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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2020



Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

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

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

With your indulgence, I would like to provide some additional information in response to questions raised yesterday on recruitment by the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Since May of 2019, there have been 30 physicians recruited to PEI. This includes those working in family medicine, emergency medicine, and specialty areas. These new resources have resulted in enhanced care in a variety of areas in the health system and also a reduction in wait times.

Despite a challenging year and a global pandemic, our recruitment efforts have been topnotch. In fact, we currently have 14 physicians in the final selection process stages to join our health care team in 2021 in areas such as family medicine, psychiatry, medical oncology, obstetrics, and more.

There are approximately 30 medical students or resident leads from our trip to Ireland earlier in the year and we look forward to continuing the conversations with this group to ensure they know PEI is an excellent option when considering where they want to begin their careers.

Using virtual platforms throughout the pandemic, our recruitment team is continuing to engage with medical students and residents across the country as they progress through their medical education. These relationships are being forged now to ensure these future medical professionals know PEI is a great place to live and work and that we're interested in them.

But this isn't just about recruiting. We're investing in new areas to offer health care in a whole new way.

Virtual care continues to be extremely successful in many areas. Many unaffiliated patients have shared with us their positive experiences through using Maple and as I

mentioned yesterday, we have capacity of 10,000 Islanders that are unaffiliated being able to utilize Maple.

We continue to reach out to Islanders and encourage them to access this vital support. Health PEI is working diligently to improve and enhance working conditions across the health system through additional engagement with staff, improved communication, and an enhanced focus on human relations. I've directed the Health PEI board to put an increased focus specifically on retention, and efforts are underway.

We are doing a tremendous job bringing dedicated, high qualified health professionals here to PEI and we want to keep them.

The landscape of health care is always changing. PEI has had a great population growth in the last number of years and the majority of our population is aging. Physicians are retiring and they, in most cases, had very large panel sizes and practices that are now set up differently.

We are continually assessing this landscape, looking at new ways to provide care to more and more Islanders. I am very proud of the work we have done and we are committed to continuing this work moving forward.

I also want to rise today and address questions asked yesterday by the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke concerning our accountability framework. The accountability framework is well underway. Health and wellness and Health PEI have been working diligently on this work for several months and it is expected to be complete in the New Year.

Some of the areas of focus include, agreed upon performance metrics, with clarity of roles and organizational responsibilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, rise to respond to a question asked yesterday by the Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke. She wanted me to bring

forward all of the emails between Dr. Morrison and myself in terms of whether – I don't know the exact words, but if I might have ignored, overruled, or didn't follow the recommendations from her.

I'm asking my staff to pull together whatever correspondence there would be to be tabled here. I would just say that the large majority of the conversation that I've been having with Dr. Morrison since COVID began have either been in person or on teleconference.

I talked to her again today. We met daily or more as needed over the summer as COVID was a little bit less of a – not that it wasn't less of a worry, but it wasn't as obvious or as (Indistinct) here. We didn't meet that often but we're back to meeting daily at a minimum again. We talked again this morning at 11:00 a.m. and we both agreed that there has not been a time since this began that we have not taken the advice of Dr. Morrison and implemented that.

I think we have begun this way back in March to use science and the best information to follow. We've followed it. I'm grateful that we have and I continue to say that I couldn't imagine not taking the advice of Dr. Morrison; someone who I think has set herself apart in this country and perhaps beyond with her leadership in COVID.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### Questions by Members

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

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

Over the last week I've talked a lot about how this government has chosen to prioritize paving over people. We've also debated in depth and on multiple occasions the profound impact mental health and addictions has had on people in our community.

One way that mental health and addictions impact families is that grandparents, or even great-grandparents sometimes, are called upon to become the primary caregivers for

their grandchildren or great-grandchildren. In the absence of these willing individuals, children in vulnerable circumstances often end up in the foster care program.

#### **Number of foster care homes on PEI**

A question to the Minister of Social Development and Housing: How many foster care homes do we currently have on Prince Edward Island and what is your department doing to increase that number?

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

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

I thank the hon. member for the question.

