



Session:	2/66
Date:	7 May 2021
No:	30

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 7 MAY 2021

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The other day, questions were taken under notice and the question was: Why was there no notice of intent sent to residents for this building permit as required by the MGA and why did the government permit this construction of a property that has high risk of coastal flooding?

Development permits within a municipality are issued by the municipal government based on the jurisdiction of the Province, provide (Indistinct) of the *Municipal Government Act*.

Land use planning is regulated under the *Planning Act* and the municipality government creates an official plan in zoning and development bylaws after extensive public consultation, as outlined in the *Planning Act*.

Within the rural municipality of North Shore, the development officer issues development permits and follows the bylaws of the municipality when doing so. Notice is provided depending on the activity. For example, a subdivision application requires public notice, neighbouring residents notified, and a public hearing. But an application for an accessory building or shed does not require this notice.

Once a permit is approved, regarding the type of permit, it is publicly listed on the provincial government webpage under PEI Planning Decisions and is then open to appeal.

The application was appealed to IRAC and was later withdrawn.

A second question was asked: Was Parks Canada consulted regarding the development on Bayshore Road in Stanhope, and if not, why?

There's no section in the *Planning Act* and bylaws of the respective municipality that addresses the permitting on parks and conservation zones – specifically, page 38, section 14, parks and conservation zone.

This document can be found on the respective municipality's website.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot asked me how do we justify not providing financial support for social assistance clients to access internet.

The short answer is that we do. Social assistance clients do receive financial (Indistinct) support for telephone communications, which can include data to access the internet.

Additionally, the department does provide support under the AccessAbility Supports program for access to internet.

Also, in 2017, the federal government rolled out the Connecting Families program, which is a secure online portal that enables eligible Canadian families to access high speed internet services packages for \$10 per month from participating internet service providers. Island families receiving the maximum Canada child benefit have been invited by the feds to use this program.

Currently, the department is undergoing a comprehensive review of all social assistance policies and one aspect of the review is ensuring social assistance clients have access, and enough access, to the needed services that they require.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Yesterday, during debate on the state of our Island forests, the minister of environment revealed that an initial analysis of information from aerial photographs

suggests that recently we may have lost as much as 20% of our Island forests.

The minister described the situation as critical and said in regard to the latest information, and I quote: We know it's going to be bad so we don't need to wait a year to start making adaptations to what we're doing. We can make the adaptations right away, and that's what we're going to do. End quote.

Comprehensive plan for Island forests

Question to the minister of environment: When can we expect to see a comprehensive plan so we can indeed get going right away?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to have to get the Legislature closed so I can spend time in the office again and not three hours a week that I'm getting in there now.

We met yesterday morning with a group from my office. We talked about this extensively. We're looking at what some of the ideas are. We're setting up a meeting currently with the PEI Woodlot Owners Association.

Trust me when I say I've received an enormous amount of suggestions and advice via email over the last 24 hours. So there's a lot of people out there who have a keen interest in this, who own land, who are working in parts of this industry.

I know I have to get everybody's voice in there, but we have to do it in a way that we can still expedite this process so we can start taking some definitive action soon.

I know that doesn't answer your question but it has to be quick –

Leader of the Opposition: I'm used to that.

Mr. Myers: I know – you're used to that, yes.

But it has to be quick. We have to do this – we can't wait.

I'd like to say by the time we're back in the fall session that we have some preliminary actions that we're ready to take and then some long-term planning activities that we're doing.

That's kind of the gist of what I'm looking at. I think it should be pretty easy to know some of the quick things we need to do, but then what are some of the long-term strategies that we need to put in place to ensure that we have sustainability for a long time ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks.

I want to say that was an unfair comment, because yesterday's conversation we had I found to be really informative and illustrative. So thank you for that, minister.

Recommendation number three in the 2013 Carver report was to allow farmers to exclude non-arable land, and that of course might include forested land, when calculating their landholdings, allowing them to hold considerably more than the 1,000 and 3,000 acre limits.

Yesterday, Gary Schneider, who is of course a recognized Island expert on forestry, suggested that a significant contributing factor to accelerated deforestation on PEI is its conversion to farmland.

