



Session:	1/66
Date:	11 July 2019
No:	15

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 11 JULY 2019

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton yesterday had some questions and here's the response I'm taking back today:

Cleantech has been identified as a subsector of advanced manufacturing in IPEI's work plan. The subsectors are Cleantech Marine Technology and Engineering Services.

Cleantech includes initiatives such as renewable technology and wind and solar that reduces the negative effects of our environment. This could also cover LED lighting, electronic motors, biomass, bio fuels and more.

Cleantech has its own five-year cultural action plan and they are in year two of this plan and also there currently is no strategic plan at IPEI, each division has its own work plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to provide information back to this House on the third option. We all agree sexual violence is unacceptable and that we need to find ways to eliminate it. We also know that sexual assault happens and it happens in PEI. Victims of sexual assault need immediate supports to help them in the aftermath of their personal trauma. It's complex and requires collaboration between several departments, agencies, law enforcements and community organizations.

Like other jurisdictions, third option can be challenging to implement for many reasons. The largest challenge relates to storage of the evidence kits, by the extension, their integrity and the chain of evidence.

An interdepartmental committee of members from PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre and the law enforcement agencies have been

working for a number of years on the best ways to support victims of sexual violence when they arrive at the emergency rooms.

One of the outcomes of this work has resulted in the enhanced emergency sexual assault response services protocol.

This hospital emergency department protocol outlines how hospital staffs can support the victims while gathering evidence.

The protocol has been developed in such a way that the third option could be included if we find evidence storage solutions.

The committee's research on evidence storage solutions they found varied from one jurisdiction to another. Some store evidence in policing agencies and others in hospitals or rape crisis centers.

To roll the third option out in our province we need to determine what makes sense for us, bearing in mind the critical factor of chain of integrity of evidence.

I recognize that this is part of the PC platform. I stated Tuesday the staff across the departments are working diligently on this and they are and they are doing it with the community as well.

There is no denying that being a victim of sexual assault is very traumatic, the victims are front of mind and we consider implementing the support programs for them.

Government has a responsibility to provide supports that will help them.

I want to stress again that they need to be the right ones, sometimes getting it right means more time. We need to continue to work together within and outside of government so we can strike the balance of holding a victim-centre approach addressing the evidence storage challenge. Today, I can't provide a definite date.

What I can say is through the staff of the departments of health and justice and public safety – and other departments are continuing to look at the storage issues so that the third option can be implemented.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

CBC news reported this morning that earlier this year the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan as well as the Canadian Pension Plan and the Alberta Crown Corporation in that province that is responsible for their provincial investments invested millions of dollars in GeoCorp and CoreCivic, private prison companies that own, among other questionable facilities, several immigrant detention centres in the United States.

These companies have come under fire for various practices that are, quite frankly, horrendous,

Investments in private prison companies

A question to the Minister of Finance: Does the PEI government have any investments in private prison companies?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for the question.

I have absolutely no idea if we do or not, but I'll be happy to look into that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I appreciate the answer, minister.

I'm sure also I'm glad that you're going to look into this.

Is the minister prepared to put an end to any unethical investments that she might uncover in any investigation that might happen?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is quite a long list of investments and investors that we have in the pension funds. It's definitely something that our government will look into, and see what can be done.

You know, if it's part of a mutual fund or a conglomerate of investment, we'd have to see how we could do that, but it's definitely something we'll look into.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Indeed, there is a very long list of places where government has invested money in terms of pension plans and other places.

A couple of years ago in response to a question in this Legislature, I found out from the Premier's Office, the premier at the time of course, that this province had about \$155 million invested in fossil fuel companies as of December 2015.

Government dollars invested in fossil fuels

Could the minister provide this House with an update on how much the province still has invested in fossil fuels?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will take that on notice and bring back the figure to you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Many of government's policies outside the direct realm of climate policy actually have an impact on climate, and we need to be absolutely sure that all of these policies are working together and not across purposes. They need to be integrated.

If we have a new commitment to meeting our climate targets, we need to make sure that we're not investing in something which is going to work counter to that somewhere else.