The hon. member, the Leader of the Opposition originally had alluded to the grandparents program, which is the alternative caregiver program now. Just to provide some information on that program specifically. One of the reasons that the name was changed is that, out of the total number in the grandparents or the alternative caregivers program, there's 36% are actually grandparents and the balance may be neighbours, they could be uncles, they could be siblings for that matter.

Under the alternative care provider program, there are presently 159 ones involved in that particular program, providing care to 211 children. Those individuals receive \$700 per month in addition to the Canada Child Benefit.

I just want to finish by saying my deep appreciation to the unions that are involved in that program.

Thank you.

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

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

We'll get to the alternative care program in a minute but my question was how many foster homes do we have on Prince Edward Island and what are you doing to increase that number?

The question again: How many foster homes on Prince Edward Island and what are you doing to increase that number?

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

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

On that point, we have 100 children in care. That is over and above the alternative care provider program and we have 75 foster homes that are providing great care to the children of Prince Edward Island when that is required.

I've had the opportunity, over the last three to four weeks, to meet on two separate occasions with the president of the foster care association of the Island, a great partnership there and certainly, I look forward to continuing that dialogue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Well, the most up-to-date statistics that I have are at odds with what the minister just told us, in that there are only 32 foster homes on Prince Edward Island. I'm not sure where the accurate figure lies and that finding new families to come forward to do this difficult job is incredibly hard.

The grandparents are referred to in the preamble, to which the minister replied in his first response to my question; often fill that gap when we don't have enough space in the foster care program.

Of course, they do that willingly and they do it lovingly.

However, there are considerable costs involved in becoming the primary caregiver for an extended family member.

### **Grandparents re: caregivers for children**

To the same minister: How many grandparents or great-grandparents are currently the primary caregivers for children here on Prince Edward Island?

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

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

As I had alluded to in my first answer, for 36% are grandparents. As far as the exact number of grandparents and/or great-grandparents, I will bring that information back to the House as soon as possible.

Thank you.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** One might imagine that if you knew it was 36%, you would know it was 36% of some number and therefore you would be able to give us at least some sort of accurate figure.

Again, the most up-to-date figures that I have suggest that there about 133 grandparents and great-grandparents filling this role. As the minister rightly says, the alternative care program now extends to uncles as well. Neighbours, I'm not so sure about, but uncles for sure and/or aunts.

In other words, about five times the number of homes are offering this, as grandparents and great-grandparents as our foster homes, according to my figures.

The cost to the Province to operate the foster program is considerable, whereas the recently created alternative care program, which provides supports to those grandparents and others, offers \$700 a month with some other expenses such as child care and medical expenses.

### **Policy document/primary caregivers**

To the same minister: This program is now over three years old and, despite many attempts, I have yet to be told clearly what the parameters for this program are. Does a policy document exist that actually outlines the eligibility criteria for grandparents and other family members who are acting as primary caregivers?

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

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

The hon. member references that I should know exactly the numbers. I had stated 36%. The hon. member also stated that there are grandparents and great-grandparents. I did indicate that I definitely will bring that back as soon as possible.

With regard to the parameters of the program, the alternative caregiver program, the Premier and I recently met with Mr. Don Avery, had a great conversation there and I have another meeting scheduled very shortly with Mr. Avery. I think it's one of the things that we always have to do is to continue that dialogue, hear where the gaps may be, hear where the concerns are and, at the end of the day, how can we do better, where can we do better.

I do appreciate the hon. member bringing this forward. It is a great program and at the end of the day, who does it need to be about? It needs to be about the children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Indeed, Don Avery has been a passionate and vigorous advocate for this program since, well, before it started over three years ago – and a constituent of District 17, I might add, in Bonshaw – a wonderful man.

This government and their predecessors have for far too long relied upon the generosity of individual Islanders like Don and his wife and community groups to maintain the fragile social safety net that exists here on Prince Edward Island and to fill in the missing gaps that this government has created. Government has to address this.

#### **Policy document/alternative caregivers**

To the same minister: When will your department finally come forward with a policy document that will provide clarity for all of those alternative caregivers and eliminate all of the unfair barriers that currently exist?

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

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

Again, I thank the hon. member.

I was not aware that Mr. Avery was a constituent of his, but he is a fine man: very dedicated, very passionate about this program.