Forested acreage to remain intact

To the same minister: Will government be closely monitoring those few landowners who, by utilizing this exclusion, are potentially beyond the limits to ensure that any forested acreage on their land remains forested, remains intact, and has not been converted to farmland?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know Gary Schneider has done a tremendous amount of good work in this province, but he would only be guessing,

much like you and I are just guessing. Until we get the results back, that, we can't definitely say.

I've had emails from people suggesting that the PEI Energy Corporation has done it by creating a demand for woodchips to feed to all of our biomass burners, so that we're responsible. Maybe we are; I don't know. I'll be quite honest, even what I said yesterday, I do not know yet what the cause is, but I am determined to apply a fix to it.

That's the best I can offer at this point until we get some better information.

That said, I've met with the PEI Federation of Agriculture and the PEI Potato Board. We've talked about some of the things that are initiatives (Indistinct). We talked about reforestation and we talked about it prior to me having this additional knowledge that kind of puts more pressure on me.

We've talked about a buffer zone system that we want to buy back large tracks of land along waterways. We want to work with farmers to do that. We want to replant them with trees. We want to create corridors for wildlife, and we also want to have well treed sections there that we can use to capture carbon, because I thought at the time, we were going to advance the amount of carbon we capture, not get back what we lost. But either way, those initiatives are still in place

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

And as was discussed yesterday, almost 90% of Island land is privately owned, and virtually 100% of logging happens on that private land. If our province is to have any sort of effective strategy to stop the appalling rate of deforestation on our Island, we're going to have to work with private woodlot owners.

Proposed recommendations re: land management

A question to the minister of environment: What lessons can this government learn

from 20 years ago when Islanders pushed back against government's proposed regulation regarding management on their land.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Mr. Myers: I'm not sure because I could honestly say I wouldn't be that up to speed what happened 20 years ago. 20 years ago I had a number of other initiatives underway – that I was more worried about whether or not I could keep my bills paid at the time and putting oil in my oil tank with a jerry can to get through the winter. I'd have to say I wasn't that engaged with forestry at that point in time because I was most worried about how I was going to survive.

That said, I think that I've learned a number of lessons from my time in politics. I've learned a number of lessons watching how bad government operates via the 10 years of the Liberal regime here. I've watched what happened when you don't talk to Islanders and when you don't listen to Islanders and I've certainly taken those notions into consideration.

When I met with the Watershed Alliance and talked about some of our plans, we talked about who would do some of this work. They thought, in some cases, maybe they were the better ones to go out and meet with the land owners because they already have a relationship with them. I'm like, anywhere where we already have good working relationships; we'll rely on the people that have them. I think we have to do it piece by piece. There's some people that are going to come along right willingly and help us and there's some that's going to take a little bit of effort, but I don't intend to make any changes in the way that it's going to cause a rumble. I want to find the right person to go to talk to the people who we need to talk to so we can get the work done that needs to be done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

May I suggest, minister, that you have a word with the Premier? Of course, it was Pat Binns' administration, 20 years ago, that was in power when all of this ruckus happened. I'm sure the Premier would have some sense of how government managed to stickhandle their way through that.

Matt Hughes is a small-scale professional wood harvester who lives in District 17 and who practices selective logging. The work he does, of course, takes more time: patch cutting, thinning, selective logging. It allows him to remove wood continuously from a forest whilst maintaining the integrity of that forest.

As we all know, that isn't how most of the forests on Prince Edward Island are harvested. Clear cutting is a far more common method to take lumber off stands. There are so many problems associated with clear cutting; of course, among them, the impacts that it has on soil health and water management.

Sustainable harvest re: soil and water protection

Question to the same minister: Soil health and water conservation are both extremely active issues in your portfolio, of course. How are you going to balance continued, sustainable wood harvesting with the need to protect water and soil?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, that's a really good question and some of the things that we are looking, in our net-zero plan, is exactly how we can do those things. For once, government all has to kind of fit together for one big plan and it's been a number of years since there have been any initiatives that's been focused in a manner that brings everybody together.

I do agree – and one of the emails that I received this morning was from a gentleman who is in the industry and he lamented that, against his morals, sometimes he cuts down the bigger trees because he has to pay his bills. There's that push on each direction of: how do I survive and how do I do what's the right thing and what's responsible to do. I

think that's where government can come in. I think that we have to do a better job at coming up with a plan that's manageable and financially encouraging people to leave woodlots standing.

