAC papers that come across my desk, I ask: are these in proper holdings and they tell me yes. That's all I can ask for.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Island farmers are proud stewards of much of our Island's land and many pay close attention to activities they feel contravene the spirit of the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*, including the excessive concentration of land under one corporate owner.

Recently, there have been some murmurings among farmers in the Bedeque area, of a soon-to-be finalized transfer of over 2000 acres from arable land from a local family operator to a new corporation owned and operated by the Irvings.

Land sale to Irvings

A question to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land: Are you aware of the land sale in question?

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member opposite, that has not come across my desk yet, so until it does, no.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The land in question appears to be the same land that just this past April was almost sold to corporations owned by the Irvings, this sale of course was denied by the previous government following IRAC's recommendation that the sale contribute the steer of the *Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*

Though this rumored new deal does not yet appear to have gone through IRAC for review, it seems likely that given the

apparent similarities between it and the proposed deal from a few months ago, the agency will offer a similar recommendation to the government and deny the sale.

Recommendations from IRAC and land sale

A question to the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land: Will this government follow any potential recommendation from IRAC to deny the sale in question?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker and to the member opposite, our government doesn't operate on rumors. When its facts and it comes across our desk and if IRAC advises us to not approve it, that's what we will do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Mr. Speaker, it was made abundantly clear during the past election, just how important the issue of corporate land ownership was to Islanders, farmers and non-farmers alike. Indeed this government was elected on a platform which significantly indicated that a PC government went and I quote: Respect and restore the spirit and intent of *the Lands Protection Act, P.E.I.*

Allowing land sales like the one I just described would indicate that this government intends to do just the opposite and in doing so, put the entrust of large corporations above those of Islanders.

Details of land holdings of Irving family

A question to the Minister of Agriculture and Lands: Will the minister put an end to all these rumors by providing this Legislature with detailed information on all of the land holdings of the Irving family and associated corporations?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the member opposite.

I understand your concerns and I understand the empathy for the farmers that are concerned about this and our government. I can assure you, we are on top of this. As the minister of also, justice, I have to find out the legal implications of releasing all that information. But if I can, I will come back to you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Mr. Speaker I would like to remind the minister that as a member of this Legislative Assembly he has the choice to exercise his privilege and table that information.

A question to the Minister of Agriculture and Lands: Will you table the information.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I will get back to you on that.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When I asked yesterday about the intended outcomes of the grants within the department of environment the minister spoke of the electric power rebate portion and how it was flagged by the department is potentially not a good use of funds.

We already know that free licenses encouraging more vehicles on the road is not a good carbon reduction policy and the minister has spoken that he is open to changing that policy.

Reduction of impact on energy decisions

A question to the minister: Is it fair to say that all of these funds are intended to be used to help reduce the impact our energy decisions are having on our environment?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course the intent of a low carbon economy fund and the money that's collected through things like the carbon pricing that was put into effect, I believe, should be used to either mitigate and lower our carbon dioxide equivalent GHD Gas Emissions, or adapt to the problems that we are experiencing because of climate change and that's exactly the direction we want to move.

Have we been able to fully explore the options and make changes, the answer is no.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Does the minister feel that these funds are being effectively used to achieve those goals?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thanks for that question from across from the member.

I think I've stated a number of times on the floor during budget estimates and other times that, in particular, the funds that we're allocating to free licenses and discounts on registrations are not actually really helping achieve our goal of mitigation or adaptation.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Gas powered vehicles to electric

The idea to encourage fuel switching was also mentioned in the minister's response yesterday. With transportation being listed as one of the biggest issues for us to tackle for emissions, will the department be looking at encouraging fuel switching from gas powered vehicles to electric?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. member knows that falls under me because I've spoken about it in this House numerous times, and what I've said and I'll continue to say is, we are first going to roll out our solar program.

When we have a solar program that is going to be aggressive and people are going to take us up on, when we get people onto solar into their homes and the cost of electric cars comes down to a lower level where the average Islander can afford it, we will look at – as we promised in our platform that you guys have all read over there – we will come forward with a rebate for an electric vehicle and follow through on our commitment that we made during the spring election.

As I have said in this House before, once we have people on their own solar with their own electric car, we'll help them become energy self sufficient. I think that's important, and I think that's a step that through the fund, my department is helping to bring programs that will help Islanders reach those goals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notably, the only form of energy we seem to not subsidize is actual clean energy. We have no HST on diesel heating oil, and rebates on gasoline, electricity, propane, wood and wood pellets. While burning trees can have a net zero effect over the long term, it certainly does work against the notion of planting more trees to help with our carbon issues.