With regard to the policy document with an absolute date, I am not in a position to actually say that today. I don't want to put a date out there and then have it not materialize for whatever reason. But again, I will bring that information back as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

This government has talked and talked about how they prioritized mental health in our schools during the pandemic, but I'm disappointed to see that, like many other announcements made, there doesn't seem to be a lot of action.

A couple of school counsellors recently asked me if the minister is aware that one in five Island children have been abused and that a single counsellor in many cases is expected to serve up to 400 students, but changes have not come to address these concerns.

#### **Abuse among school children**

A question to the minister of education: Are you not aware of these concerns or are you just not doing anything about them?

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

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

The Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park knows that I'm well aware of these concerns because she does such a good job of bringing them to my attention. It really is

such an astounding statistic to think that one in five children are victims of trauma and that one in five have suffered from abuse.

This is something that the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning and our education authorities – student services, for example, within the Public Schools Branch – take very seriously.

We have increased supports. What we added was a counselling consultant to support the existing counsellors and that's what the recommendation was as we went into the school year this year.

But Mr. Speaker, let me just say that we have received additional requests and we are currently working through those to see what we can do in the near future.

Thank you.

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

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

I bring things to your attention but you don't do anything about them.

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

**Ms. Bernard:** There are currently 34 schools on PEI without a full-time counsellor and I have a list if anyone would like to see them.

Let's think about this. A part-time counsellor will have roughly 12 hours face-time with students per week. You take out recess and lunchtime. With up to 400 students to care for and one in five of these potentially living with abuse, neglect, assault, or may have suicidal ideations, this leaves the counsellor with 80 high priority students with which they have about 9 minutes a week to spend with. Never mind the other students who are in need of support with less pressing matters, but no less important.

School counsellors are telling me that children's lives are at stake and it certainly doesn't look like this government understands, therefore it doesn't look like a government priority.

### **Full-time counsellors in Island schools**

Question to the minister: Will you follow through on the commitment you made during the last sitting and truly make the mental health of our children a top priority by having at least one full-time counsellor in every single Island school?

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

**Mr. Trivers:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the mental health and wellbeing of our students – really, it is a priority of my department and a priority of this government.

The counsellors are the anchor within a school that work with the student wellbeing teams as well and they provide a very important role in that. The student wellbeing teams are still relatively new in our education system and they've been growing and they've been improving.

I am going to keep that commitment. I believe that if all goes well in the very near future, we're going to see some really good news on this front.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I'm happy to hear that commitment and student wellbeing teams do a fantastic job in supporting the work of the school counsellor. They are not the ones in the building – I can't say daily because school counsellors are not there daily, often they're sitting home twiddling their thumbs, wishing they were at work but anyway, they're a great compliment, but they don't take the place of someone who is in the school, building relationships.

The minister of education committed in this House to increase the number of full-time counsellors in our schools. His words were great. If only the actions would follow.

The federal government provided a significant sum of money to our province to address the challenges in our schools because of COVID-19. If mental health was

actually a priority for this government, I would assume that making trained counsellors available to students would have been a part of the spending.

### **Federal funding for school counsellors**

A question to the minister of education: How much of this federal funding was put towards addressing the shortage of school counsellors?

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

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

Indeed, there are a lot of challenges with regard to COVID and there was federal funding to help deal with those.

We worked with the education authorities, both the Public Schools Branch and CSLF to look at their request for what needed to be done. We have an excellent, excellent student services team. We are servicing those requests as they come in.

One of the big challenges is, believe it or not, it's really hard to find qualified counsellors to hire. One of the things we're looking at is taking the existing counsellors that are in schools that may be doing counseling part-time and teaching part-time and bringing them up to a full complement of dedicated counseling.

As I said, hopefully in the near future, more to come on that, but I feel like we're making progress, we're listening to the experts on the frontline and we're going to make some great progress in this area.

Thank you.

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

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

Family violence does not just affect adults. It has devastating, lasting effects on children. Far too many Island children are living in fear. They don't want to leave school because they're living in fear. They know the nightmare they are returning to at home. They spend their nights hiding in closets, holding their siblings, praying that

they don't bear the brunt of abuse tonight. They are developing unhealthy coping skills just to survive.

