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of Prince Edward Island**

**Responses to Questions and
Oral Question Period**

(Preliminary Proceedings)

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No. 18

The Honourable Sidney MacEwen, Speaker

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[1:27 p.m.]

[B. Trivers in the chair]

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

A question for the Premier. It is clear from yesterday's election results that Islanders are very comfortable with the outcome. During a time of external threat and economic uncertainty, we opted for calm and experience over those who told us that Canada was broken. Canada is not broken. Canada is an incredible achievement. I'm very happy that Islanders helped to validate our democratic success with such a high voter turnout.

Nationally, this is the first day of a brand-new phase, so I'll be interested to learn about the approach the Province will take to this new time in the life of our country.

Impacts of federal election

So, Premier: In the interest of Islanders, what is your first priority with the new federal government?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said here earlier today, we were all watching very closely last night and I think what we're all most happy about is that we have the opportunity now for a stable federal government that can show a united front for Canadians, to help Canada find its place in what seems to be an emerging global economic order that's been upended.

After COVID, we often said that things would never be the same. It seems that now, after Donald Trump, the world economic order will never be the same. I'm looking forward now to having the election behind us so that I can work with the federal government – all the Premiers can work with the federal government – to

protect Canada's future and protect the future of this province.

I look forward to working with Mark Carney and all of his colleagues in Cabinet.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, but my question was what was this Premier's first priority with the new government. So, I'll ask him again.

Premier, what is your first priority with this new government?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

[1:30 p.m.]

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, I think the first thing I'm going to speak to them about is the commitment that they made to reduce bridge and ferry tolls. That's obviously a very big commitment that they've made to this province, and I want to make sure that they live up to it, and that they live up to it quickly. I don't want this to be something that needs to be studied and mulled over for months and years at a time. I think it's something that can be very simply implemented, and that's the commitment I got when I spoke to the then minister of interprovincial trade in Ottawa and the Prime Minister himself. Those commitments were made to us. They were made here in Prince Edward Island.

But again, I'll also be prioritizing discussions about interprovincial trade. It's something that all of the Premiers across the country will be working hard on. It was a priority prior to the election. It will continue to be a priority to deliver for Canadians.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The federal election may be over, but it's clear we're in for some choppy waters along the way. The Americans continue to pose a major economic threat. There are widespread concerns that the U.S. may enter a recession and that we may follow.

Does the Premier believe that his government needs to follow a path of some fiscal discipline, or is the government counting on federal assistance to once again help us weather any difficulties that may arise?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, we are making strategic investments in Prince Edward Island to help protect our future, secure our future. We were very clear about that in our Speech from the Throne. Of course, we're going to work with our federal partners. We need economic stability in this country, as much as can be achieved at this time where everything is being uprooted, but we also need a partner in our federal partners for infrastructure programs to build the kinds of transportation and trade infrastructure that we need for the huge trading economy we've built in Prince Edward Island, and to continue and grow that trading economy well into the future.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Mr. Speaker, I think many Islanders are quite happy that the tolls will be substantially reduced here in Prince Edward Island with this new government. It was a commitment that they made that also included the ferry service for Prince Edward Island. I think most people on the Island are relieved that the federal government will keep its role because even though it's a sad commentary, I don't think anyone wanted this provincial government to have a substantial role in operation or the maintenance of that bridge.

That being said, does the Premier believe that traffic on the bridge will now increase at a substantial level?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Look, the traffic on the Confederation Bridge – anybody who drives over the bridge – I marvel at it every time. The traffic is unbelievable. It is a critical transportation link to Prince Edward Island. Our economy has grown leaps and bounds since that bridge was built. I'm absolutely certain that the business case that Strait Crossing made to build that bridge did not anticipate the kind of traffic it has now.

Regardless, if lowering the tolls increases the traffic – which it may have some sort of effect on. Regardless of that, what it amounts to, if we reduce those tolls, is a giant tax cut to Prince Edward Islanders, a massive financial burden relieved from the people of Prince Edward Island, money we can use to spend here in Prince Edward Island the way Islanders want to, money that businesses can use to reinvest in their own businesses to grow our economy, and to reprioritize things that Islanders can spend their money on.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure what the Premier means by "we will reduce the tolls" because Islanders were promised during the last election by that government that the tolls would be reduced and the ferry service kept affordable, and that didn't happen.