Government funds divest from fossil fuels

A question to the minister: Will the minister commit to ensuring that all provincial government funds divest from fossil fuels?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will not commit to that, unless you're willing to drive a bicycle to work every day. I mean, we have to have fossil fuels. It's as simple as that.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: Everyone in this place, except for maybe the hon. Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change, have fossil fuel vehicles, so it's pretty hard for me to say that we could do that when everyone in this place is driving a vehicle that needs a fossil fuel.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I should perhaps clarify this is not about the personal choices we make. Indeed, I own a fossil fuel car as well. –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Leader of the Opposition: It's about the value of those investments and what the potential future value will be as more and more fossil fuel investments become stranded assets.

There are a number of places, both jurisdictional and private companies that are divesting in fossil fuels strictly for financial reasons. I'm not talking about any sort of ethical issue here at all, although there may be something attached to that. I'm talking purely from a financial point-of-view for the wellbeing of the finances of this province.

The province invests a significant amount of money and these investments have an influence on developments within and even beyond this province, private prisons and fossil fuels are just two examples of investment practices that are not socially or environmentally responsible, and increasingly acceptable.

A question to the minister: Does the province have a policy to ensure its investments are done in socially and environmentally responsible manners?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I cannot say a definite yes to that, but I would be assuming that we would have looked at ethical reasons. I never really thought of fossil fuels as being something that's unethical, but I guess we have to change the lens that we look through.

It's very hypocritical for all of us to say we're going to say 'no' to everything involving fossil fuels when we're all still using fossil fuels on a daily basis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Clearly, I don't think I stated that there was anything unethical about the use of fossil fuels, indeed I own a car. Hybrid car, but it's still a car and it burns gas.

A question to the minister: Does the – oh, I'm sorry I've already been there.

Clearly, if we're investing in oil and gas, and potentially detention camps – we don't know that, probably not, but it would be nice to know. This policy needs to be looked at and it needs to be updated.

Review of policy

A question to the minister: Will you commit to reviewing this policy?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I would have to say that the investors that look after the purses of the government, if they're worth their weight they would have known that all fossil fuel companies have been down in value for a number of years so they probably are looking at that, if we're looking at just dollars.

I would be more than happy to bring back what our policy is and what the investment is, to my very best ability, in fossil fuels.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Coalition for Women in Government is a non-partisan organization dedicated to advancing women's leadership in the political, civic and democratic life of PEI. They do crucial work and have been a valued support network in this province over the years. We often reference their work as we continue efforts to grow diversity in this House and throughout the province in general.

In the throne speech, there was an announcement of \$100,000 worth of funding. After some digging, it is clear that this is not new spending, but rather maintenance of current spending levels. Official opposition specifically sought operational funding support for the PEI Coalition for Women in Government.

Funding support for PEI Coalition for Women in Government

A question to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women: Can you advise why that wasn't included in the budget this year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The \$100,000 was already committed but it is in this budget, so we do have to make account for that. We've also promised going forward \$100,000 each year for the next, I

believe, three years. That's the commitment we've made.

We made choices. We've talked about it with every department about where the choices need to be and what is important. I'm not saying it's not important. It's very important. Health is important. Education is important. We made the decisions we made in consultation with both the opposition and the third party and I stand by those decisions.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The following two things I'm going to say are quotes: I observed that it was much more difficult for women, especially if they had children. Women tended to enter politics, a lot of them later, or not at all, because they waited until their children were older.

These quotes are taken directly from the coalition's 2009 report *Who's Job is it Anyway? The Life and Work of an MLA* – and may suggest that it is more important for women to have no care giving responsibilities before they say yes to running for office than it is for men.

Question to the minister: As the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, could you explain to this House how the projects to the Coalition for Women in Government inform your work?

Speaker: The hon. Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just didn't catch the last part of that question.

Ms. Bernard: I'm just wondering how the projects through the Coalition for Women in Government inform your work.

Speaker: The hon. Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, first of all, when you started that quote I thought maybe it was my quote, but I appreciate that.

We all know in this Legislature it's very, very difficult to get women to run and we're encouraging women to do that and care giving is both – it should be provided by both partners and as far as the Coalition for Women in Government, they report to the Women's Secretariat, the work that they do, and it's very important work and we'll continue to work with them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The work of the coalition is pertinent, important and in danger. For sustainable, productive, long-term outcomes, the current funding model is short sighted and unproductive. Project-based grants have short-term goals and themes determined by the federal funding agency. The coalition does not receive provincial funding other than the occasional small-project grant via the Interministerial Women's Secretariat.