No wonder our mental health and addictions rates are so high. Reports of child abuse have been increasing for years on PEI and COVID has only made matters worse. In just one year, PEI Child Protection Services received 3,177 child protection reports. That's an average of 61 reports per week, close to nine reports per day.

### **Demand on Child Protection Services**

Question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: That's nine children who may be hiding in their closets or worse tonight. Are resources into Child Protection Services and family violence protection increasing at an appropriate rate to keep up with demand?

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

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

The member from across points out a very important situation, a very critical situation here on this Island.

I know, during the pandemic when it first happened, the Premier started a committee, a Cabinet committee for family violence prevention and I was honoured to chair that committee and it's still running today because of the importance of that and of this matter.

Biweekly now, we have the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, the Minister of Social Development and Housing on this call and listen to the staff in our departments. We're not in silos. We're hearing from the frontline people that are addressing these issues and we are continuing to work to eliminate family violence and if we can't eliminate it, we're going to do all we can to prevent it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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



I'm sure all of those children are reassured by the committee working, but what kind of recommendations and resulting actions can we see from those committees?

Access to justice is one of the most beneficial things we can give victims of abuse, but accessing justice on PEI can be a difficult and expensive hill to climb. Legal Aid is a critical tool for many, often women and children fleeing abuse. Unfortunately, PEI has the second lowest per capita Legal Aid spending in the country.

Without legal aid, access to justice is often too expensive, too hard. Without it, many mothers and their children are left to choose between living in fear and violence or living in complete and devastating poverty.

### **Commitment to increased legal aid funding**

Question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: Will you commit to increased legal aid funding to be more in line with other provinces and remove the inequity that this underfunding has created?

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

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

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

Again, a very important topic that the member across brings up. Of course we have the family legal aid program and of course we will look at that. A very important topic that we will address next year in our budget talks.

Thank you.

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

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

I spoke in this House about the need for our men and boys to step up and act against family violence. Family violence most often affects women and children, but it is not women's responsibility to fix this problem, it's everyone's responsibility.

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

**Mr. Howard:** We need to start educating our boys to see women and girls as equal and our men need to stand up to the generational biases that hurt women.

### **Programs/resources for men and boys**

Question to the Minister Responsible for Status of Women: Our caucus heard from a number of women's organizations calling for more, or any, programming for men and boys. I'm sure you've heard this as well. What programming or resources are you planning for men and boys in the help to fight against family violence?

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

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

**Ms. Jameson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again, thank you for addressing such an important issue for Islanders and one that is quite personal, having known many people who unfortunately have experienced family violence.

Certainly we, as a department and the women's secretariat, are in constant communication with Family Violence Prevention Services, Community Legal Information, the rape and sexual assault services. Certainly we are available to support them in any way we can and we're constantly looking for new programming and new services to support them.

I think that, as my colleague spoke to earlier, the subcommittee that was formed on the onset of the pandemic was an extremely important endeavour for this government. I think those public briefings to ensure that the public had that sense that government – we care and that help and support is available to families.

I just want to make sure and reinforce that message that we do care and we are here to support families, whether you're a woman or a man.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

With staggering statistics like this, it's no wonder that it's personal to the minister; it's personal to pretty much the entire Island.

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

**Mr. Howard:** I'll ask the minister again: What recommendations are coming from this committee? What actions are you putting forth? You've been at it a while. Where is the action?

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

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

My colleague can speak to it further regarding the Turning Point Program that is specifically geared towards men. If you look at our Interministerial Women's Secretariat grants and our violence against women grants, certainly there's a number there that address that. I can happily table those documents for you if you'd like more information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I would like to see those documents, yes.

I need to take a moment and respectfully criticize the actions of our Minister Responsible for the Status of Women. I'm not convinced that this minister truly understands that the massive societal problem of gender bias is not solely women's responsibility to fix. Last month, the minister announced that every Grade 7 female student would get a copy of the Famous Five book, a groundbreaking book about five amazing, strong and intelligent women that only our girls would learn about.