I think one area that everyone needs to be cautious about is the upcoming tourism season. As I mentioned earlier, there are concerns about an American recession, and those problems often migrate north.

I asked about this earlier in this session, but I'll repeat my suggestion. Given the unwillingness of Canadians to travel south while Trump is president, has the Province redirected its tourism marketing efforts towards our own country? Is there a plan in place to take advantage of lower tolls and the rising patriotic feelings to boost our tourism sector here in Prince Edward Island?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Mr. Speaker, I think our tourism growth numbers speak for themselves. I think we're doing a good job of marketing Prince Edward Island. I think Canadians as a whole will prioritize vacationing in Canada this year. I look forward to that. I've said it in this House before, I look forward to welcoming American visitors here, and I know that I recently read in the media somewhere that already we're seeing an influx of Americans coming to Canada, who want to show some solidarity with our country.

[1:35 p.m.]

Look, on Friday, I had the opportunity to go to Wood Islands and tour the new Northumberland ferry. Looking forward to affordable and reliable ferry service there, which will provide a link to Nova Scotia and make the travelling public that much more convenient coming to Prince Edward Island.

I think we're in for a banner tourist year, and I'm looking forward to it, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition,

Hon. H. Perry: Again, Mr. Speaker, within the context of a possible recession on the horizon, there may be an impact on transfer payments. As the Premier knows, transfers are dependent on the economic health of the entire country, and Ontario looks like it may face some difficulties. Similarly, the price of oil appears to be headed downwards, which can have an impact out west.

Given our dependence on transfer payments, what steps will the Premier now take to preserve those revenue sources?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have to prepare for the worst. Yes, there's a lot of economic turmoil around the globe, and as I said, the whole global economic order seems to be completely in flux right now. We don't know where things will stand. That's why we came out with a plan for dealing with this economic disruption with the United States. That's why we have a \$30 million contingency in the budget.

Of course, we do rely on federal transfer payments. The economic outlook for the country is a bit uncertain, but I think the country as a whole is united to get us through this and emerge from this a better and stronger country, a more prosperous country with a stronger economy.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some of the political rhetoric that emerged from this election was a little bit disturbing. For instance, there were attempts to paint our province as riddled with crime and violence.

Again, some of these statements made during the heat of the election were over the top.

What steps will the Premier take now to distance the provincial government from some or more of these extreme comments that were made during the election?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: I'm not sure what to say to that, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't a candidate in the federal election. I didn't hear anybody on this side making those comments.

Look, we govern the province of Prince Edward Island. That's my priority. We'll work with our federal partners that Canadians have chosen to govern this country. That's our job.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: Well, yes, they have an association with the federal party, and they were the ones that had a lot of that political rhetoric that had emerged on social media. So, there is a connection with the Premier and those comments.

I fully understand and appreciate the fact that in all probability, most of the Premier's caucus actively support Pierre Poilievre and his party. That's normal; it's a partisan impulse. Often, political allegiances play a fundamental role in decision-making. But I just want to clear up a certain matter that confused me....

[Interjections]

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

Hon. H. Perry: It was so quiet last week. So quiet last week.

[Interjections]

Hon. H. Perry: But I need to clear up a certain matter that confused me.

[Interjections]

Deputy Speaker: Members, members.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

Hon. H. Perry: I need to clear up a certain matter that confused me and many Islanders. First, the Premier ran out after the First Ministers' meeting to announce a conversation that they had in which he took credit for a commitment to reduce the bridge tolls. I suppose that was fine. There was no election underway, and the Premier was reporting on a discussion with the federal government. Then, a few days later, the government issued a press release on behalf of the Conservative Party of Canada talking about their bridge toll promise.

My question to the Premier: Historically, does the Government of Prince Edward Island typically act like this? Does it usually issue official statements publicizing the political promises of parties?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[1:40 p.m.]

I am proud to have advocated very strongly on behalf of Prince Edward Islanders to reduce the cost of living here, proud to have finally extracted commitments from both of the major federal parties vying in this election to reduce the bridge and ferry tolls. I don't apologize for that. I'm a little baffled by the line of questioning, Mr. Speaker.

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

[Interjections]

Deputy Speaker: Members.

G. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, these are questions that Islanders reached out to ask, and they had wanted them asked to the minister based on questions....

[Interjections]

Deputy Speaker: Member.

G. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, this weekend, we heard from the family of a 90-year-old senior who had a bad fall and was left waiting for 16 hours at Prince County Hospital before being seen by a doctor, and yet, just last week, the minister stood in this House and proudly declared that things were "going great" at the PCH.

Access to health care (further)

How can the minister possibly boast about progress when seniors are left waiting through the night for care?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was aware of that situation at the PCH. We continue to have extreme volumes that happen at our ER departments, especially during weekends; they can be busier times. Our patient safety team and quality and improvement are looking at the situation and evaluate it on a daily basis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, last week, the minister was busy patting himself on the back for the so-called improvements at the PCH, but for Islanders and the family of this 90-year-old senior who was waiting 16 hours for help on the weekend, the reality is very different.

Will the minister admit that the situation at the PCH is nowhere near "great," and explain what he's doing to actually fix it?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've talked a lot about workforce development here in this House, and we did have a 10-year gap where no workforce development was done on Prince Edward Island to support our health care system. That's why we had the medical students in here the other day. That's why we have a new physician services agreement. That's why we've expanded the nursing program. That's why we have Marion Reid. If this would have been done 10 years ago, we'd probably have more staff to staff our health care facilities.

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

G. McNeilly: Well, it's been six years, and they're still waiting 16 hours under your watch, minister. Thank you.

Access to health care remains the number one concern for Islanders, as I just mentioned, and with an operational budget of \$1.1 billion, Islanders expect Health PEI to be managed by a strong, stable, and experienced leadership team, not a revolving door of vacancies and temporary appointments.

Health PEI leadership

Question to the Minister of Health: How many senior executive leadership positions at Health PEI are currently vacant or filled on an interim basis?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we're all aware of some of the situation that occurred out of ELT when not following Treasury Board and Public Service Commission policy. Our CEO walked into quite a mess, for lack of a better term. I must commend the current ELT team; they've been able to make these improvements with a smaller staff. She's continuing to rebuild our executive leadership team, along with directors within our health care system, and I think she's done a pretty good job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Mr. Speaker, Islanders deserve to have confidence that the \$1.1 billion that was spent with their taxpayer dollars is being managed responsibly. We're about to debate the Health PEI operational budget – hopefully, this week – and Islanders expect real answers, not vague reassurances.

Question to the minister: Will the chief financial officer of Health PEI be present at Committee of the Whole to support you in answering financial questions here in this Chamber?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do know – I think last year we spent about 17 hours on the Health PEI budget. It does get a rigorous debate on this floor, probably one of the longest in the country if we started to compare

for that. We have an interim CFO at Health PEI who has provided services for our organization. The member is probably aware that he did have a family emergency and had to return to Saskatchewan.

We will have a very dedicated person on the floor. It's my third budget. We always endeavour to answer questions, and if we can't, we will certainly bring them back for you to have a look at.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: It's a \$1.1 billion budget. I want reassurances that somebody from Health PEI will be on this floor.

Is that correct, minister? Will they be here to answer these important questions?

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I think we've....

Deputy Speaker: Sorry, the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

[1:45 p.m.]

Again, it is quite a rigorous debate. Anybody who can sit through those hours and hours of debate and watch it online – I'm sure it's scintillating entertainment to go through that \$1.2 billion budget. We have a dedicated staff of professionals. It is a \$1 billion organization. It is not relying on one person to compile all those transactions. Health PEI does anywhere between 6,000 and 8,000 transactions per day, so it is an extensive budget, and I think we do a great job. I think we're one of the last Legislatures in Canada to actually debate our budget on the floor.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: The people of PEI only get one shot once a year to debate that, so I don't care if it's 17 hours or 1,700 hours. It's a \$1.1 billion budget, minister.

[Interjections]

G. McNeilly: This is serious stuff. There's a lot of stuff going on in Health PEI that we need answers to. The reason for these questions is very simple: Islanders want to know that the Health PEI executive leadership team is actually adding value to the health care system, not just drawing down large salaries that could be better spent on frontline professionals.

Question to the minister: The chief financial role is critical to managing the \$1.1 billion budget. That position has been vacant or filled temporarily for far too long. When will you finally hire a permanent chief financial officer for Health PEI?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I didn't catch the exact phrasing about the quality of our EL team, but let me stand on this floor and say that we have a dedicated group of professionals. To run the health authority in PEI is 24/7. I can tell you that phones, texts, emails go from 5 a.m. until 3 a.m., and maybe about a couple of hours of sleep in between. They're dedicated professionals. If you go to the garage in the government building, the first person that you'll see there is my deputy minister.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A new federal government was elected last evening, which opens a great opportunity for Islanders to secure additional funding and supports, should our Premier and his ministers be ready to advocate for them.