The value isn't in cutting them down. The value, to me, is in leaving them up in order to meet our goals and I think that we have to put a value on that, that's intrinsic, that we can somehow pass onto the land owner and say: because you're doing what we want you to do, we will pay you to do that. Much like we do with the ALUS program now. There's no reason why government can't come up with a program that will do that.

On the soil health side – I know I'm running short on time – there is avenues where we can use our woodlot and we can create heat with it, we can abate our carbon and we can return the nutrients to the soil. We're looking at it on an exact project like that currently. It's very preliminary because it's in these early discussions we're having about the results we got back from our LIDAR. In the not-too-distant future, I hope to be able to talk about it, kind of in a more expansive way. I'm really excited about it and I'm pretty sure the members over there will be, too, when we get to it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The *Co-operatives Association Act* sets out the legal framework and requirements for organizations that operate as cooperatives, including housing co-operatives. Co-operatives are self-governing under this act, but have clear requirements, legal requirements for governance, reporting and financial accountability. This includes electing a board of directors, holding annual membership meetings and filing audited financial statements and reports with the provincial inspector of cooperatives.

Active inspector for co-operatives

Question for the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: As per the legislation, is there currently an inspector of co-operatives active in your department?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll have to come back with that answer. That's a great question. Co-operatives play an important role in our society, Mr. Speaker, and I'll have to bring that answer back.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Lower Montague Trailer Park Co-operative Ltd. was incorporated in November 2003 to provide affordable housing by means of acquisition, renovation, and the operation of a trailer park for the co-operative members, the park residents.

In recent years, that co-operative has not been meeting the conditions of its registered bylaws and the legal requirements. Annual membership meetings were not held, board meeting minutes were not kept, and the last filed annual report is dated 2016. There are no recent financial records, rental receipts, or audited statements available for members.

Administrative failure in co-operative

Question for the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: Any one of these administrative failures is a legal red flag under the *Co-operative Associations Act*. Why were they not enforced or even noticed?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for bringing this forward to me. I will definitely have the department look into this and bring some answers back to you.

Thank you for this.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Mr. Speaker, as if things couldn't get any more complicated, the land that the park is located on has been sold to a private corporation by two of the directors, despite the fact that the co-operative remains in active status on the corporate business registry, which probably makes that sale transaction illegal.

Navigating of law and regulations

Question for the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: Just because a situation is complicated doesn't mean we are not obligated to act. I'm prepared to help these residents navigate the law and the regulations. Are you?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, it's very important and I really would like to work with you on this matter and see if we can come with some resolution. We'll bring this back and have that conversation.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll just continue on from Charlottetown-Belvedere's line of question.

I was initially contacted by several residents of the trailer park who have been under extreme stress as they face ongoing uncertainty about the future of their home. Some residents have already given in and left, while many of those who remain, experience ongoing threats of eviction and rental arrears bills.

Each time the residents appeal to IRAC, some residents have faced eviction up to eight times and they've won every time.

At some point, the government needs to recognize this as harassment and step in.

Evictions and harassments

Question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: Does this sound like a fair or a legal process to you?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not familiar with this file, so it doesn't sound like a fair circumstance, but I'd like to get the facts on this and I'll – happy to bring back anything I find.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

Ms. Beaton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, you were contacted by the same concerned residents of the Lower Montague Trailer Park Co-operative Ltd. almost a year ago. They have asked you and the Member from Montague-Kilmuir to take action on their behalf and nothing has happened.

They have provided substantial evidence that, at minimum, there are concerns about the status of the co-operative, the management actions of the directors, and the legality of the land sale transaction.

Investigation of co-operative

Question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: The residents of the trailer park must not be neglected any longer. Will your department please do the right thing, investigate and provide legal assistance?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will look into this and bring it back.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With two surgeons leaving Prince County Hospital, we know that more surgeries are

currently being diverted to Charlottetown. However, this shortage, as well as an overall lack of specialized surgeons here on PEI, means we will need to be relying even more on off-Island surgeries as well during a time when the realities of COVID-19 in our neighbouring provinces make this quite difficult.

Support for Islanders re: off-Island travel

Question to the minister of health: What additional measures have been put in place to support Islanders who must travel off-Island for health procedures and surgeries at this time?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I think, going back as the member references, the personnel, the challenges that we do have across the board, certainly she references Prince County Hospital. I've said here before that, with regard to our physician recruitment, with regard to our senior management, the executive leadership team recognized here earlier in statements, with regard to Paul Young, I do have great faith in our leadership.