### **Societal problem of gender bias**

Question to the same minister: Do you think it was appropriate to show our Grade 7 girls, through your actions, that women's accomplishment only matter to women? That women's issues and challenges only

matter to women? And that our boys and men shouldn't care and you're not going to do anything about it?

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

**An Hon. Member:** Wow.

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

**Ms. Jameson:** Mr. Speaker, thank you.

To be honest, I'm a bit surprised by the question. Having a tremendous amount of respect for my father and having two boys myself, it comes a bit as a surprise.

With regard to the book, I want to acknowledge first and foremost that these five trailblazing women who did incredible work for this province and this country – first and foremost, I think that we should all tap our desks for that.

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

**Ms. Jameson:** Secondly, I don't know if the member across follows me on social media but shortly – the day after the release of that book, the Premier and I actually went to Prince Street School and read to a Grade 5 group of students some passages from that book. Certainly, I thought, personally – that I thought that that was a really wonderful announcement: to ensure that all Grade 7 females got a copy of that book.

We made it adamantly clear that that book was available in all public settings, so any boy in this province has access to it. Certainly, if there is an opportunity there, we can absolutely order some more. We thought it was a wonderful gesture and it is very much available in public spaces. But I definitely don't want to take away from the fact that that book honours tremendous women, and ultimately, I'm really grateful that Islanders get access to that book.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

A question to the minister of education: Following March Break earlier this year, we saw Island schools move to a form of online learning for the remainder of the school year. This was understandable, given the unpredictable situation, but now we must ensure work is being done to enhance and maintain students' capabilities as they advance in the school system.

### **Learning capabilities re: online learning**

Question to the minister: What is his department doing to ensure students' learning capabilities are not falling behind as a result of the online learning gaps last spring?

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

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

Well, you know, this is an area where I'm extremely proud of the work that's being done in the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning; in particular, by the director of English programs and the director of French programs.

Really, what they did starting in April during that shutdown is they started looking at the key outcomes that were in the curriculum and making sure that they identified those so they could identify any gaps. They made sure that, going into this fall; those gaps were closed for students. They redeveloped the curriculum. Mr. Speaker, they're leading the country in that. We've been consulted with by other jurisdictions and I think it's just a fantastic testament to the education system here on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. McNeilly:** But what are the standards – the equity across all classrooms?

*The Globe and Mail* recently published an article that contains research examining the reading assessment scores of more than 4,000 students from Grade 1 to 9 in the Edmonton area. When comparing scores from 2017 to this fall, there was a decline in

reading assessment scores for students in Grades 1 to 3.

This was a concern as those crucial learning years.

### **Performance indicators of students**

Question to the minister: What performance indicators is the minister using to gauge performance of our students this year compared to previous years?

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

**Mr. Trivers:** Mr. Speaker, what they use when they're laying out a school year and within curriculum is they call them outcomes – and foundational learnings is another thing.

Any teacher within the curriculum can identify those and there's a plan, as the students progress through the year, to make sure they attain those outcomes and foundational learnings. Based on the time of the year, the outcomes that have been attained by that point, they knew, when it came to March, how many of those had been attained and which ones were left. So, they were able to take those and say: These are the ones we need to move into the fall.

As I've said before in this House, our teachers – what they do every day – it's the core function of any teacher, is they assess their students and they look at what they're doing with respect to those outcomes and foundational learnings and they're the ones that grade them with the report cards. They know exactly where their students are at at any given time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. McNeilly:** We are talking about standards and equity here. There's a big difference and I don't think enough is being done, Mr. Speaker.

When the minister cited last spring that there would be no academic incentive for online work completed at home, he laid the

groundwork for our Island students to fall behind in crucial learning areas.

Also, the minister decided in July of 2019 to suspend Grade 3 literacy assessments – has made it nearly impossible for PEI to obtain data about student learning capabilities for that age group.

### **Learning assessments for Island students**

Question to the minister: Will the minister commit immediately to arranging learning assessments for Island students and subsequently releasing a public report with the findings?

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

**Mr. Trivers:** Mr. Speaker, let me just say again, that learning assessments are occurring every day, all the time within our classrooms. Our teachers know where they're at and perhaps the member across has heard of a system called progress monitoring. In fact, this is a case where the exact foundational learnings of any given student follows them throughout the system so, at any given time, we're able to give you the place where they're at in terms of their learning assessment.