Impacts of federal election (further)

Question to the Premier: We've known for a couple of months now, Mr. Premier, that a federal election was coming to give Canadians a new federal government. Have you identified a list of federal funding opportunities that PEI must urgently secure, and if so, will you table that list of funding opportunities today?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We'll take advantage of every federal funding stream that's available to us. That's an extensive list. We always have. We'll advocate for further federal funding streams. Of course, we think that a permanent infrastructure program is very important at this stage of our development here in Prince Edward Island. That partnership will be as strong as it always has. This government has been quick to take advantage of funding streams in infrastructure, housing, and child care, and we'll continue to partner and sign agreements with federal government that benefit Prince Edward Island.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, first supplementary question.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the Premier's response.

Islanders, at this time, need a provincial government that has a strong, clear direction so that we ensure a seat at the federal table and that our voices are heard. Our small size makes it critical that our leaders are ready to advocate for our fair share. I was concerned when I saw the Premiers of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Ontario earlier this month signing onto an agreement on free trade between those provinces, but PEI was not included.

Question to the Premier....

[Interjections]

M. MacFarlane: Question to the Premier....

[Interjections]

Deputy Speaker: Members. Members.

[Interjections]

Deputy Speaker: Members, the hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora has the floor.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Interjections]

Deputy Speaker: Minister, the hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora has the floor.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Premier: When you say that you're advancing free trade to protect Islanders and strengthen our economy, but you were left out of that important agreement with the other two Maritime provinces, how did you let that happen?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was just last week that we completed second reading of our free trade and mobility act here in the Legislature, and I assure the member, I am in very close communication with our regional Premiers here about that issue. Stay tuned on that front.

[1:50 p.m.]

I'd also say that in July of this year, Prince Edward Island will take over chairmanship of the Council of the Federation, giving us a national profile and a leadership opportunity, leading that Council of the Federation. I look forward to that opportunity and all of the advantages that that will confer on our province, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, second supplementary.

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If we can't get a seat at that Maritime table, we're going to have a hard time getting voices heard at the federal table.

The previous Premier obviously did a fantastic job of collaborating with the federal government; he was rewarded with a nice job over in Ireland. Now, I'm not saying this Premier should perhaps strive for that same outcome, but Islanders would like to continue to see strong leadership on their behalf.

Premier, as an interim leader at the helm of this government and no clear direction from you or your Cabinet, how can Islanders trust that their voices will be strongly represented with the newly elected federal government?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. R. Lantz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I see that the Green Party has already started trying to create a strong partnership with the

federal government when the Member from Borden-Kinkora and New Haven-Rocky Point seemingly endorsed the Liberal candidate in Malpeque, according to him anyway.

[Interjections]

Hon. R. Lantz: That was posted on his Facebook. I believe everything I read on social media.

Mr. Speaker, we have a strong partnership. I've already met the Prime Minister. I've met some of his Cabinet ministers, who presumably will continue to be Cabinet ministers. We have a strong relationship. We've already got an agreement on bridge and ferry tolls. We'll make agreements on all kinds of things, I'm sure, that will benefit Prince Edward Island.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the PEI Federation of Municipalities held their AGM, bringing together local leaders from across the Island. These are the people on the ground dealing with housing shortages, land use pressures, and community services. Yet, it was noticed by several in the room that the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities, the minister responsible for these very issues, did not attend.

We have also learned that this minister has not met with the federation since his appointment seven months ago. This is an important piece of the minister's portfolio.

HLC engagement with communities

Question to the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities: How can you claim to represent the interests of Island communities if you don't meet with their elected representatives?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Since coming into this role, I've met with a number of mayors, a number of councillors. I actually met with Councillor Mitchell Tweel yesterday for a coffee to talk about issues. He couldn't have been out there at the thing either. I

had a number of other engagements that prevented me from going.

