



Session:	2/66
Date:	12 May 2021
No:	32

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 12 MAY 2021

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition asked me to provide some clarification on one of the exposure sites that was released on Friday, May the 7th, as part of a public health bulletin.

As I mentioned in my response, Public Health Nursing and the Chief Public Health Office work with individuals who receive a positive diagnosis for COVID-19 to conduct contact tracing. This is a methodical process that often takes multiple interviews with individuals to get all of the necessary information and to ensure that all close contacts and potential exposure sites are identified.

Contact tracing begins soon after the individual is informed of their positive COVID-19 test results. As you can appreciate, it's often a time where these individuals are worried, scared and upset. They're also concerned about their own health, as well as the wellbeing of their family and friends and, of course, all Islanders.

For one of the public exposure sites reported last Friday, the initial information provided to the public was incorrect and identified the wrong day of the potential exposure. This exposure site was not considered high risk and individuals who were at the site were required to get tested only if they had symptoms of COVID-19. When the CPHO learned about the error, they took immediate steps to correct the information by advising the public and the media on Monday morning.

Again, the guidance for anyone at this exposure site did not change. Individuals were asked to self-monitor and testing is required only with individuals who are symptomatic.

I take this opportunity just to thank, again, on behalf of all Islanders and individuals in this House, the dedicated public health staff and the CPHO for their great work in managing COVID-19, for keeping Islanders

safe, and also to all Islanders who are terrifically engaged and follow the health protocols so very closely.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

In response to questions with regard to exit surveys for health employees across the province, since the formation of Health PEI, the opportunity for employees to conduct an exit interview has been available. Exit interviews are sent from human resources representatives and all Health PEI employees who exit Health PEI are provided the opportunity to complete an exit interview.

This would apply to all classification groups in Health PEI, such as nurses, RCWs, LPNs, physical therapists, physicians, service workers, et cetera. I will be tabling a blank copy of the exit interview survey that is made available to all employees.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The forests of PEI tell an interesting tale of the history of our province since settlers arrived in the 1700s. In order to create arable land, the existing forest cover had to be cleared. While most of the timber would have been burned by those early pioneers simply to get rid of it, much of it was used to build the first homes here on the Island, to heat those houses, and to build fences to contain livestock.

The second wave of harvesting was much later and it involved removal for ship building and to ship mature timber to Europe where most of the forest there had, of course, already been felled.

Our forests reveal a story of the challenges faced by early pioneers and of a time of iconic commercial prosperity here on Prince Edward Island.

Third wave of deforestation

To the minister of environment: What story is the current third wave of deforestation telling us about our province?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't think we're not at the levels we were in the early 1900s where we had 8% forest cover and a lot of the land on Prince Edward Island was farmed by small farms. There's a small farm in my family on my mother's side – my great grandparent's that's completely forested now that would probably still be considered agricultural land, I don't really know. But it was the family farm and it was for a number of years, and it became forest.

In some cases, those growths – and they grew over the years and filled back in. I think that we've seen the land kind of change again, in some cases. I know we've talked about this and we don't know the complete result. In the 90s there was a big push to build golf courses so there's golf courses and that could have contributed to it.

I know there's an increase of biomass; that might be contributing to it. I know there's an increase of farmland; that might be contributing to it. I think we have to look at what all the issues are and when we talked about it Budget estimates here yesterday, is we have to – our goal for ourselves is: What are we working inside? What's reasonable to expect on an Island of our size that has population density that we have going into the future?

Quite frankly, I don't believe that we have that answer, but I think we need it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Continuing on the sort of history lesson that we're providing here; the infamous land lottery of 1767 put the entire Island, including forested land of course, in the hands of a small number of proprietors. Unlike the other Canadian provinces, that process failed to reserve any Crown land for timber, leading to the situation we have now where almost 90% of the Island is in private hands.

As we discussed last week in the House, this creates challenges for government when it comes to what can and can't be regulated on this private property.

To the same minister: Like me, I'm sure you've had a large number of emails and calls and other messages from worried Islanders concerned about how your administration is going to manage this. What can you tell all of the people who've reached out to me with concerns in the last few days?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Besides the fact they probably reached out to the wrong person, they should've reached out to the decisions makers that can actually make the decisions, I will say that I've spoke to a number of people, I've received emails. It seemed that there was some sort of a combination between the *Environmental Bill of Rights* and the discussion that we've been having about forestry here.

Maybe, in one particular area where one particular member of this Legislature might have been telling people things that weren't true. It wasn't from your caucus, so not you guys, but I've talked to numerous farmers and numerous woodlot owners and I've said we haven't made any decisions.