When it comes to these standardized provincial assessments, that's one tool, but also, there's the international assessments that are done and, of course, the frontline assessment.

I'm not sure what the member is getting at, but when I talk to the experts, really, this is not an issue.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

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

Today, I'm going to actually going to give the minister of health a break today and I'm going to go with a question to him there, put the feet up.

Over recent growing seasons, we have had extended periods of dry weather in PEI, none worse than the one that we've

experienced this year. Farmers not only provide us with food that we eat, but they also have a great impact on our Island economy as our largest industry. Look no further than the 149.3 million in farm cash receipts for the second quarter of 2020.

### **Priorities for supplemental irrigation**

Question to the Premier: How long will you continue allowing golf courses and car washes to take priority over those who are responsible for food production when it comes to the use of supplemental irrigation?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. It is an important topic and one that each and every Prince Edward Islander is very passionate about.

We inherited a moratorium that goes back to 2001, where the agricultural sector is essentially the only group that is not allowed to access the, I guess what we call high-capacity wells or irrigation wells or whatever the term would be.

I spoke, at length, this summer with a number of agricultural individuals, farmers. The conversation that I had with them and one that they were leading, which is heartwarming to me, is that we stopped looking at this strictly as a water issue. We talk about the health of our soil, we talk about the use of our land and all of these different components because they're all wrapped together. That's the road that I would choose to go down.

As I said, we inherited the situation that we're in, but I have said from the beginning, I don't want to be a part of a government that just kicks this down the road. I would like this Legislature to find a solution so that everyone is treated fairly. We protect the most important resource, our water, and we continue to provide tremendous exports that grow the economy in this province.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, when the Conservative government of the day did choose to discriminate against the

agriculture industry in terms of supplemental irrigation, there doesn't appear to have been a scientific rationale, just a political one.

Of the 308 high-capacity wells PEI has today, only 30 are related to supplemental irrigation for Island-grown food products.

Dr. Mike van den Heuvel and the Canadian Rivers Institute have a study awaiting approval from the minister of environment that would allow Islanders to accurately determine the sustainability of supplemental irrigation.

### **Study from Canadian Rivers Institute waiting approval**

Question to the Premier: When will you instruct the minister of environment to approve this study so we can obtain the science and data needed to make evidence-based decisions?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member again for the question. It is an important question.

The style of leadership that I've been trying to display here in this province, I don't instruct anybody to do anything.

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

**Premier King:** I like to find a way to work together. We have a standing committee that is dealing with the issue and I would love to see the standing committee make a recommendation, bring it to this Legislature so together we can make a decision that will go for –

**An Hon. Member:** (Indistinct)

**Premier King:** Oh, you did already – thank you.

My apologies, I haven't seen the report as of yet. I look forward to having a look at it, but I would like this Legislature to act as the body, what it's elected to do and do something together that can move our province forward. We also have to make sure we protect the most valuable resource in this province and that is our water.

I'm not here to instruct anybody to do anything. If the responsibility, at the end of the day, falls on me, fine, that is the job, after all, but I think we have to get away from this style where we all think one person is the be-all and end-all that makes all the decisions.

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

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. Premier, you are the Premier and the reality is that when this legislative committee tables things, you think you'd be on top of such an important issue.

In the PC platform, there was a promise to obtain independent science on this issue. However, they're actively holding up the study to do exactly that.

We know the Premier, in the presence of Island producers, tailors his stories to the audience and indicates his support for seeing a study completed and the science obtained.

However, his government members already voted to indicate and further restrict Island producers access to water when they supported a green motion, last spring, to place a moratorium on holding ponds.

### **Working with agricultural sector**

Question to the Premier: Will you commit today to working with the agricultural sector to end the discrimination before the 2021 growing season, or are you prepared to let our producers continue to be impacted under this discriminatory moratorium?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Mr. Speaker, I suppose if I was trying to promote a story, I would talk about the new-found courage the member has finally found after 11 years of having that opportunity to do just that and did absolutely zero in the field, but I wouldn't do that. That would be (Indistinct)

What I will continue to say is this is the place to have this discussion and to find a way forward because that is what Islanders have elected us to do. I'm all for research. I'm all for science. We've just spent the last

nine months taking every possible recommendation from Dr. Morrison to help us get through this COVID situation. I'm absolutely all for science.