That said, I have a great staff who work in municipalities. We're trying to help the municipalities with a new funding arrangement that we have for them. We're out doing an MGA review so we can try to help them navigate the new world of the MGA that the Liberals brought in. Quite frankly, our feedback has been through the roof. We have over 750 responses so far. We're quite happy with the engagement that we've had with communities here on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you, they're not happy with your government.

While the minister has yet to meet with the federation as a collective voice for municipalities, and he's just mentioned that he's met with individuals, I'm wondering if he's met with individual towns or councils. Islanders deserve to know how their communities are being heard, or not, by this government.

Question to the minister: Will you tell this House which municipalities you have met with since your appointment last October?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've met with a number of them through a number of different initiatives that we've had. I've had a number of telephone conversations with a number of individuals including CAOs, mayors, and a number of different councillors from throughout.

I will say that I've had correspondence just recently from the Town of Borden that insinuates that the Member from Borden-Kinkora is interfering with how their town is being operated. I think you should worry about your side of the fence.

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

K. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're just fine over on this side of the House. Thank you for your concern.

Municipalities are the closest form of government to Islanders. They're responsible for land use, recreation, housing approvals, and local planning – key pillars of our communities. Imagine the outcry if the Prime Minister refused to meet with our Premier or Cabinet ministers for seven months. That's essentially what this minister has done to municipal leaders.

[1:55 p.m.]

Question to the same minister: Do you believe it is acceptable to go more than half a year without meeting with the Federation of Municipalities?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Communities.

Hon. S. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Like I said, I meet with the mayors and councils. The Federation of Municipalities was involved with the new agreement that several of the communities aren't happy with at this point. I think that I'm going to take my direction from the people that are actually elected on the ground each and every day, which I do.

And I might say, once again: you should get your own membership under control over there and tell your own member to stop interfering with the Town of Borden, like they've said in the letter. Quite frankly, you should worry about what's going on over there, not what's going on over here, because clearly, you have no clue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All year round, off-highway vehicles travel all over our Island, in the winter and in the summer. Recently, there was legislation passed that the no-expiry plates on off-highway vehicles would have to start having yearly registration, and I've had a number of constituents reach out.

Off-highway vehicles

A question to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure: Legislation was passed last November to have off-highway vehicles yearly registered, and they were given a grace period until April 30th of this year to do the expiry transition. What does this mean for the off-highway vehicles?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank the hon. member for the question. A great question – one of the best that we’ve had here this afternoon, for sure.

With that, yes; he’s absolutely correct that there was an amendment to the *Off-Highway Vehicle Act*. That amendment was brought forward at the request of the ATV Federation. What that is going to provide is, on a yearly basis, revenues to the ATV Federation so that they are able to carry on with the great work, the great programming that they have done.

With that, the registration fees – 80 percent of those fees go back to the federation with a minimum of \$70,000 going to the federation each year from registration fees. It could be substantially higher than that, but it will not be lower than \$70,000.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, your first supplementary.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That’s great to hear. We’ll go back to that same minister for another question on it.

Minister, some residents were looking at the yearly registration fee as a cash grab, but you outlined that it’s going back to the federation, which is great to hear. The other moneys that were going into the federation – are they still available? Are they will getting funded so that they can continue to make our Island one Island for their trails?

Deputy Speaker: Alright, I’ll assume that’s a question to the same minister, member.

The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Hon. E. Hudson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do thank the member for his advocacy on behalf of ATVers right across the province.

Absolutely. Look at the number of dollars in addition to the registration fees that will be going back to the ATV Federation. Just, for example, through the department of one of our Cabinet colleagues here over the last few years, the ATV Federation, and not only the federation itself but individual clubs across the province, have received upwards of \$790,000 from this government. This government certainly is, have been, and will continue to be strong supporters of ATVing in the province of PEI.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, your second supplementary.

T. DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One thing is for sure: the federation is doing unbelievable work, and hopefully they continue to join our Island in one set of trails.

Back to that same minister.

Minister, as we go forward, and now off-highway vehicles have a yearly registration, does this mean that it’s going to be easier for the federation to access the secondary roads that they’ve been trying to access?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

[2:00 p.m.]

There’s a process that the ATV Federation does go through. They provide the information back to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure with the development of pilot roads. At this point in time, over the last 18 months to two years, there has been a total of 68 kilometres of pilot roads established on PEI. We’re going to continue to work to expand that number.