With regard to travel off-Island, certainly the Department of Health and Wellness and Health PEI, they work with an organization that I would think and assume that the member is familiar with, Hope Air, which not only provides assistance to individuals who have to travel by way of air, but also by way of ground and, certainly, it's a partner that we do work with to provide services to Islanders that do have to travel, for whatever reason, off of Island for medical services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know that not everyone has access to a car or is able to drive long distances. For example, if you're a senior awaiting cataract surgery.

Public transit to off-Island locations, such as Moncton or Halifax, is almost nonexistent at this time and Islanders relying on transit must work around extremely limited schedules, which can make a day trip pretty much impossible for many.

Question to the minister of health: You mentioned that there are some supports available, which there have been, certainly, before as well. I'm asking about new supports or extending additional supports because more people are needing to access these services at this time. Why is it that, despite off-Island travel becoming even more difficult and time consuming and costly, there have been no changes to these limited supports?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, again, raises some interesting points, without a doubt.

The department, as I had mentioned, Health PEI, have services, have partners in place. But I do question the comment, the assertion that the member made with regard to no off-Island transit, I'll certainly look into it further. From my understanding, there absolutely still remains off-Island transit to areas outside of the Province of Prince Edward Island, including Halifax.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just to clarify, I didn't say no, I said limited. It has been reduced, which, as you know, there is a 24-hour window that people can go off-Island to access treatment and if they need to stay beyond that, there is the additional requirements around isolation for a good reason. With that limited transit, it makes it quite difficult.

The need to self-isolate for 14 days when travelling off-Island for more than 24 hours does add that additional challenge and barrier. As well, some surgeries require days of recovery time before returning to PEI. For some, the procedure is such that they are

unable to drive themselves, leaving many scrambling to find family or friends who can take time off work to do this

Self-isolation and paid sick leave

Question to the Minister of Economic Growth, Tourism and Culture: During outbreaks of COVID-19 in this province, paid sick leave provisions have been expanded. As we watch Nova Scotia struggle through this third wave, will you consider making this program accessible to all Islanders and support persons needing to self-isolate due to accessing off-Island medical treatments until at least September?

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

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, we can certainly take a look at that. I can go back to the department to get them to do some work on it. When we rolled out the million dollar fund, we didn't know what kind of uptake we were going to get, obviously day-by-day and the cases and so forth. I'll certainly commit to going back and getting the department to work on that and come back with some more info.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bernard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can remember my excitement, as a student, when on a beautiful, random, sunny day, my teacher would say, okay class, we're heading outside for our reading time today. The fresh air, change of scenery and the great outdoors is such a perfect reset for the mind and body.

More and more schools are building outdoor classrooms because they see, firsthand, the benefits of time spent learning outdoors. The home and school has put forward a motion asking for more outdoor learning to be a part of the official curriculum so that schools will get children outside more often. As one student said, quote: I can be stuck inside all day. It gives me a time to just be outside. It's just nice.

Support to outdoor learning curriculum

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: Will you be supporting these curriculum changes?

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

Ms. Jameson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the question.

Actually, on Monday evening, I had the opportunity to speak with the Morell and Souris district advisory committee and a representative from the PEI Home and School Federation was on that as well. We had the discussion around more outdoor play-based learning.

Certainly, it's something that I'm interested in. We all spoke in here with regards to the motion that was put forward by the hon. member around play-based learning. I think it's important; it's critical for the wellbeing of our students. I'd love to see more outdoor learning in the years to come.

Mr. MacDonald: I'd like to see some indoor (Indistinct)

So absolutely, I can commit to this in the House here today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Recently, it's been reported that PEI is struggling to recruit school counsellors. As it stands, 40 of our 62 public schools have full-time counsellors with a promise from the former minister to increase that number to all Island schools by this fall.

A school recently contacted me from my district. The students there do not have a full-time counsellor.

Full-time counsellors in schools by fall

Question to the minister of education: Are you on track to meet the previous minister's

goals of having full-time counsellors working in all 62 schools by this fall?

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

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

Another very important question and I'm really pleased to see the hon. member asking it today, as I know the principal of that school had reached out to me there yesterday as well.