We also have to have a comfort level that that science is done properly and that everyone feels comfortable that it's going to be unbiased. That is what we're trying to do. I don't want to just rush this through and create another problem that you guys didn't want to handle for 11 years.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

**Mr. Henderson:** It would seem that this hasn't been rushed by any means. It was 2001 that the then government implemented this. I think we've all had time and I would say that the members on this side of the House, we did the *Water Act* passed and now it's up to your government to proclaim it. It's important to do that.

#### **Decisions made on advice of health officials**

Question to the Premier: Yesterday in the House, the Premier said something quite unusual and I want to quote this: I would add, we've been highly criticized here for the last number of days over decisions that were made on the advice of health officials but blamed the minister.

Question to the Premier: Is he familiar with the concept of minister responsibility?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Mr. Speaker, I think we've demonstrated in here that we know all about responsibility and that we take it very, very seriously.

What I indicated with that answer, it was in response to the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Sherbrooke who asked me the question, which I answered again this morning, which is do you take the advice of the health professionals and Dr. Morrison, or has what we have seen in other jurisdictions, it seems that that advice has not been taken or has been overruled. That is not the case in what happened here.

What we did was take the advice of the health officials, we acted at their advice, we knew it was a difficult time and that is why we did that. We had situation tables where that stuff was discussed and deliberated and executed and I'm happy with the work, from a COVID perspective, that we're in the situation that we're at. We always knew that there were unintended consequences for some of the decisions that we're making and that is why we are working hard to try to do the best we can in this situation, but it has been a heck of a time here in PEI. I think we all know that.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier's statement yesterday was not very clear and I wouldn't say that the answer today was very clear.

Which elements or what specific government advice does the Premier believe led to criticism of his minister? Pretty easy question.

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** That's a pretty open-ended question, Mr. Speaker, but I'll do my best to pick a part of it and answer it, how about that?

What I was referring to, I suppose, in that answer is, I think many of the questions that have come from – I'm going to say this side of the House as opposed to this here side of the House – have been why did the minister do this? I think questions from this side of the House have more been were you aware of the impacts of the decisions that you would make and what are you doing to change them.

I think there has been a difference in the line of questioning. I think the questioning from this side of the House has been everything that has gone right in this province, it's somebody else's win and everything that has gone wrong lies at the minister. That is our ultimate responsibility. We accept that. I just don't happen to agree with it.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, our democracy partly relies on the idea that ministers are responsible for the decisions that are made by their officials within their department. The buck has to stop with someone and if it's not the minister, then it has to be the Premier. That's one reason why we have Question Period. It's why we're here to ask all these questions.

My question to the Premier: Were you blaming officials for providing advice to your minister that resulted in a legitimate criticism?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** No, Mr. Speaker, I was blaming you for the lack of creative questions.

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

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

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

I wanted to ask a question today kind of particular to my district. It's a district-specific issue and it's on a road. It's the Valleyfield Road and it's the road that – I don't know, perhaps some might be aware, but it's in front of the high school and it's extremely bad. It's kind of like taking the rollercoaster at Sandspit.

This road was supposed to be fixed this year. The department told me that it would be done but it hasn't been done. This road – the school buses drive over, the students drive their cars to school, and in some cases – I don't know, I'm surprised the school buses don't scrape the bottom.

### **State of the Valleyfield Road**

Minister, are you aware of this road?

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

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you. I'm quite aware of the road. I think we paved 8 kilometres on it this year, so I'm fully aware of the road. Now, it was in the Minister of Finance's end of the road, granted, but nonetheless, there was a lot of pavement put on that road.

I know that it breaks up bad every year. It has, basically, since the high school was built up there and the road was realigned and changed. I don't know if there's a sub-base problem. I think we had a truck out there to take shots of the sub-base to see if there's a reason. I think it's more complicated than just paving it. I think it requires us to do a major dig and a rebuild of the road, which we don't do a whole lot of. A lot of what we do through our capital is the shave and pave that you would all be fairly familiar with.

