



Session:	2/66
Date:	13 May 2021
No:	33

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF  
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 13 MAY 2021



Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The interview yesterday by Dr. Gardam, the acting CEO of Health PEI, was forthright and illuminating. I first want to thank him for his candor in recognizing and naming some systemic deficiencies and for his clear determination in wanting to tackle them head on. His experience and his obvious competence are a comfort to all of us.

The first step in dealing effectively with any problem is to acknowledge it and it's refreshing to hear a high-level civil servant who is unafraid to do this. One of the defects of conventional politics is that the admission of a problem by a government is often pounced upon by opposition parties who are more interested in scoring political points than contributing to solving serious, systemic issues.

**Support to acting CEO of Health PEI**

A question to the Premier: Dr. Gardam is shining a light on some very uncomfortable areas and I applaud him for doing so. How are you going to support him in his important work while not undermining the confidence of Islanders in a clearly stressed system?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. leader for the question.

I agree, Dr. Gardam is a most impressive individual and a tremendous, strong leader who has the total confidence of myself, of the minister and those he works with. I have spoken on a number of occasions in here and I agree with the hon. leader is that politics, sometimes, gets in the way of things.

I'm not afraid of the light that he's shining. I think there are changes that need to be made in the delivery of health in PEI. We've been

working on them; we've made a number and will continue to do so.

What I love most about Dr. Gardam and the officials that we have in Health PEI right now is that they're all focused solely on making the best health care delivery service we can in this province, patient-focused for those Islanders who need it. I just want to do everything I can to continue to help reach that ultimate goal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, it takes time for systems to develop and the pros and cons of it, a chosen structure to become apparent. Dr. Gardam said that, and I quote: Health PEI has been stumbling since its inception.

Teething problems, of course, are to be expected in any new venture, but Health PEI has been around since 2010. It's over 10 years old. It's a governance structure, based on that used in many other jurisdictions, where it seems to be working just fine.

Question to the Premier: Will there be a strong commitment from your government to support Dr. Gardam to take a critical look and to do the hard work of making the needed systemic changes?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Yes, the answer is, quite honestly, yes. It's not just Dr. Gardam. It's Dr. McNally; it's so many other leaders that we have in there who are focused on making changes.

I think health care delivery, in every jurisdiction, is challenged, it's difficult. Perhaps it's more noticeable here, simply because of our size. It's easier for us to take a look in and see how things are going. I think we need to continue to use that as a positive. I want to continue to make the overall changes that need to be made.

We have made a point, as this government, sometimes through the critique of some on

the other side, but we're taking our direction from the professionals like Dr. Gardam, like Dr. McNally and so many others. We're trying to use a professional expert approach in the delivery of health in this province. That's the approach we will continue to take, focused, of course, on the patient, the Islander who needs the service; hopefully, as close to their community as possible, when possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thanks again, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Gardam used some unusually blunt phrases to describe the medical system over which he now presides, describing it, on one occasion, as a game of whack-a-mole, where it feels like he's constantly putting out fires. This is not normal, he said in the interview.

Throughout this sitting, my colleague, the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke, has repeatedly asked the minister to admit there's a problem with our health care system and actually to do something about it, neither of which has happened.

### **Problems in the health care system**

A question to the Premier: Dr. Gardam has said that when bad stuff happens, we have to own it, we have to talk about it, and we have to figure out how to make it better. Is your government now willing to own the bad stuff that has happened and are you ready to make it better?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Well, Mr. Speaker, from the day that I was sworn in I understand the job, and that's the job of being the leader of this province as premier, is you own all of those issues. So we've never shied away from that.

I think what myself and the minister have been saying from the beginning is that, yes, there are challenges in this system. I think some on certain sides of the House have tried to paint this as a crisis, and what we've been saying is there's a challenge here. The

party of crisis, they've been doing this from the very beginning.

There are challenges here, but as we have been saying time and time again, if you want to see a health care crisis, go to Toronto right now, go to somewhere in Alberta. We have challenges here that are important to be addressed. We're working to address them, we're not afraid or running from them. Matter of fact, we're running head on into them trying to make it better.