Our government has taken the wellbeing of our students as the utmost priority, this past year, especially. The investments we have made in our education system – \$4 million from our K-12; 185 new additional resources for this year to support our students through a tumultuous time. A time that is unlike any in our history.

I was really, really pleased to be on the floor with the Budget for the coming fiscal year. In it there is an addition of 12 school counsellors; something that we haven't seen in decades. In addition to that, 20 additional teachers; 34 additional education assistants; 4 autism consultants; bus drivers; school secretaries.

These are investments, again, like we've never seen before. It's a testament to the commitment that our government has for the wellbeing for our students in our school system.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I'm going to assume that's a yes.

PEI is home to many rural communities, and those who live in rural areas expect to receive the same services that are offered in urban areas of the province. This can sometimes be a challenge for government when recruiting professionals because often those with a connection to rural communities opt to live in more larger urban areas of the province.

This school has seen a cycle where a counsellor joins the team for a year or so to get their foot in the door, then moves elsewhere when an opportunity opens up.

Retaining guidance counsellors long-term

Question to the minister of education: What are you doing to assist schools in rural communities with retaining their guidance counsellors on a long-term basis?

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

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

Again, a great question. I did have the opportunity to speak with the HR within the Public School Branch, as well as the director of the Public School Branch this morning regarding our school counsellors in our rural settings as a result of the concern that the principal had put forward to me.

They are quite confident that counselling positions for the coming year will have a full complement of qualified personnel for September. Mind you, in the case whereby we have trouble filling our counsellor positions, which again, they've said with certainty that shouldn't be the case for September, the minister does have the ability to authorize a special permit in cases where we need to fill those gaps.

I really do want to take this opportunity to encourage members in this House to speed along the budget process. The school systems are waiting for it. We do need to hire these folks and it does take a little while. We want to have them ready to go for September.

I'm really pleased that we do feel we'll have a full complement for September and I appreciate the hon. member's question today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I'm glad that the minister mentioned that she does have the authority to issue a special permit. This particular school that we've been talking about, the principal had sent a letter into the minister yesterday about this. They've been without a guidance counsellor for five-to-six months now and 71% of those students require support of a guidance counsellor.

The community has recently identified a qualified RN who has experience working with the Student Well-Being Teams in the area. She also has a certificate in psychiatric mental health nursing and this person is committed to the community and will remain there long term.

Hiring of local qualified RN

Question to the minister of education: Will you commit to meeting with this school to explore the possibility of hiring this qualified local candidate?

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

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

Yes, I understand that there is somebody who has come forward and who'd like to take this on, on a permanent basis. I understand the questions and appreciate the questions that the school has brought forward.

Just to educate this House regarding the situation there: We did bump up the hours for youth service worker time and supported additional training to better support youth service workers in that area. Also, I understand that we did add three more hours of additional EA support.

Absolutely, I'm willing to have these conversations, but like I said, I did have a thorough discussion with HR and the Public Schools Branch this morning and they are quite confident that they are going to be able to fill the complement this September. Again, we need to get these positions approved and then we need to move forward to make those offers to individuals, whether it's in a rural or an urban setting, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

Update on surgeries at PCH

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday during Question Period, the minister of health did a poor job of the game show *Jeopardy* question that I asked him, so today, I’m going to try another game show, maybe something a little bit easier that he’ll get this time.

I’m going to go back to an old game show called *Truth or Consequences*, an old game show from ‘70s. That way, at least the minister has a 50/50 chance of getting the answer right.

Minister, today, status of operating rooms at the Prince County Hospital – today.

Is the answer, A, all surgical procedure happening at Prince County Hospital today and will, until the end of June 2021, as the minister had stated on CBC recently, or is the answer B: due to a shortage of general surgeons, there will be no on call general surgeries at Prince County Hospital today until May 11th, 2021?

An Hon. Member: May 11th?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

You know, it was mentioned by the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road with regard to the number of questions, and that sometimes, I – because of the quality of those questions that do come forward from the Third Party – that they do have to be shifted to a certain extent.

The other thing I’ve heard back from discussions is that – Ernie, you’re being too hard with your answers on the Third Party.

An Hon. Member: Oh.