For an organization doing consistent work, this funding model is precarious and there is no way that we can rely on people to take on those roles within the coalition as volunteers.

Funding to provincial organizations

A question to the minister: Do you believe it is important to provide operational funding to a provincial organization doing such crucial work?

Speaker: The hon. Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's very important work and there needs to be funding. There are a number of asks across the province. As the Minister of Finance, we decided where the funding should go and what the priorities are. We talk health. We talk education. Everything is important and I will stand by that. We will

do our very best to fund all the NGOs that we possibly can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There was a leadership course offered through the Coalition for Women and Government and Winding Path funded through a federal project grant, and I was one of the participants. In that course, I learned that every reason I provided for not running was a barrier to why all women who would like to run and don't face.

When I did decide to run and was sharing the news with family, friends and community members, they had a hard time getting passed the idea of what this would do to my family. It was through the coalition that I found the support necessary to navigate this fear and doubt.

Question to the minister: What will your government do to support the continuation of this critical and evolving work?

Speaker: The hon. Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

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

This government will work with the Coalition for Women in Government through the secretariat to help them with the work that they do. As a woman, I understand the barriers that are there, perceived barriers in some ways in my mind, but barriers none the less for some people. It takes a different person to do what we're doing and everyone in this House can agree to that and you have to be a strong individual who can stand up for your rights. We all need to do that. You have to do it for your constituents and for yourself.

We will work, we will continue to work with the coalition on the important work that they do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've spoken with two mothers in my district who have children requiring accessibility supports. Both of these mothers expressed concern over how infrequently they are contacted by their support worker.

Special needs child and support workers

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: Minister, how often would you expect a family with a special needs child to have appointments with their support workers?

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

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

From my time when I did work in government and it was in a different department – but individual clients if you like – contact with them would be made on a variety of schedules. It would depend to a certain extent on just what the individual needs of those clients are. I would assume that it would vary from client to client, hon. member.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The mothers I've had conversations with have both indicated to me it's not uncommon for them to have to wait more than a year between appointments. When support workers themselves are overworked, everyone suffers.

Review of accessibility support workers

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: Will you review the current caseload of accessibility support workers and look at expanding the complement if they are overloaded?

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

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

Again, I do thank the member for the question that she has brought forward. Frontline staff in my department, I give them a tremendous amount of credit because they do on a day-in day-out basis work with situations that I'm sure are extremely emotionally draining, challenging and the like.

With regard to the members specific question, I will always frontline services, our frontline workers and if any type of a review, information, what have you, coming forward to me, shows that yes, indeed, that we are understaffed that we are not able to be providing the service to the community, to the most vulnerable, then, yes, I will take it under consideration and review it.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: I've learned that as children with special needs reach school age, they age out of certain supports within the system, despite the fact that their needs for those supports haven't changed.

Access to therapy for school-aged children

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: Minister, can you explain to me why school-aged children can no longer access physiotherapy and occupational therapy?

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

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

I have to be completely honest I was not aware of that. I will look into it and I will take the question under notice and bring it back to the Legislature.

I don't know whether this is appropriate, but it does concern me to some extent when I stand here and I provide an answer that is completely honest and upfront and to see a member on the far side shaking their head, that to me is inappropriate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Ms. Lund: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the fact that you'll look into this, minister, because I've emailed your department about it about two months ago. I can table that for you.

Minister, when children who require these services don't have access to them, it makes it very difficult for their families. Without a physiotherapist these children do not have professional support for their exercises or to watch for muscle stiffness on a regular basis, but they also don't have a physiotherapist to write the referrals required for wheelchairs and various necessary equipment.

As it is the process for waiting for supplies can be lengthy as parents first need to find a physiotherapist themselves to write the referral, fill out the forms to get them approved within the department and then there's still an ordering process.

One mother told me a story of waiting for a year for a wheel replacement.