But as the minister and I continually said, there are isolated challenges here that need to be addressed, but we're not in crisis. So I would suggest to the Leader of the Opposition – I don't think he meant it this way, but we haven't shied from that. I think the classification that a certain party over there has tried to make is totally false –

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Premier King:** – and designed only to scare Islanders, which is a horrible, horrible thing to do in this time.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the Premier's answer, but I need to say that in the interview last night I said – Dr. Gardam was kind of blunt. He said that we have a crisis. In fact, he said that we have a number of crises.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Leader of the Opposition:** I think, while we're working constructively together to fix this, we cannot deny that there are problems and he used that word himself last night.

The fundamental problem that seems to permeate virtually all of the concerns that Dr. Gardam expressed last night, is a lack of human resources, whether that's GPs or nurses or surgeons or nurse practitioners or LPNs.

It's clear that the lack of human resources is putting a strain on those who are already working and on the system itself. As Dr.

Gardam in another candid statement put it: Scrambling is the order of the day.

For a system to be kind and supportive to its health care workers and to provide the services Islanders expect, we need to build some wiggle room into that system and create resilience so that each resignation doesn't result in systemic impacts.

### **Hiring of health care professionals**

A question to the Premier: Cumbersome hiring processes were singled out as a major contributing factor that prevents hiring of new health care workers on Prince Edward Island. What is going to be done immediately to streamline these flawed processes and allow Prince Edward Island to effectively hire more health care professionals now?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Mr. Speaker, there's one thing Dr. Gardam also said, but nobody on the other side wants to recognize and that is we're 15 months into a worldwide health pandemic which has essentially crippled the health care services of the world. I know the hon. member again is smiling and laughing over there, but we're in a situation – and look at what happened here today in Charlottetown. We do not know the full extreme of that, but that puts the pressure on our health care system to need to deliver.

So yes, we have challenges here. We're working to identify them. When I got into this job, the Medical Society of PEI asked me if we could have doctors recruiting doctors. We know have doctors recruiting doctors. The other government before us didn't want to do that. I don't know why, but I can only speak to my time here.

We also had nurses coming to us and saying we need retention bonuses and we need recruitment assistance. We need to help pay the student loans for those nurses who come here. We now have that. We're trying to do everything we can.

I've spent more time in my office trying to understand how we recruit and why we recruit and how we can improve it. I think we have a very efficient system now. It's improved drastically. We'll continue to

improve, but health human resources is a challenge for every jurisdiction. It's one for us and I think we're going to continue to make improvements. We're going to see growth – new individuals here.

I would say to everybody in here: Let's all row together. Let's try not to create chaos and crisis for political purposes, but let's just try to do what's best for Islanders.

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

**Ms. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was announced that the department of education would be creating a new position, based on pre-Budget consultations with BIPOC USHR, the Black Cultural Society, and also from the recommendations in the report for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Although the request was for more positions, one position is what government announced. I've heard positive things about the consultant that has been hired and how the process has been rolling out.

### **Job description of diversity inclusion position**

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: What is the job description of this new diversity inclusion person? Will they work at the curriculum level or will they be on the ground supporting schools?

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

**Ms. Jameson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for a question.

Yes, we will be hiring somebody who will be working on the curriculum. In discussions with my staff, we will also be moving ahead with hiring some services within the school system, recognizing that we need it. I do look forward to bringing that information back to the House and having those discussions with the hon. member across.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's good to hear that there will be curriculum and people in the schools as well because I was going to say, it's clear that this person will have a lot on their hands, because one role is not nearly enough if we're really to take this seriously and if we're committed to making these true changes towards inclusivity. To put this into perspective, BIPOC USHR asked for four positions in their pre-Budget submission.

There have been rising numbers of individuals and organizations coming forward with complaints of racism in our school system.

### **Incidents of racism in Island schools**

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: If you are a student or a member of the school community in general and you experience or witness racism in one of our Island schools, who do you talk to?

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

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

Again, thank you for the important question.

Most certainly, our counsellors, which we talked about so often in this House – they are an incredible resource for our students, along with our Student Well-being Teams and our youth care workers, our teachers, our administrators, and they have stepped up in incredible ways over the last year.