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Hudson: But again, going back to game shows – health care in the province of PEI – it is not a game. It is absolutely not a game.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hudson: So, the hon. member can keep playing around with figures and the like, but I’ve said before here: Yes, I have, as a Minister of Health and Wellness, faith in our administration, faith in our leadership, and faith in our recruitment.

Are there challenges – always going to be – have been challenges in the past when the hon. member himself was the minister of health and wellness? Yes, he encountered those challenges, without a doubt, but we are working through them. We have a plan and we realize that this is not a game.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Henderson: You’re right, Mr. Speaker. It’s not a game. He’s playing games with people’s lives. That’s what’s going on over here.

Minister, what’s going on here at Prince County Hospital? One day, you’re telling us things are okay right up until June at the Prince County Hospital. The next day, emergency surgeries will be transferred to the QEH from the PCH, leaving the population of West Prince, which he represents, over an hour away from life-saving surgeries.

Minister, there are consequences to your actions and your lack of ability to inform Islanders of what you’re doing in health administration here in this province. Will you table all your wonderful plans that you keep talking about for providing health care surgery coverage for our two main operating rooms at Prince Edward Island here? Tell us the truth. Come on.

Mr. McNeilly: Good question, good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member says: tell us the truth here. Well, whatever information that I provide in this House is based on information that I get from our experts, from our executive leadership team –

Mr. Henderson: (Indistinct)

Mr. Hudson: – and I have faith in them. I have faith that they tell me the truth whenever I do have a conversation with them and the information that is passed on to this House, to the hon. member, is the truth based on the information and the faith that I have in our leadership team.

Again, I'm going to reiterate, it is not a game. You look at the investments that we have placed in primary care, in health care. It shows our tremendous commitment to the people of PEI.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, it's not much wonder people are saying I'm getting feisty in here. I have documents here that have been put out by Health PEI saying that the emergency room is closed. The answer is B, what was on the first one.

Minister, what assurances can the minister offer here? Is this a one-time decision that he actually has some contingency plan over the pending crisis in health care here? This impacts all Islanders and they need reassurance that they're able to get health care services and not have to travel another hour, hour and a half to get those services. Lives depend on this.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You know, that was certainly quite a rant by the member. I will have to ask the member, I did not hear a specific question in that rant or coming from that rant.

If there is a specific question there, I would ask the member to put it forward.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to follow along with my colleague's questioning because, in the past two years, I don't think I've had as many calls from – and not just my constituents – constituents across the province on our health care system.

I know that my colleague will be tabling a document in that regard and there's been a lot of questions and concerns. You hear the chirps back and forth here on health care. We heard the minister saying let's keep this serious. Let's keep it serious, but let's deal with the issue. This failure will place enormous pressure on our entire health care system. People from Summerside and surrounding areas will be the first ones in line on this government's failure.

Emergency services at PCH

If someone from Miminegash, for example, is experiencing severe pain that requires emergency surgery, will they have to go to Charlottetown this weekend?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hudson: Mr. Speaker, I have not been provided, as minister, I'll be honest at this point in time, with what seems to be coming from the Third Party. Certainly, with regard to provincial surgical services, as I've said here before, we do, we have to operate as a team, whether it's Prince County, whether it's Queen Elizabeth and, at the same time, we have to work with partners such as Island EMS to make sure that the best services are available.

I do appreciate the member bringing this forward, like I say. I have been not notified of that at this point in time, but I certainly will look into it and I do appreciate it being brought forward.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: Here's a copy of a letter that I received. I'm going to read one paragraph out of it:

All potential surgical cases presenting to the PCH will be triaged by the physician. Consultation to the general surgeon on call at the QEH for any urgent surgical consults during this time period can occur by calling the QEH switchboard directly and having general surgeon on call paged.

Your answer to the last question is kind of scary. I think all members in this House, and especially over on that side of the House, should get behind their minister, give him the support, find out what the heck is going on in Summerside. This is getting ridiculous. This is getting scary.

You can imagine if you have an appendectomy or a gall bladder attack this weekend and you're in Miscouche. This decision means a lot of extra time –

Speaker: Question.

Mr. MacDonald: – driving.

Copy of letter: re PCH services

Minister, what can you tell us here today to ensure Islanders, especially in West Prince, what securities are you going to tell them when you get a copy of this letter, which you likely should have had before me?

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I absolutely agree with the member that I should have had that letter before he did. I will be absolutely looking into why I did not get that letter before the hon. member did. The long and the short, that is not acceptable.