All of these energies release carbon into the atmosphere when consumed.

No subsidization for clean renewable energy

Question to the minister: Why is clean, renewable energy the only form of energy not subsidized by the department of the environment?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The member raises a really good point and it's an excellent question.

I think it's something that we need to look at. We have to be very attentive to the fact that there are many people who heat with oil and having the provincial portion of the HST or around that 10% back onto it would impact them.

But, this is exactly the sort of discussion – these are sort of the costs and benefits that I'd like to have at a standing committee with respect to the climate change file.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, in reference to that committee, we could empower them here.

The cost to Islanders to transition to a carbon-neutral society would be significantly lessened if the funds that are supposed to be used to encourage clean tech were not being used to encourage the opposite by using price signaling, favouring the behaviour we want to discourage.

Grant funds used for clean energy

Will the minister commit to ensuring the grant funds of the department of environment now budgeted at \$13.6 million are used to encourage Islanders to make use of clean tech, such as Islander-owned electric cars or wind and solar?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Those are some really great suggestions. I'm not going to stand here on the floor today and commit to anything specific. Like I said, I want to have those discussions at the standing committee.

But, there are a lot of different things we need to look at. For example, there was a decrease in the excise tax on gasoline that

was really presented in an offset through the climate tax that was added. That would be other money that potentially should go back towards these clean initiatives.

Before I commit to anything, I want to have that fulsome discussion and really, that's what I keep talking about with the standing committee. That way, it allows all parties and all members of the House to participate instead of me going back to the department and making those decisions behind closed doors.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Access to local health services is a key factor in maintaining and building vibrant and resilient rural communities. With an aging rural demographic which will increasingly have health care needs and reduced mobility, this is going to become even more important into the future.

The PC platform certainly had a wide variety of points on health services generally, but it actually had very little to say specifically about services in rural Prince Edward Island.

Plan for expansion of health services re: rural PEI

A question to the hon. Minister for Health and Wellness: What is your government's plan for maintaining and expanding health services in rural Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

First and foremost, one of the key things that we've stated already is we are investing more dollars into primary care. That's not just here in Charlottetown or Summerside, that's across Prince Edward Island.

I'm very proud that there's two new family physicians that are actually starting today in

Western PEI. We continue to recruit for other areas of the Island as well. We believe as well that it's fundamentally important to treat people to provide health care as close as possible to home as we can and that is our commitment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The PC Platform's only specific point on rural health services was a commitment to and I quote: Increase the current family practitioner compliment from 92 to 100 and with a focus on rural recruitment.

Indeed the minister has just referenced two doctors who started work this week, I think perhaps enlisted under the previous administration.

This is a fine goal but government and communities have been attempting to recruit medical professionals across Prince Edward Island for years.

Recruitment of medical professionals in rural PEI

Could the minister clarify what this government will do different from previous administrations to increase the recruitment and retention of medical professionals in rural Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Very early in my mandate as Minister of Health and Wellness, I had discussions with the medical society of Prince Edward Island and those are ongoing and I'm looking forward to having further conversations in the very near future with the medical society.

We firmly believe that in addition and in cooperation with our retention and recruitment secretariat that doctors recruiting doctors is an integral part of

getting new physicians here to Prince Edward Island. Doctors, health care professionals that are already practicing have a network that we need to tap into and I'm very happy to report that the medical society is very welcoming of this.

As I said, these dialogues are going on and we're coming forward with a plan to do just that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It seems that in recent decades rural communities have constantly had an ongoing fight to maintain access to local services and health services in their communities. Indeed in my district and in the South Shore area we've recently seen some incremental improvements with the arrival of a part time nurse practitioner but that's a long way from local provision of comprehensive health care in rural Prince Edward Island.

Support for centre in South Shore region

A question to the minister: Will your department be supporting the development of a collaborative community health care centre in the South Shore region?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Throughout the summer period my plan is to go out and meet with local communities and to best ascertain where health care can be best provided with regards to exactly what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is referring to.

A collaborative hub model in the community so that we can better provide health care, particularly in rural PEI, where it's closer to home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

In the Green Party platform we had proposed developing rural health care hubs, based on Ontario's very successful and improved model. This would involve co-locating a variety of health services such as diagnostics, preventive chronic health care services, long term care counseling and primary care services in rural hospitals, to make services more effective, more accessible and more efficiently delivered so we can keep those rural services and rural communities.

Developing of rural health care hubs

A question to the minister: Would you be open to this approach or do you have some other plans for our rural hospitals?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Yes, we're certainly open to that approach; we're open to any approach that will ensure that we're providing the very best health care to Islanders close to home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning stated: that it is his government's inclination to put at least the Grade 3 assessments on hold. I find this concerning.