We do have a safe and caring learning environment policy and there are ways in which students can bring forth concerns, but I agree with the hon. member, we need to do more and that is precisely why I had indicated in my previous response that we will be hiring on some additional expertise in this field.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I'm not really clear on is, once a student or a member of the school community goes to that person, where that person takes it. We've been hearing from people who have reported instances of racism. They report that very little happens as a result and they do not feel there has been any sort of resolution.

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: When there are incidents of racism reported, what actions are taken? What is our policy? What does that look like?

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

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

Again, this is an area of great priority to me and to this government. I'm sorry for those individuals that have made reports and they don't feel like action has been taken. We have to do better because I never want that to happen under my watch.

As I had mentioned previously in my previous response, we do have a safe and caring learning environment policy, and with regards to the specifics, I'd be happy to bring that back to the House.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

**Ms. Beaton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I met recently with a parent that has been advocating for her child who has experienced racism in the school system since November of 2019.

After multiple meetings, the Public Schools Branch committed to striking a committee of stakeholders, including representation from the BIPOC community, to address anti-racism training and curriculum. This has yet to happen.

### **Committee to address anti-racism training**

Question to the Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning: When will the Public Schools Branch act on their promise to strike a committee to address anti-racism training and curriculum?

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

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

Again, I can't speak to what's been done previously, but as everyone knows in this House, I am a new minister and I am taking this very seriously. The wellbeing of our students is of utmost priority to me and no one should have to ever experience racism in our schools.

That is precisely why we are moving ahead. We will be hiring somebody to help support our curriculum development. We will be moving forward with some additional supports within our school.

With respect to the committee, I'll get back to the department to get further updates regarding where that's at. But, again, I can assure this House that this is something that is very important to all members in this House.

Again, I can assure this House that this is something that is very important to all members of this House and I can assure you that I will take this matter very seriously and move forward in making more positive steps in the right direction.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

**Ms. Beaton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do understand the minister is a new minister in this portfolio, but it's important that we have continuity so that when concerns are brought up from parents, that they are continued on.

It takes courage for a child to speak up and when they speak up, we need to listen to them. This parent was told that her family situation would have been investigated and this happened back in September when she

had this conversation. Due to COVID, they couldn't do the investigation.

### **Investigation by Public Schools Branch**

Question to the minister: When a public complaint is made, what triggers an investigation by the Public Schools Branch? And what escalation process is in place if this complaint is not acted on?

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

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

While I don't know the specifics of this case, I can certainly go back to the department and find out more details. Again, something that is very important, we need to make sure our students, all students feel safe and secure in our school. Certainly, this is an answer that I will bring back to the House.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Mermaid-Stratford.

**Ms. Beaton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Diversity in the workplace needs to be facilitated through mentoring and an upward promotion path for senior management or to senior management positions and executive leadership positions. That needs to be facilitated through those mentoring programs.

### **Leadership programs in public service**

Question to the Minister of Finance: What leadership programs are in place in the public service to encourage more diversity in senior leadership and executive management positions?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

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

Hon. member, Public Service Commission is constantly working to make the workplace more inclusive. There have been a number of courses that have been offered over the last year for all employees to make them

aware of what bias is and what their bias is, whether we feel we have bias or not. I've had that discussion a number of times with the director and will continue to make sure that all employees are offered those courses and that the conversation continues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Social Development and Housing said last week that Social Assistance clients can access financial supports for internet services.

#### **Internet access for Social Assistance clients (further)**

Question to the same minister: If this is the case, why are those clients being told by your department that they can't have funds approved to cover internet costs?

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

**Mr. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let me just start by saying that the Department of Social Development and Housing takes serving our clients very, very seriously. To say that they're not giving this information to our clients is quite the allegation, really and has not been brought to my attention before.

When I went back to my department and I got the response that I brought back to this House, I go by what my department tells me and if this is the case, member, we'll get to the bottom of it.

I trust my department and I feel they do a good job serving our clients.

Thank you.

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

**Ms. Lund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It would suggest to me that the minister did not dig deeply into the information that he

got back from his department because, as I understand it, there is a small amount of money that is available for utilities, one of which could be the internet, but the thing is, it's not enough money to cover all utilities. If the person was going to access internet, they would have to go without another essential service.