Expand age range for accessibility needs

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: Will you expand the age range in which children with accessibility needs can access these necessary medical professionals so that school-aged children still get the care they require?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Within the school system, school-aged children do have some supports for this and I do appreciate the members concern.

There are, there is a school therapy – occupational therapy program and according to my information it received over 450 referrals in the 2018-2019 school year and 120 requests for small group sessions and whole class observations; 325 students will be seen individually and approximately 100 small group and classroom observations have been completed.

This may not completely fit exactly the service that the member is talking about over there but rest assured, there is at least some support, occupational therapy support, within our school system for these students.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Occupational therapy support is provided to the Public Schools branch in kindergarten and in Grade 1. I might have seen them in my classroom to work with five or six students once, maybe twice, throughout the year. So the support is offered in kindergarten and if you're lucky and there's a little bit of time left over, you may get some support in Grade 1. I'm just curious if this is what you would consider support.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, based on my notes you may be minimizing the amount of support provided. There's no doubt that more support is needed. I just wanted to make sure that it was brought out here in this House today that in fact there is some occupational therapy support provided.

I'm sure that the Minister of Social Development and Housing would love to expand the supports available, but this is what we're working with today and we will work together to see what we can do.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The leases on our current fleet of SUV's for ministers is up this fall.

Number of vehicle leases

Question to the minister: How many vehicle leases are up this year?

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

Mr. Myers: I'm not aware that we have any leased, but if we do, I'll bring the answer back to the House.

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

Replacement of government vehicles with electric

Mr. Howard: Considering that plug-in hybrid electric SUV's are available locally at a much lower price tag than the existing vehicles cost and that government should be leading by example, will the fleet be replaced by hybrid electric or all electric vehicles?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a really good question, it's a conversation that I had with the people over in the energy wing of the department about what we're going to do with some of the vehicles.

I talked to the fleet management people. We have a very big fleet of vehicles across government, various employees have them for various reasons and I do think it's important to start having that conversation, particularly now that we're going to be able to provide charging services right across Prince Edward Island once our project comes to an end with our charging stations.

Yeah I do think it's important that we do start leading by example. That said, it's not going to be a fit for absolutely every job function across government and that's why we are studying through the ones that it doesn't make the most sense to, the ones that travel at a daily range that is under the limit of what an electric vehicle would be, so that we can make sure that we're putting electric vehicles on the road using the appropriate people to use them.

That said, also if that's the direction we're going to go, we're going to need to notify some of the local car companies because they're going to have to ramp up the original six that we ordered, one of which the Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change drives. It took us six weeks I think to get it.

We got three of the five or six that we ordered. I think we have two more coming in, so we're like 12 or 13 or 14 weeks since we first asked for them.

We're going to need to find a way to get those in quicker; in order to do that, we're going to have to talk to the car company.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, you know, I have my electric car in at the Mitsubishi dealer right now, and they've got a bunch of hybrid plug-in electric Outlanders there that they can bring in all sorts for you. So I'd suggest you have a conversation with them.

To encourage greater use of electric vehicles, it would show leadership to install charging stations at all government office for staff and public use.

Charging stations at government offices

Will the minister commit to taking the actions required to enhance our public charging network by having charging stations at government offices?

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

Mr. Myers: Yes, Mr. Speaker, so you're really testing my memory here of where we agreed to put them, but we did have that discussion.

There's one in the basement of the government complex, which of course isn't open to the public. We did have somebody in the other day that was asking to charge a vehicle and they had come in for working (Indistinct)

We're quite aware that there's concern with the complex down there, but we have government buildings spread right across Prince Edward Island.

It's hard for me to commit to cover every single building in this run of charging stations, but I do think it's very important and I will commit to starting, moving forward to getting charging stations at all places – primarily, we'll start where public interacts with government first, and then we'll spread them out to all government buildings.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty.

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change.

In regards to the carbon reduction policy, yesterday the minister said and I quote: "I think I've stated a number of times on the floor during budget estimates and other times, the funds that were allocated to free driver's licenses and discount on registration are not actually really helping achieve our goal of mitigation or adaptation."

Elimination of free driver's licenses

Minister, you indicated you are open to changing this policy, are you really considering eliminating free driver licenses for Islanders.