Since PEI introduced standardized testing, student achievement has substantially improved. Island students have made tremendous gains. In fact, I remember the previous minister of education receiving calls from other jurisdictions asking what we were doing here on PEI to have such remarkable improvements.

Grade 3 assessments on hold

My question is for the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Is your government

still prepared to put Grade 3 assessments on hold?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can understand the Leader of the Third Party's concerns; assessments do play an important role in how we roll out our education system. In the end, it's about student achievement, right? That's what we're all focused on.

We're very focused on the frontline and helping teachers help our students and that's exactly what we're doing. We've been collecting data through assessments for many years in the department of education and they've done a fantastic job. The assessments have collected very good data.

What we're hearing from teachers is that it's time to put that data to work. One of the things that we're looking at – and I'm not going to make a big announcement about it today is really – we are going to look at putting at least the Grade 3 assessments on hold for the near future to do just that.

I think if the member wants to go and talk to Grade 3 teachers, I think he'd find they're all in agreement.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly sounds like the minister is not flipping on that decision this week.

It isn't hard to see why standardized testing makes a difference, since it ensures that curriculum outcomes are taught.

PEI's gains in the PISA and PCAP assessments coincide almost precisely with the introduction of provincial standardized testing.

Prior to 2007, PEI students wrote no standardized exams and ranked near the bottom in student achievement in Canada, near the bottom.

After the province introduced standardized testing in several grade levels, student achievements have substantially approved.

If educators do not know where students' weaknesses are, it's difficult to improve those weaknesses.

Evidence to suspend Grade 3 assessments

My question is to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Where is the scientific evidence to suspend the Grade 3 assessments?

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

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

You know, as I've said before, assessments do play a role and as the member said, they are important, yes they are and that's why we are not getting rid of assessments, we're continuing with them. We might put the Grade 3 assessments on hold for a year or maybe two, we're looking at that.

I look forward to the members input.

There's some people that assess the students every day, day-in, day-out at the (Indistinct)

—

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: — they're teachers and they know exactly how their students are doing and that's who we are listening to in the department of education right now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly sounds like this is being driven from the minister's office, or perhaps the office of his deputy.

An Hon. Member: Whoa.

Mr. Mitchell: RMJ assessments, an Ontario-based consulting firm issued a report earlier this year that said PEI standardized tests had a positive impact on

student achievement. To quote the firms leader Richard Jones: The assessment program is operating well the way it is right now.

Last week CBC quoted the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning saying: the question was what are you doing with the data and do we really need to continue collecting data?

Teachers and staff have used the data to set schools goals, plan interventions and bring positions to teaching. This helps to ensure that Prince Edward Island continues to be one of the highest achieving provinces in Canada.

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Do you not want PEI to continue being one of the highest achieving provinces in Canada?

Are you not concerned that this particular cohort of students in Grade 3 needs these assessments?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure if the member across is getting the message but we're not getting rid of all assessments, we're going to continue to use assessments, they're a valuable tool. We have some just fantastic staff in the department of education that develop assessments and they apply assessments and we've collected the data, they do a great job at using the data. There are some areas though where we feel, like the Grade 3, we could use a little break from that and really it would benefit the teachers and the students.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Going forward, I mean, assessments are done at a number of grade levels and we're going to — we're thinking reducing the frequency of assessments, as is in our platform, is something that will benefit everybody in the end, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Finance: Prior to the recent election, this minister called for immediate action to help with rental costs. Yesterday in reference to a rental rate freeze, the minister stated and I quote: If it needs to happen, it will happen.

Great news to see the Deputy Premier and the finance minister who controls the purse strings make such a statement.

Action on rental and housing crisis

Based on this answer, are we to assume the minister doubts there's a rental crisis and that there is no need for immediate action?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for the question and as the former finance minister, I think you understand quite well how this job works.

We take into consideration all requests coming forward and we deal with them on one-on-one and we decide what's best for not only the province, but for government, and the purse strings of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Henderson: People can't afford rents.

Mr. MacDonald: I'm having déjà-vu, Mr. Speaker.

The minister likes to claim that there's no money to deal with all priorities. Yesterday, the minister stated: We did what we could with the money we had.

Well there is money. The government has a surplus contingency slush fund of almost \$18 million.

Some Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Henderson: I can't believe that.

Mr. MacDonald: This is more than enough to fund such initiatives as the rental voucher

initiative for low-income Islanders and seniors or to increase the George Coles Bursary or to initiate the school food program or perhaps if we're not doing assessments –

An Hon. Member: Pick one.