Question to the same minister: Not having access to internet at home creates another gap for these individuals, especially if you have children in the home. Minister, will you commit to ensuring internet fees are covered for all Social Assistance clients?

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

**Mr. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to Social Assistance clients, clearly there are ones where we provide money right now for utilities. That includes for cell phones with data and it includes phones where they can go and access free wireless from places. There is a second group that have children. Of course, we provide supports for those folks. The federal government, as well, provides supports.

I'm working with my department. We want to make sure everyone, especially children, have access to the internet. We're going to make sure that, together with the full supports and suite of supports they receive, that they get that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms. Altass:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have an easy one today.

When I was taking part in the Women's Institute Roadside Cleanup on the weekend, we picked up a tonne of garbage left around the carpool lot at the Granville Street roundabout.

#### **Garbage at carpool lots**

Question to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure: Is this something you have noticed at other carpool lots in other



areas, and have you ever considered just putting garbage cans out at these locations?

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

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

Similar to the hon. member, I, as well as many members in this House, took part in the annual Women's Institute Roadside Cleanup. What I saw in my area of Stratford that I was collecting, unlike a lot of communities that talked about fast food containers and coffee cups and things like that, I saw a lot of construction material that was coming from a new subdivision and various other places.

I think the hon. member brings up a very good point with regards to making sure that there's receptacles at locations so that people can properly dispose of them. So, I will take that back to my department and we'll rectify that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. McNeilly:** In February 2020, government did a complete overhaul of the *Long-Term Care Subsidization Act*, and at the time, they also established a new minimum annual income of \$22,133 for spouses of those living in long-term care.

A family recently contacted me with the father in long-term care and their mother is still living in the family home. The father had a small RIFF and they made a withdrawal on last year for essential home repairs. The one-time increase in the annual income has resulted in the father being just above the threshold for subsidy and the mother being expected to pay the rest, leaving her with an annual income well below the poverty line.

### **Amending changes to annual income**

Question to the minister of health: Do you believe this situation is fair for the family and will you consider amending the program to ensure spouses living in the community are not forced to live in poverty?

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

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

The hon. member brings forward a very valid point. I absolutely would take that under consideration.

I think, as well though, that I would need to get a bit more information as well, and potentially work with my colleague, the Minister of Social Development and Housing, just to ensure – because there is a bit of an overlap there between programming with community care and long-term care.

But certainly appreciate the member bringing this forward and would certainly take it into consideration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. McNeilly:** Well, it is health.

The Long-Term Care Subsidization Program allows for an appeal to be filed within 15 days of the decision. The act states spouses living at home should retain 50% of their monthly income, and since this is not happening in their case, the family followed the rules and filed an appeal.

The appeal was deferred. The reason was given – COVID-19 – and no further information was offered.

This delay in the process has left the family in a difficult situation and I'm told they're not the only family facing this similar situation.

### **Addressing appeals of long-term care subsidy**

Question to the minister of health: Is there currently a backlog for appeals of the long-term care subsidy? If so, how big is the backlog and what are you doing to address it?

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

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

The member certainly raises what we have seen here and talked about so many times – is just the impact, right across the board that this horrible pandemic that we are dealing with does have on frontline workers, but right across the board on Islanders.

With regard to the member's question, I do not have the exact numbers as far as the backlog is concerned. He raises a very valid concern though and I'll certainly go back to the department, to health and wellness, and Health PEI to determine that and to determine how we can best address it, because we certainly do not want to leave any Islander, any senior, in a position such as the hon. member has referred to, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. McNeilly:** I appreciate the answer, minister.

The act also lays out a very clear process for appeals to be heard and notice of decision being communicated to the parties involved.

When the family further inquired about having their appeal heard, they learned it was dismissed, despite not having received any notice.

A FOIPP request filed by the family revealed that there was no appeal waiting for the panel hearing. They sought additional information on the status of the appeal but got no response, leaving them to conclude the department must have dismissed the appeal of their own decision.

Question to the minister of health: Do you think it's appropriate for the department to hear and dismiss appeals on their own decisions?