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

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

The member has a good question, and just to clarify, yes, I don't think they are contributing to either climate adaptation or climate change mitigation and so I think it's something we really do need to consider.

Just to clarify, when decisions like this are made, this is just not me sitting at a desk somewhere making the decision. This is why standing committees are so important. This is why consulting with the public is so important.

And that's why I'm looking forward to having those discussions and really talking about exactly what changes should be made on that front, and potentially where the money should go to actually make a difference helping adapt to climate change and mitigate climate change.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty your first supplementary.

Mr. McNeilly: Well you made a decision on Grade 3 assessments, license fees are going up, no food program for children. Islanders are struggling. This additional fee, that a lot of them live paycheck to paycheck

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. McNeilly: We can't take these fees or the waffling that's going on on the other side.

The official opposition seem to be in agreement that the policy should change, and both Conservatives and Greens seem to be in favour of restoring fees to driver's licenses.

Allocation of fees from licenses

Minister: If you take action to eliminate free driver's licenses, where will the revenues from the driver's licenses fees be allocated?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's a variety of approaches you can take to this topic. There's a number of programs within government, the member's probably familiar with them, that are means-tested.

You know, when it comes to driver's licenses, maybe that's something we can consider some sort of means-tested programs for people who may be able to afford a car but are having trouble getting the driver's license and registration.

That's something we would consider.

When it comes to where that money should go to help either adapt to climate change or

mitigate climate change, there's also a wide variety of options.

We talked today – there were questions on installing electrical vehicle chargers, but there's probably other, maybe even better ways again – to ensure that all Islanders would have access to those funds to help them mitigate climate change or adapt to it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, your second supplementary.

Mr. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To quote the minister from yesterday's proceeding: "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 monies that potentially should go back towards these clean initiatives."

Increase on excise tax on gasoline

Minister: You seem very open to this, are you considering an increase on the excise tax on gasoline?

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

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

I want to thank the member over there for raising some of these issues. It was indeed the former administration that decided to cut the excise tax to offset the carbon tax they put on.

I think that there would be almost nobody that you could find that would argue that that in any way helps with climate change adaptation or mitigation.

This is what it's about when you have fulsome conversations and you work in standing committees and you work together with the opposition, to decide what kind of changes are needed.

Now, I'm not going to say here today whether I think that tax should be removed or not, but let's just say that I would like to hear their input. I would like to hear input

from the public and the official opposition as to what they think we should do with it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

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

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

During the most recent election, the PC leader pledged, according to media reports, to stepping in and regulating the short-term rental market also known as Airbnbs.

Regulations and consultations for Airbnbs

Minister, has your department began the process for preparing regulations and if so, will there be public consultation on these regulations?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, hon. member, for the question.

This has been a topic that continues to come up. There are a lot of short-term rentals on Prince Edward Island – Vrbo, Airbnb, Home Away – the message I delivered in my department is to follow how many people are not in compliance, that are licensed. If they're not licensed, follow up with them; work with them to get them licensed. If they continue not to be licensed, we will be putting out a fine.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

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

Question to the same minister; during a recent public meeting in Charlottetown on short-term vacation rentals, there were concerns raised by long-time bed and breakfast operators that Airbnbs are negatively impacting their business.

I am getting similar concerns from bed and breakfast owners in my district.

Impact on tourism from Airbnbs

Minister, would you agree that Airbnbs are impacting tourism accommodation operations across the province and not just here in Charlottetown?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, member, for the question.

I can't speak on the impact. All I know is that there are 2 million visitors a year come to Prince Edward Island that are looking for accommodations.

The big message I want to get out to all the short-term rental accommodations out there is: You need to be licensed. You have to follow the rules like everybody else, whether it's a bed and breakfast, a cottage somewhere – there are rules in place. You need to comply with the rules and if not, we will be knuckling down on it.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

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

Non-certification and charges from tourism

My second supplementary kind of alluded to that so I guess my question to the minister is: Are you willing to charge any of these people that are not certified and have permission from your tourism department to operate?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, hon. member, we certainly are. Compliance officers right now are looking into the short-term accommodations now that are being advertised to make sure they are following the rules.

The problem we are running into as we get a hold of some of them that aren't licensed, they're coming off the sites. They're getting harder to track.