Mr. MacDonald: – She could take the money from the assessments and put it into the school food program.

All promises of this government.

Mr. Henderson: Lots of money.

Mr. MacDonald: This government is becoming unreliable.

Why is the minister reluctant to fulfill these promises?

Fulfilling campaign promises

My question to the minister: Why are you not fulfilling these promises when there are clearly available funds in the budget to deal with contingencies like a rental crisis? Is a crisis a time to draw down on the contingency slush fund?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank would understand, because it was there when he was minister of finance, there is a contingency fund.

It's in the general government, you can look at – there's a budget line for you in the budget book for that. It is there for unforeseen circumstances and there a number of those, usually maybe bridge washouts, whatever we need to use the money for.

But we will look at that on a need to do basis. The contingency fund is there for a reason, we need to keep it where it is right now and as we go forward we will look at all the needs and wants of the province.

Thank you.

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

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is becoming clear that this government neglecting election promises, and those Islanders struggling to pay for rent when they Premier's office increases his budget by \$200,000 or each of the Cabinet ministers all get an EA. It didn't happen under this government.

I think we see where these government's priorities are: build an empire from the top down.

Action on rental and housing crisis (further)

Minister: When will this government take immediate action on the rental crisis and help low-income Islanders, our seniors, persons with disabilities, and our most vulnerable Islanders.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Appreciate the question.

I'd like to point out that we have eight cabinet ministers on this side of the floor; I think there were 11 when the third party became the third party.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: Big cost saving right there.

Ms. Compton: Big cost saving there. I believe there were six EAs at that time. Yes we've increased it to eight. I will admit that.

The contingency fund, which we're not in the Ron McKinley, it's not the slush fund, the contingency fund when you were the finance minister –

Mr. MacDonald: (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: – and it will remain that.

The contingency fund is established so that we can maintain our budget surplus and that

is something that we have promised. We would maintain our budget surplus. As the demands come forward we will address them one by one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's easy to poke holes and ask questions about current physician vacancies, I have more interest in putting plans in place so there is a continuum of care when doctors retire or move on.

Patient access to care

A question to the minister of health: What is the process to ensure patient access to care when their family doctor retires or relocates?

Mr. MacEwen: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

We do talk a lot about recruitment all the time, but when I was critic for health I had a strong focus on retention as well. That's what we need to focus on, not just recruitment, but retention.

Recently the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island did a poll to the members, and there are some shocking, alarming numbers there that have come forward with regards to doctors that are planning on retiring, doctors that are potentially looking at leaving to go to another jurisdiction.

Those are all very serious issues that this government and myself as the health minister is addressing internally and we are working hard as I said, measures to work alongside the medical society of Prince Edward Island to get them to help us to recruit more doctors on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Plans in place for physician crisis on PEI

Well the Montague area may see upwards of five physicians retire over the next five years. Minister, what plans does your department have in place to deal with what could be a potential crisis in five years time?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

There's several things that we need to look at and again I'll go back to the new initiative that we're looking at and we're going to be moving forward with and that is engaging Island physicians to help us to recruit their peers. Whether they're coming from another jurisdiction or whether they're coming out of medical school.

There's lots of work to be done; there's lots of conversation to be had in addition with the college of physicians who actually license physicians to see if there is a better way to license foreign doctors as well.

That's just another example of things that we're doing and those conversations that we're having to alleviate this potential problem.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Potentially in five years we're going to be in a crisis situation in Montague where we have upwards of five doctors retiring. No one wants to see disruptions to patients accessing care when a doctor transitions out of a practice. The big thing is to make sure the patients have consistent access to care when a doctor retires or locates.

Minister, is there anything the community, or even myself, can do, to help address this

situation and help with the process to ensure that in five years time we're not scrambling to find doctors when upwards of five retire.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

We just have to look to other regions of Prince Edward Island, particularly some of the rural regions, like Western, O'Leary and Tignish as an example they work very, very closely in collaboration with recruitment and retention. They have committees that work very hard when we do have respective new doctors coming to look at an area. They take on the role of engaging with these individuals, of touring them around, to highlight how great of communities they have.

To me, working together, not just with our secretariat with recruitment and retention and with our doctors recruiting their peers but it's also the department, it's our communities, it's all Islanders. We can make this happen and we can improve health care here on Prince Edward Island if we work together.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Cultural and creative industries were added as a strategic sector to the mandate of Innovation PEI along with a clean tech when the then third party passed an amendment to the legislation last year. This was specifically to recognize the economic and social value of these sectors and to ensure they are placing the overall economic plan for the province.