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

**Mr. Hudson:** Mr. Speaker, again thank the member for bringing this forward.

Without knowing any background details on the specific case that the member is referring to, I would hesitate to comment on it. I would be more than happy to work with the member, work with his constituent or the individual who have reached out to him and get to the bottom of this – see what can be done, Mr. Speaker.

Again, thank you member.

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

**Mr. Perry:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government announced plans to set up collaborative structures later this year for patient care that it refers to as medical homes and medical neighbourhoods. So far at least one community has been identified as a location to welcome a medical home. We know government members have been lobbying to have another in the north side of Kings County.

#### **Selection criteria for medical homes and neighbourhoods**

Question to the minister responsible: What is the selection criteria and process to determine the location for medical homes and neighbourhoods?

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

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

First of all, I want to acknowledge the member's member statement from earlier with regard to infrastructure in rural communities. Being from a rural community myself, I applaud you for bringing that forward and I think it is so important to have that infrastructure.

To a certain extent, that does tie in with regard to our medical homes, medical neighbourhoods. We do need that infrastructure. You look at the addition that was placed on at the Tignish medical centre earlier this year. I believe it was about 40 by 60 or in that vicinity.

But those are the types of things as we move forward that we have to have in addition to things such as electronic medical records and that collaborative nature of practice when we are moving forward with our medical homes and medical neighbourhoods.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

That's clear as mud.

What I'm hearing from Islanders is that they do not have enough clarity on a concept of medical homes and medical neighbourhoods. Is it a physical structure? We have lots of those. Is it physicians and staff that we – that's what we don't have enough of. Is the medical neighbourhood a shared doctor or is it a doctor that rotates between communities?

#### **Assigning of physicians to medical homes**

Again, there's not enough clarity around this, so a question to the same minister: How will physicians be assigned to medical homes or neighbourhoods? Or will they be physicians that are relocated from one community to another?

**Speaker:** the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

It's one of the things – and it is. It's a great question from the member.

We do have a steering committee in place that actually one of the individuals – the CEO of Health PEI is involved in sitting on the steering committee to coordinate this whole process as we build upon our primary care. I do believe that Dr. Gardam last evening in his interview had referred to primary care being one of the bright spots that we have in this province.

Again, as I've stated before, I have utmost confidence in our leadership at health and

wellness and Health PEI. Our leaders are – our experts are putting together that plan, that program as far as how this is going to roll out over the next number of months.

Thank you.

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

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

Thanks, minister, for recognize that being a great question; I think all my questions are great.

The patient registry has 1,631 Islanders from West Prince on the waitlist for access to primary care. That's not a small number.

#### **Impact of medical homes on Tignish Health Centre**

My final question to the minister: What impact will medical homes and neighbourhoods have on the health centre in Tignish?

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

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

I know that the hon. member feels that all of his questions are great questions, and the majority of them are.

As you would notice, sometimes in the past when I get a question, I'll have myself a question and answer it. With those three questions today – they were such great questions; I didn't actually have to do that. So I do appreciate that.

**Speaker:** Are you going to answer?

**Mr. Hudson:** With that, certainly we have to look at recruitment, and with regard to last evening, I had the opportunity to attend a reception for our medical residents here in the Province of Prince Edward Island and the number of them that are very interested – extremely interested in setting up practice not only in our more major centres such as Charlottetown or Summerside, but out in rural PEI, as well.

As we address the numbers on the patient registry, we have to do things differently, obviously, but we have to have the health care providers to work with us, to partner with us, as we work towards reducing –

**Mr. Henderson:** Call the hour.

**Mr. Hudson:** – the number of individuals on the patient registry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Premier King:** Yes.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Premier King:** (Indistinct) good question.

**Mr. Hudson:** Good question.

**Mr. Gallant:** This week at the Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce AGM, the Premier indicated that home heating oil will be subject to a new carbon agreement this province is currently negotiating.

### **Carbon agreement for home heating oil**

Question to the Premier: Is that correct?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Mr. Speaker, I think I've indicated in this Legislature a number of times as well that the federal government is adamant about increasing the carbon levy on a broader selection of fuels and there's less opportunity for exemption, and the four major fossil fuels that we use in this province are going to be a part of that.

In the last agreement, I think home heating and propane, I believe, were exempt, and this time, it doesn't appear that that will be the case.