But the message I am delivering to the department is if, after we issue a warning, basically, to be licensed and if they don't follow through with it we will be issuing fines for sure.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I need some common sense. I want to read an email.

This is from a non-profit seniors club in the district: We applied for a 50/50 license starting May 1st, 2019. We did not know we needed a license as no one from the department had informed us. It was quite by accident we found out.

According to the terms and conditions of the license, the treasurer is required to keep the proceeds from the 50/50 separate from the other funds and keep records to show the proceeds. Not only does the treasurer keep a weekly record, but must submit a quarterly report. Again, more work for this volunteer. Our club is a great asset, not only to the seniors in our area, but to also the community.

We don't receive any funding to help run the day-to-day operation of the club. At a time when government should be helping seniors stay active in their own community, we're getting nickel and dimed.

Do you know what they submitted last week for their 50/50 lottery? .57 cents. That's all that work went towards, .57 cents.

Fees for non-profit clubs

Will the Minister of Finance commit to bringing some common sense and getting rid of this ridiculous fee?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad that the member called on me for common sense. I appreciate that.

I wasn't aware of this particular instance, but I know it's something that I've heard about from community groups.

It's too bad that all those groups are put in the position where they have to be the fundraisers for their communities to keep rinks and halls alive.

It's just too bad that the previous government cancelled the Island Community Fund, which was a huge asset to all rural communities.

Some Hon. Members: Bring her back.

An Hon. Member: Good for you.

Ms. Compton: We just might do that.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: I appreciate the question from the member, and I will be happy to get back to you with whatever they would like done.

Just let me know.

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

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've got all kinds of organizations across PEI that are doing this, right?

There's a ton of them that don't ever have to submit anything, they just do their 50/50.

This was a volunteer that happened to be on the phone with a representative of the department, and they happened to mention 50/50 in passing. They said what, wait? You have a 50/50. Then all of this work for 57 cents.

Changes to 50/50 policy

When will the minister commit to changing this?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Ms. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm assuming that there'll be policy implications to changing this, and that would go through justice I believe.

Right now, I want to apologize to that senior's club. It's totally not appropriate and I will commit to making sure that we change that rule. I will work with the department of justice to make sure that that happens.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So the minister's response to my question about chargers, he mentioned that he was having trouble remembering where all of them were going, but I'd like to drill in on one in particular.

There are six high-speed chargers going in across PEI this summer. Most of the locations make sense to me as they have some sort of amenities around them. However, the station in Summerside is to be installed at the Maritime Electric service centre.

If this is the Maritime Electric location on Highway 2, there is nothing around there for a vehicle owner to do while they wait for the car to charge.

Locations of electric vehicle chargers

Should we not be trying to get these chargers, particularly the expensive high-speed chargers, into areas where drivers will be wanting to stop anyways?

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

Mr. Myers: Yes. So yes, we should.

I don't disagree with anything you said. I'm not 100% sure if that's the location. If it is, you know, that's probably not the best place for it.

But the thing that we're trying to deal with right now, once we have a bunch of them

going in this summer and we have to negotiate with all – if it's not a government spot, we have to find people who are willing to take them.

I came on board and this project was well in hand, a lot of the decisions were made. As I said in this House, we have another round of it coming next summer. I'd be more than happy to open up the conversation wider.

I don't know how we do it in a cost-effective manner that we can spread them right across Prince Edward Island and give everybody exactly what they want.

But I'd love to be able to work with communities and community groups to help decide where are the best locations and where necessary we might need some help negotiating with the owners of the facility that we're setting up in front of to make sure that they're going to be okay with it and they understand the stipulations that kind of go along with it.

As we move past this first stage of it, we're going to have more of them and I'd be more than happy to take any help that people have to offer.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speech From the Throne discussed more health services being delivered at a community level.

Delivery of health services in communities

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Can you tell us more about what these services will be and when they will be implemented?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

We're going to be taking this summer period to go out and consult with various community groups and communities in general to discuss just this.

Certainly there's a particular need areas with regards to rural family physicians, and while recruitment and retention is still working hard to recruit those particular positions, some of the measures that we are putting in place and we have put in place already are nurse practitioners. So nurse practitioners and physiotherapists are just two examples of what this government would like to include and implement into some of these community hubs as we roll forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to providing services at a community level, one of the most effective ways to promote health and mental health and wellbeing is for individuals to feel included and involved in their local communities.