The other thing, too, that I do want to point out is the funding that has been provided by our government to the federation for the development of a tip-to-tip trail. Actually, this past Saturday morning, I had the opportunity to

attend and to speak at the ATV Federation AGM. They are well on their way with regard to that study, mapping out what will have to take place, not only from on the ground but also the identification of if there are going to be requirements that need to change any legislation/regulations.

But with that, we're going to continue to work with the federation for the betterment of sport in PEI, and for tourism in PEI as well.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

C. Deagle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to touch on an important topic, and I know these questions have been asked in here many times before on impaired driving.

For years now, PEI has had and continues to have the highest rate of impaired driving in Canada. Impaired driving is an epidemic that continues to have severe and life-threatening consequences.

Impaired driving

Question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: How are you working with law enforcement to improve the prevention of impaired driving in our province?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question, and thank you to all members who bring these questions and this conversation up.

Impaired driving is a senseless crime that can lead to tragedy, and it has led to tragedy on this Island. As a government, we have to continue to do what we can. We are increasing enforcement, we're increasing training for our officers, and we're increasing roadside checkpoints. It is helping; we are catching more impaired drivers because we're out there more and we're seeing more, and the public is helping us do that.

Is that enough? No, we've got to continue to think outside the box and come up with new ways to stop this problem that we have on this Island.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, first supplementary.

C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, are you aware of the barriers that police face when they catch a driver impaired by cannabis or drugs? First, police conduct a roadside standardized field sobriety test, and once the suspect fails that, the officer will conduct a blood sample test back at the station. This lengthy process is ineffective and time consuming, and it continues to put drivers' lives at risk on our Island roads.

Minister, you had stated before that work is underway to review options for a PEI approach to cannabis legalization.

Question to the minister: What is your department doing to strengthen impaired driving penalties, legislation, and awareness to deter people from consuming cannabis while driving?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that.

I think I've been on record of supporting immediate roadside suspensions. It's been brought to me by MADD Canada, and we've had that discussion, and I've had that discussion with the Minister of Transportation as well; that legislation lies under him. We are in the policy mode to make that happen, but it's going to be a mindset change for Islanders.

Prince Edward Island is one of the only provinces that puts people in custody for impaired driving, but immediate roadside suspension would immediately suspend the license, take the vehicle, take that person off the road, and opens up our police officers to catch more. So, I think that will balance it out, and I think that's the route that we have to go in.

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

C. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That kind of takes my last question here, but I know that any RCMP officer or any police officer I've spoken to said that a big part of the issue is that once they do catch impaired drivers, it takes sometimes three, four, five, six hours to

actually process that, where if they could issue the roadside suspension, they could continue to enforce and maybe catch another two or three impaired drivers.

[2:05 p.m.]

Other jurisdictions such as British Columbia, Alberta, and New Brunswick have implemented immediate roadside suspensions for impaired drivers, significantly reducing police processing time and improving road safety for Islanders. Police would be able to process offenders right when they catch them and not hours later.

Minister, will the government commit to introducing roadside license suspensions for impaired drivers as proposed by MADD Canada, and on what timeline?

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

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question.

Myself, I sat through a docket recently in Georgetown. That docket was three-quarters impaired driving. We had RCMP officers sitting in the court all morning. We had the legal system tied up.

Are we solving the problem? We are putting people in custody, but we've got to get them off the road. We've got to stop this, whether it's the upstream approach on the addictions here on Prince Edward Island and the abuse of alcohol and drugs, but we have to take that approach.

But I am fully in support of this immediate roadside suspension, and I will work with the Minister of Transportation to ensure that this legislation gets done as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-West Royalty, final question.

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the minister said before to my questions about Health PEI – and I have the annual report right here. It says that Health PEI is accountable and has requirements to this PEI Legislative Assembly. Now, the minister just said that Health PEI will not be appearing in this Chamber to defend the \$1.1 million budget or 40

percent of our taxpayer spending across the province.

Health PEI leadership (further)

Minister, how is that possible that nobody in an executive leadership team, nobody at Health PEI, will be here to defend their incredibly growing budget? We have many questions. Why will they not be in this Chamber?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can assure the hon. member that a very competent individual has been working on the file for months. We'll answer any questions he has with the budget. We've always been very transparent with the budget handouts that we give. We spend a tremendous amount of time. I think I have the record of 16 hours or 17 hours on the floor in two consecutive days. I will hold that record probably for a long time, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

[End of Question Period]