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

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Premier.

While we know many Islanders are making a shift in new heating technologies to rely less on traditional heating sources, many Islanders still use fuel to partially or fully heat their homes.

### **Cost impact for home heating oil**

Question to the Premier: What is the anticipated impact on the cost of a litre of home heating fuel at this point?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that's still being negotiated. As we've talked about in here, all of the money will be rebated back to Islanders. I have been working with members like the minister of environment and climate action about, just as the hon. member referenced, that many, many people heat their homes with home heating fuels, and in particular, many people at the lower end of the income scale use that.

One of the programs that my colleague is working on implementing is trying to offer a program to those individuals to replace their home heating with fuel to electric. One of the programs that he is working to put in place, on behalf of our government, is to do that as a grant-type system and not just some kind of rebate, because we know too many people at the low end of the scale don't have enough money to buy first and then be rebated later.

So, we're working on a number of these things, but we do know, as the hon. Leader of the Third Party has indicated, that this will have impacts on many Islanders and we have to find out as many ways as possible to make that the least amount of impact while encouraging them to change how we do things to help our environment.

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

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

### **Cost of gasoline**

Premier, what about the impact on gasoline? How much more can Islanders expect to pay at the pumps for regular fuel?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Once again, Mr. Speaker, I don't think gasoline will change in terms of that's already been impacted or is part of the carbon levy, so I don't think there's anything new in that regard.

But as I say, we're still negotiating the terms of the final agreement with the federal department through the minister of environment and climate action. We'll have more information later on in the summer, but I don't think anything new on gasoline – I think that's already been part of the carbon arrangement.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

**Mr. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A lot of talk today and in this session has gone to health care. I think for the minister's answers, everyone waits on bated breath.

Recently, the Health PEI officials have been speaking about the need for the process – and this is kind of to piggyback a little bit on the Leader of the Opposition, but changing gears a little bit, specifically dealing with the patient and trying to make sure that the patient's experience is the best that it can be.

#### **Addressing patient experience in hospital**

A question to the minister of health: Do you think that, maybe if there is a better way for Islanders to have their concerns addressed, it might hopefully improve the patients' experience in the hospital?

**An Hon. Member:** There's a good question.

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

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

I guess, at the start of Question Period today, the hon. Leader of the Opposition had questions for the Premier with regard to Dr. Gardam's interview on *Compass* last evening.

One of the things that Dr. Gardam did reference, if I recall correctly – and actually, that I have had discussions with staff – is

exactly along the line of what the member is referring to; in particular, that we strongly need to look at a patient ombudsmen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Winsloe.

**Mr. Bell:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yeah, I think that's where this line of questioning is stemming from is, earlier this week we were debating in here – it was the *Ombudsperson Act*.

#### **Role of patient ombudsperson**

To what you had just said, minister, when the ombudsperson comes, would they be basically working to help the existing patients or would there maybe be someone different dedicated within Health PEI to act as an ombudsperson?

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

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

I guess I see it as two-fold in that we're part way there now, but we've got farther to go. You look at right now we've have the patient navigator position to help Islanders when they are having challenges getting into the system, navigating it.

I would see, with regard to a patient ombudsmen, that would be individuals that, once they are into the system – and it would be similar to the hon. member from the Third Party's questions earlier today, just that you have that office, that independent office, that if there are concerns, if there's roadblocks, if there's been a bad experience with any section within the health care system, that that Islander would have the opportunity to take those concerns forward in an independent manner and to have them reviewed.

Thank you.

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

**Ms. Lund:** Mr. Speaker, in a CBC story on sick leave last month, the minister of economic growth said that the expansion of paid sick leave was, quote: Something that has been discussed over the last four or five years, but I think COVID really opened our eyes to the importance of it.

Today we learned of an incident where a worker had gone to work while sick. Unfortunately, this is not unexpected when workers can't afford to lose their income and it's exactly what our caucus has been concerned about when we advocated for accessible and expanded paid sick leave.