Update for cultural and creative industries

A question for the Minister of Economic Growth, Culture and Tourism: Has the mandate of Innovation PEI and the overall strategic plan and direction for that organization been updated to reflect the

inclusion of cultural and creative industries and clean technology s key strategic sectors?

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

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

That's something I'm not sure of, but I will go back to the department and ask for you and bring it back tomorrow.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Cultivating growth, a five-year action plan for culture and creative industries on PEI was launched in November of 2017 and is being implemented by dedicated staff and programming coordinated at Innovation PEI.

Implementation of five-year plan re: Innovation PEI

A question to the hon. Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture: Will this government commit to continuing the implementation of the five-year plan and its goals as part of the overall mandate of Innovation PEI.

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

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

Yes, we certainly will. The arts and creative industries are a very important economic driver for PEI, so I assure you that it's something we're going to take to the next level. I've talked to the department on this on a couple of occasions, they're excited about it. Once again as we proceed over the summer and do a review through everything, our plan is to work within the industry itself. Culture is a big part of PEI and I can't say enough how big of an economic boom it would be. I've taken it for granted and I've certainly looked at it with a whole new light since I took over the department, so I assure you yes, we will proceed.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. Hammarlund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you minister for your response. It was very reassuring.

I've learned from the minister earlier that new jobs in other sectors are typically supported by a value of 50% of the yearly salary.

Support for salaries in cultural sector

A question to the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture: Will salaries in the cultural sector be supported by an equal 50% subsidy?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, hon. member.

I think it's something to look at, for sure. Anything is a possibility at this point. Like I say, we started discussions here now. I'm open-minded. My door is always open. If we feel there's a need and it will help the economic outlook of PEI and whatever we can do to contribute, I'll look at it.

It's something I can take back to the department and start a discussion for you.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are currently facing a nursing shortage here in PEI with RNs being in high demand.

Addressing shortage of RNs

A question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: What is your department currently doing to address the shortage?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

That is a very correct statement. We do have a serious issue here on Prince Edward Island with regards to a nursing shortage.

We've had preliminary discussions with the nurses union here on Prince Edward Island and those conversations are going to be ongoing. We plan on having conversations with the nursing school at UPEI to see if we can increase the enrollment there as well.

Those are just a couple of measures that we're doing, but you know what? The nurses that we do have in place here on Prince Edward Island, we're extremely proud of the hard work and the commitment they have to providing excellent health care to Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The provincial government in New Brunswick recently announced funding for a bridging program to support LPNs to upgrade their training to RN level. This program will allow LPNs to be certified as RNs in two years, rather than needing to go through the full four years of training that involved repeating material covered in the LPN training and experience.

Bridging program for PEI RNs

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Do you feel this type of bridging program would be a worthwhile initiative for Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Yes, I think it is an excellent program that they have in New Brunswick. But you know what? We can't always look outside of the jurisdiction. Sometimes we have to look internally and find the best solution for a homemade cure.

In 2018, there was a nursing incentive program put in place. The program is four streams of graduate registered nurses, experienced registered nurses, graduate nurse practitioners and experienced nurse practitioners. Since that program was put in

place in 2018, Health PEI was able to successfully recruit 50 new nurses. That's just one other measure that is put in place, and I applaud the previous administration for doing that.

What we're doing as a new government is working over and above that and moving forward with new initiatives, such as I said, meeting and talking, having discussions with the nursing school to see if we can increase enrollment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would highlight that it is important for us to look at best practices outside of the province while also, I agree, looking at what is needed in our province and listening to the frontline health care professionals as I am listening to the many LPNs who have contacted me since the program was announced in New Brunswick, hoping that we would have a similar program here and wishing to upgrade their skills in a bridging program that would allow them to become RNs in a shorter period of time, and something that would make it much more accessible for them to do. I think it's important that we listen to our frontline healthcare professionals as well.

This type of bridging program is designed to recognize the experience and education of LPNs, while addressing the knowledge and training difference between LPNs and registered nurses, consisting of a combination of classroom learning and clinical experience.

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Will you be implementing a similar RN bridging program in collaboration with UPEI and if so, what's the timeline for implementation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I can't stand here today and announce that we're going to be doing that. It's something that's interesting. I'll guarantee you, I'll assure you that I will look into it, but until I have an opportunity to do that and have the staff in the department actually do the research and have the conversations with our educational facility, I can't really commit to it.

I'd also like to note, that since we put in place the incentive program to recruit RNs here to Prince Edward Island, I'm very proud to say that we've had 92 applications to that incentive program.

So in addition to the 50 nurses that we hired, we have another 92 that have applied through the incentive program. Those are actions that are measureable.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Members, that's the end of Question Period.

[End of Question Period]