But going back again, we do, we have to provide the best care that we can. Are there going to be times that, for whatever reason, there's going to be a diversion from one facility to another because of staffing challenges that we may be experiencing at a

certain time? Yes, that has happened. It's happened in the previous administration as well. I'm quite aware of that.

We do have to work as a team in the delivery of health care services here in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you for the answer, minister, but I'll tell you, I know you keep talking about the plan, but the first paragraph in that plan should have the word communication in it, and communication by Health PEI. There's something seriously wrong.

Emergency services at PCH (further)

I think the Premier – Premier, there's going to be a time when you're going to have to jump in on this because this is getting out of hand. It's getting out of hand. I know the minister likes to jump over the abject failures of his predecessors, but you know what? Today is today. There's people worried. There's surgeries that are being delayed. There's doctors that are leaving. There's all kinds of things happening here, and yes, some of that has happened in the past, but this seems to be a tsunami in health care.

I really think, Premier, that we need to resolve this as fast as possible.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

I would, again, try to reiterate to all of those in this House and all of those who are watching that we're operating right now within a worldwide pandemic that is at its worst that it's been since the very beginning. The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness can laugh and chuckle about that, but I can look across the strait to Nova Scotia and see the situation of COVID. I can talk to my colleagues across this country. Every single

health care delivery service in this country has been under strain for the last 15 months. We're having some challenges here in Prince Edward Island, absolutely, and we're working through them.

But I wouldn't trade the health care service that we have in this province with any other province in Canada. They're doing a great job. Stop beating them up. Work with them and try to work. It would make PEI a little bit better, Mr. Speaker. I've had enough of this over here.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Premier King: Best in the country over here.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you –

Mr. MacDonald: I never said that.

Premier King: Best in the country.

Mr. MacDonald: They're sending us (Indistinct) –

Speaker: Order!

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh has the floor.

Premier King: Ridiculous.

An Hon. Member: Can't keep up (Indistinct) –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Premier King: The best in the country.

Mr. MacDonald: They're sending us (Indistinct) –

Speaker: Okay. Okay.

Premier King: Still the best in the country. Where would you trade?

Speaker: Order!

Okay, fellows. Take it outside.

The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh, you have the floor.

[Laughter]

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can attest that it's quite windy outside. It's a little bit windy inside here today too, as well.

In 2018, the PEI Climate Change Action Plan was released. In that report, they committed to annual reporting, and I'll quote from it: Reporting our progress to the public will ensure transparency and provide an opportunity to change course if needed. It will allow government and others to gauge where we are and how far we still have to go. The annual updates will be provided as a status report and posted on the Climate Change Action Plan webpage.

There has not been an update in a couple of years now, and in fact, last November, the department presented at a committee and said that they'd be releasing the progress report shortly.

Update on Climate Change Action Plan

A question to the minister of climate action: Can he update this on where these progress reports are at?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have to be honest, I'll have to go and get that information for the hon. member, but what I will say is that I have been sat in this Legislature for a number of years and I witnessed when Wade became premier here in 2015. He went to Paris and signed onto the Paris Agreement and talked about all the great things we were going to do and then we didn't do anything.

I was quite shocked when I got into this role, and as – I know I have a reputation of taking action, but – and I appreciate that people view me like that, but there has been no action – there was no action taken. I honestly was astonished. We know all the things we know that have to change. We know them all. It's becoming so broad in the

world. Everybody is taking action. That's why we are taking action.

So, what I'd like to be able to start updating the House on, and based on the legislation that was brought forward in the House here I believe last summer or fall – I don't know when it came into place, but we want to get our board in place and we want to start reporting on our actions because we're going to jump deep into the deep end in action and I'd like to talk about those actions in the future.

I hope our future reporting will be on the things that we're doing and getting criticized on those instead of the things that we're not doing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Donagh.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's actually a fair point and I'll veer from my prepared questions here and speak to the plan on – your government has committed to an ambitious net-zero plan and you're right, the Member from Summerside-Wilmot did bring legislation forward on that from last fall.