This means encouraging and supporting active involvement in a range of activities.

Encouraging active engagement in communities

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Will your department be providing supports for individuals to more effectively engage and connect within their local communities as a means to promote wellness?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly when we get our budget on the floor, you're going to see a long list of wellness grants that the government is working with specific communities.

We made an announcement the other day around two initiatives where groups, whether its communities or organizations can apply for different grants. I think that this government has already exhibited our willingness to do just that.

I had great conversations with the hon. member across the floor from the third party

with regards to wellness. I'm looking forward to, again, bringing the budget to the floor so we can have even a more fulsome and wholesome discussion on wellness because I am a huge advocate for wellness, wellness and proper wellness and the health of Islanders will eventually decrease our health budget and that's my goal as the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Social prescriptions that link patients to non-medical community supports or programs have been shown to be effective for promotion and prevention of mental and physical health issues.

Social prescriptions to promote wellness

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Has your department considered using social prescription as a means to promote wellness?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

As I said, we're going to be doing a lot of consultation over the summer period and meeting with different organizations, I'd love to have the opportunity to sit down with the hon. member as well to discuss just that topic.

We're open to everything, we're willing to sit down to look at all options when it comes to the health and wellness of Islanders, this government is listening.

Speaker: Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke.

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Social prescription pilots in the UK have shown that positive health changes can be measured within as little as 18-24 months. In addition to improving wellbeing, the long-term cost benefits of these types of

community based interventions would be significant.

Social prescription pilot project

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Would you support a social prescription pilot project here on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I would be willing to commit to here today is what I just said, is to sit down with the hon. member to have a robust conversation around this and perhaps she could educate me a little bit more on the topic. Freely admit, I don't know everything about it.

You probably know more than I do at this time because you've done the research, so let's get together, let's sit down and let's figure this out.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Finance PEI provides short-term operating to those in the agriculture industry to cover almost all related expenses for annual crop including your seed, fertilizer, fuels etcetera.

This type of credit is repayable in full on a yearly basis. This is a valuable service and as the timing of cash receipts for varies, so this is used by farmers to get the crop in the ground and then it's paid back when the crops are harvested.

Operating credits to cover annual crop insurance

Question to the Minister of Agriculture and Land: What percentage of farmers used this sort of operating credit to cover annual cropping expenses?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an important service that we offer; timing of stress on the finances on farming is very important and every year there is a new stress. It's important that we offer this service and I don't know the exact numbers today but I will take that as notice and get back to you.

Thank you.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm thinking we can say it's high. So AgriInsurance states were all extended this year due to the poor spring and the difficulty the farmers had to get on the land. This is the second late spring in a row, all planting was delayed and it was cold which is not conducive to strong growth.

Weather re: impact on crops

Question to the minister: Does the department anticipate the late planting and cold spring to have an impact on crops this year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the member opposite, yes there could be an impact but fortunately the weather has turned around and things are prospering right now but to furthermore, the crop insurance, there's certain dates that they have to have their crops planted by and we've asked the federal government to look into changing those dates and they are. So they're going to get back to us on whether the dates can be changed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford, your final question

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes the dates were changed and grateful for that to happen.

So part of the issue is in order to get an operating credit, in order to get the plants in the ground, a farmer has to get

AgriInsurance. They can't get that operating loan unless they have it.

Earlier when we were going through budget statements, when I asked about what's the risk plan, risk assessment plan, the minister stated and I quote: It's on uptake and maybe the prices will become too high for farmers.

But, it's not a maybe. It is. Farmers are already opting not to insure some crops and they're insuring the crops that are most valuable to them.

Risk assessment plan re: crop insurance premiums

I come back to the minister. Question to the minister: Does this government have a risk assessment plan to deal with impact on crop insurance premiums in the event of multi-year crop losses and will they table that plan in the House?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Land.

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

I understand where you're coming from. I acknowledge the struggles that farmers are having and with the crop insurance, it is under review all the time and I will take this back and get some information for you and whatever I can table, I will.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]