### **Paid sick leave for workers**

A question to the minister: If government's eyes have been opened on the importance of sick leave, why haven't we implemented a program that actually helps keep sick people at home?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Mr. Speaker, I would just say, in the preamble to that question, we should not presume anything from the case today and what the issues were of the individual, as the hon. member was trying to suggest. I'll let the minister answer the second part of the question, but let's not jump to conclusions about what happened here today until the CPHO has had time to go through the whole process here. I think we should be responsible in here with our comments until we have the right information.

I'll defer to the minister to answer the second part of that question.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

**Mr. Hammarlund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Seniors housing is of particular concern here on Prince Edward Island. Where other jurisdictions are creating a variety of imaginative and flexible options for seniors to age in place, from cohousing and cooperatives to supportive housing and retirement communities, PEI continues to have a disproportionate dependency on institutional style long-term care.

### **Options for seniors housing**

Question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: With demographics telling us that the need for appropriate and affordable seniors housing will increase dramatically, what is the government's plan to create a range of choices for Island seniors to allow them to age in comfort, dignity and safety?

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

**Mr. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is exactly the sort of evidence that the Department of Social Development and Housing uses to develop plans and take action. As the member probably knows, we have lots of government owned housing across the province, but we also have mobile rental vouchers, for example, that seniors can apply for through the seniors registry. The seniors housing registry also allows for rent supplements.

We're looking at those numbers and demographics and we're making sure that various types of housing are available going into the future to meet those housing needs. There's a number of different reports that have been written, including one most recently out of Summerside and area.

Of course, we've already heard in the House about the strategy to allow seniors to age at home as much as possible and our home renovation programs help in that regard.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

**Mr. Hammarlund:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you for the answer, although I think we need a lot more creative action.

Back to existing homes. In one of my homes in my riding at Duvar Court, the residents complain that staff do not wear masks when inside the building or inside their units, even when asked. Staff even refuse to wear masks offered by residents. One staff member was quoted: there was lots of mask available at the office, so supply cannot be the reason.

**Staff use of masks in seniors housing**

Question to the minister: Can you please explain why your staff refuse to wear masks inside your buildings?

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

**Mr. Trivers:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

That's a pretty serious allegation. I'll go back to my director of housing and we'll look in to see if we can verify it.

Thank you.

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

**Ms. Lund:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to just clarify that if I've misunderstood the article that I saw online, Premier, I do apologize for that. I was of the impression that that's what that article had said, but the question still stands. We do know that we need paid sick leave and this is something government has been aware of through the duration of this pandemic.

**Paid sick leave for workers (further)**

Minister, my question to you is can you tell us where we are on this issue?

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

**Mr. MacKay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You're absolutely right. This has been a discussion. We knew we had to do something. This is where we put a million dollar special leave fund in exactly for these situations.

I do have to give my staff and the department credit. Within 90 minutes, they've had a 1-800 number rolled out. Right now, somebody is on the other end receiving calls that will be answering questions on this special leave fund, as well as the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit and the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit, both through the federal government.

I do want to make one point. When I said all along that now is not the time – and I'm going to give you an example. Everybody in this House, there hasn't been one member hasn't called me and asked for support for small business during this pandemic right now. Businesses are hanging on by a thread. This is why this million dollar fund was put in this. The conversation is going to come on the paid sick leave but we need to make sure our businesses survive right now.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, final question.

**Ms. Bernard:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We had heard rumblings in our office and then it was on the floor of the Legislature during debate that Clinic 554 and Prince County Hospital have started working together and offering services for gender-diverse people. We had it confirmed when we reached out to a community organization that this is, indeed, happening and I'm not sure why the Minister of Health and Wellness did not take the opportunity to toot his own horn with this.

**Province and Clinic 554**

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Can you please give us an update on the relationship between our province and Clinic 554?

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

**Mr. Hudson:** Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the member's comment of me taking the opportunity to toot my own horn. At the end of the day, I guess where we have accomplishments; it's good for all Islanders. It's not good for the minister of health, necessarily, but it's good for all Islanders. I do certainly appreciate the member stating that.

With regard to the question, I'll be honest, I am not sure of the exact relationship –

**Ms. Beaton:** Do you even know it?

**Mr. Hudson:** – that she has referred to. I would happy to get that information from my department and provide it back to the member.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** End of Question Period.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

End of Question Period