Timeline on updated Climate Change Action Plan

Given – I'll say that there's a number of outdated items in the Climate Change Action Plan, when are you going to release the updated plan based on that legislation to the province for our net-zero plan?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When the House closes, we're going to move to get the bill in place – proclaim it. I think we gave ourselves until December, but I want to have it in place because we're going to have some more information from our net-zero group here hopefully by the end of this month or to the middle of June. We could still be sitting here by the time we release it.

Once we have the actionable items that we're going to take and the path that we're going to follow to meet our goals, I think it's going to become really, really important to report, have outside interpretation of what we're doing, that all the voices are being heard.

I still think that the previous plan is important because it meshes in. It's kind of what leads us to some of the action that we need to take. We're going to merge those together and I hope to be starting to report on them as early as – hopefully by the end of the year we'll be able to offer some baseline reports so that we have something to go on year-over-year to show that the action that we're taking is making a difference.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That plan or that report needs to be based on good data. It is our understanding that the department has hired Navius Research to do a lot of this preparatory work and also to look at – I know one of the things that they were looking at is the carbon abatement costs for what the province is going to do.

Update on Navius Research report

Can you give us an update on where that research is at and will your report going forward include those costs and numbers so that we know how much it's going to cost to get there and how far we are away from our targets?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Navius report is basically done. I have a copy of it in my bag here with me – that was the preliminary one. I think there's some back and forth. I had really hoped to have released this in public – I think I committed to you that I'd have it in April, and now that I look at the calendar and realize I missed the commitment I made to you, I'm nervous to make you another commitment and also not meet that commitment.

But I'm going to go back and find out how soon we can release it, because it is very important and it's important that we have this – it's an open conversation because we don't want to shock anybody by what we're doing and we don't want to shock anybody with what the costs of it is going to be.

I agree, let's put in all on paper. Let's put what the costs are and let's have a good discussion about what the best path is going to be based on those carbon abatement costs. I know that the committee on climate change has done a lot of work – and I believe you may sit on that, I'm not sure. But I know that committee has done a lot of work as far as some of the costing components of it, so I think it's important that we now merge that all together, come to a plan that we can all agree on then.

Obviously, because of the length of this project, it's going to be multi-political levels that are going to have to take it on. So we want to make sure that what we put in place is going to be agreeable to anybody else who may serve in government at some time down the road based on their political stripe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: We only have, of course, a few EVs on the roads right now, but I'm sure with the incentive program that was announced the other day by the minister that that's going to change very quickly. There's so many things to love about emission-free travel but one of the features of EVs is that the large batteries present potential dangers for first responders who may have to deal with an accident.

Currently, there's nobody on Prince Edward Island who offers training to fire departments or other first responders on how to safely deal with circumstances like that, as far as I'm aware. We've never actually had an accident involving an EV, but of course, that's going to change at some point. At the moment, these fire departments and first responders have to hire and pay for somebody off-Island to deliver the training, and it's a fairly significant cost.

EV safety training for first responders

A question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: What plans does your department have to ensure that all first responders on Prince Edward Island are properly trained in safety measures related to EVs, and will funding for fire departments be provided for this necessary training?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a very important question because, of course, we're hoping that there will be an influx in EV cars here very soon and first responders to be trained with this is important. I've had the conversation with the Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate Action there and we are going to help assist with the training.

As far as budget-wise, we have to look and see where that can fit in, but training our first responders is a priority.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition, final question.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Each morning, as I drive in, although it didn't happen this morning because it's a PD day, I see a couple of the new electric buses on my way down North River Road. Of course, they look no different from the others except for the little bolt sign that they have on the front and the back of the bus.

Update on electric buses

My question is to the minister of transportation: We have 12, I believe, of these buses now operating on PEI. How is that going? How are they operating? Is it as we had hoped? And how long before we actually replace the entire fleet of diesel buses here on PEI and allow all of our kids to travel in emission-free vehicles?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

The 12 electric buses that we currently have on the roads are working extremely well. We've had a tremendous positive response to those vehicles. With regards to some of the other questions that were asked about responding to a motor vehicle accident that might have an EV involved, the bumpers on these buses are being wrapped in a blue wrap which is the international symbol to show that it is an EV vehicle.

In our Capital Budget moving forward, we're purchasing additional buses this year. We're working closely with the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning as well to look at how we can expedite the replacement of this fleet and I'm very proud to say, as well, that our federal partners are very much on board, excuse the pun, to help us with this great initiative.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: End of Question Period.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

End of Question Period