I think that takes a little bit more work than your average project and it has to be done in a time of year where we don't expect the weather to change drastically, like the fall. So, I suspect that's why it got bumped off, but I will find out the answer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I guess, in fairness to the minister, it was the Liberals that built this road, so it's not a surprise it's crumbling.

School buses take this road every day – students. It's probably the road I get the most phone calls on. I had told them that it was going get fixed this year, so I guess I'll have to go back on my word and I'm telling them hopefully we're going to get it done first thing next year.

### **Timeline to fix Valleyfield Road**

Minister, when can we expect to finally get this road fixed?

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

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

I think it's slated for next year. That's my understanding, at least. I think that the original plan that we had – like I said, it's a little more complex than that. So, I'll commit to fixing that road properly next year.

I am acutely aware, having spent a number of years coaching hockey and both working

in Charlottetown with my previous job and working in Charlottetown often with this job, that's basically a back way to the rink for many people. Sometimes when you're in a bit of a rush and you forget what that road is like, you can go for quite a sail up to the roof of your car with your head. I've done that a couple of times. So, acutely aware of the issue with that road and acutely aware of how necessary it's going to be for us to fix it.

So, I'll commit to having it done next year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

And like the minister said, a lot of people take this road. It's kind of like the bypass around Montague. Not only are school buses using it, but also, it's the truck route around Montague. I think a lot of people would be quite pleased to see it fixed and hopefully we can do the whole stretch of it. There's about a kilometre there that really – probably about 1.2 kilometres that needs to be done.

#### **Commitment re: Valleyfield Road**

Minister, could you commit to having this road finished this summer, before school would open in fall of 2021?

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

**Mr. Myers:** Yeah, like I said previous, Mr. Speaker, that would be when we would have to do it. It's this time of year that – when we get into the fall part of the season is when we expect rain to come and when we have a project like that where we have a hole in the ground, basically, or we have the road opened up to rebuild the sub-base, we'd be a little bit nervous of the weather change and the water coming in there. That particular road got bumped for that reason.

I do want to point out that we have been preparing the area for that piece of road to be fixed because this year, we paved the other end of the Valleyfield Road. We paved

the Loane Road, which was a dirt road. We paved the Campbell Road, which attaches onto the Valleyfield Road. We paved the Wood Islands hill that attaches to the Valleyfield Road. We paved Douses Road that's across from that road, and we paved Route 4, pretty near from Montague to Murray River.

We're ready; that's the only thing that's left to be done there. It'll be done next year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Deagle:** Paved every road but it.

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

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

During Question Period last November when referring to the importance of Island youth, the Premier said that this is, and I quote: Not just about having committees or groups that have youth representation, but giving youth a role in actually developing policy, implementing policy and making sure that it's done in the right way.

This is the role of the Premier's Youth Council. It's a province-wide youth advisory body of 16 to 29-year-olds that will work to help focus policy and programs in a manner that best services the interests of young Islanders.

#### **Premier's Youth Council re: capital budget**

A question to the Premier: How was the Premier's Youth Council engaged in the capital budget process and does it reflect their input?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier King:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. I do think it's important that we, as an effort to try and engage more youth in the political process of this province, that we actually take that initiative very seriously.

In terms of capital budget, I would have to go back with staff to just double check to see what actual groups participated in the capital budget presentation this year. It was



a little bit different this year, obviously, with some of the restrictions that we had, but if I could bring back that information I'd be happy to.

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

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

Recently the public has been made aware of several locations that have been identified as possible exposure sites for COVID-19.

### **COVID-19 exposure sites**

Question to the minister of health: Are there any enhanced cleaning and sanitation measures required at locations traced to COVID-19 exposures before reopening to the public? And what supports are provided to businesses who find themselves in this situation?

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

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

As we're all aware, any business or location that wanted to open under COVID restrictions, they had to submit an operational plan to the Chief Public Health Office to be reviewed and approved before they could open. The Chief Public Health Office and the excellent staff working there are working very closely with any establishments that may have been related to contact tracing. They're there to help and assist in any way they can.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

End of Question Period