So, what we need to do is look and say: What do they need? I've committed to meeting with the PEI Woodlot Owners Association to talk about what their needs are for healthy forests into the future and how they can make money on it, but look internally and say: what can we do to help

protect forests by incentivizing people to not cut down their trees and let them become mature, much like we already do with the farm community and the ALUS program.

We have to look at a program similar to ALUS, maybe a little more robust, that deals with woodlots on Prince Edward Island because they are spread out everywhere across Prince Edward Island.

And I might add that the number that we're working from is the 1990 number, which was kind of like an all-time high for us, as far as the pieces of Prince Edward Island that were forested. And of course, there was over 10,000 hectares disappeared in the 10 years between 1990 and 2000, and we're continuing down that path. It's not a path that we want to be on, but I contend that we don't really have the answer for what is the number that we want and what is actually sustainable for the amount of forest we have here on Prince Edward Island, and I think we have to work towards first determining that. And then we can better discuss with the landowners, the woodlot owners, and farmers what is the best way for us all to work together.

I don't see legislation coming. I don't see us coming with the hammer. I see us working in a collaborative nature with all Islanders to help service, both the better goals of government that we have in our net zero plan and to help people have some sort of value in their land, that they don't feel like they have to clear-cut.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks.

That was a revealing answer.

An Hon. Member: Wasn't it?

Leader of the Opposition: I was always of the opinion that the ultimate decision-makers were the legislators in this House, the legislative branch of government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Leader of the Opposition: So, when the member says they're talking to the wrong person because he's not speaking to the decision-makers –

Mr. Myers: You asked the question, I answered it.

Leader of the Opposition: – that really tells us a lot about how this minister thinks his job is and what he thinks the rest of our jobs are.

We have a clash of several opposing forces here. We all know how much the price of lumber has increased in the last year, so that financial incentive to harvest is significant.

The public is also more knowledgeable and concerned than ever about preserving the natural environment. We know that the loss of forest has wide impacts ranging from soil health and erosion to water retention, loss of shade, windbreaks, habitat, micro-climate, and so on. The forests play a critical role in air quality and they also, of course, provide places of calm and beauty.

Incentives and regulations to landowners

To the same minister: A number of policy options are available to curb the momentum towards further loss of forest cover. What sorts of incentives could be offered to landowners to not harvest their forests, and what regulations do you think need to be brought forward on the nature of how and to what extent forests can be harvested?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If we're all equal, like the hon. member over there seems to think we were, he wouldn't be asking me questions. He'd be able to answer them without asking them. As a matter of fact, he wouldn't blame any minister over here for things that go wrong. So every time something goes wrong in government, you guys are standing up blaming the people that sit over here, so exactly – the decision-makers are over here. That is the way our system works and I'm sorry that you don't accept it or can't understand it.

That said, what we're doing – as I've said numerous times, I haven't had the opportunity to meet with the stakeholders in this because we're in the Legislature every single day. When the Legislature ends, I plan to meet with the people – start our policy program. We're looking at beefing up our forestry division and how we bring people in. We have specific goals in our net zero program and we're bringing people in to cover off those, too. And we're going to come up with a plan.

So, I'm not going to make policy on the fly. I think that we found out yesterday when you tried to make amendments to the bill what that looks like. It's sloppy. We're going to do this right, we're going to meet with the right people, and we're going to get the right advice that we need to make good decisions so that all Islanders benefit from the decisions of government, not just a handful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Premier King: (Indistinct)

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

So, we've gone from a history lesson to a lesson on how the legislative branches work. Very interesting.

Most people look at reforestation through planting as a good thing and this department spends millions of dollars on growing and planting seedlings of a number of species every year.

However, many informed stakeholders question the department's continued commitment to that practice. Last week, the minister of environment said that we have to, and I quote: Throw away the current plans and start from scratch because of the seriousness of the situation.

Cost-benefit analysis re: preserve of woodlands

A question to the minister: As part of this reset, will your department conduct a cost-benefit analysis to compare current

approaches with the various policy options available, such as stricter regulations, increased public ownership, and direct incentives to woodlot owners to preserve their woodlands?

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'll say that notices have been made because we haven't had the opportunity to meet with stakeholders. There's nothing that won't be on the table in this discussion and we have to look at this from a fresh lens. We have some new people that are coming onboard to help us out in the short term. We have several people that are interested that are in this environment that own woodlots that are woodlot owners that do it in a sustainable fashion. We have to kind of reach out to everybody and make the best decision for all Islanders.

It's unfortunate and I know that this is a good topic and it's great that we're talking about it. The only reason we're talking about it was because I was really forthright with my answers to the hon. member over there, when we talked about the deforestation. We don't have all the information. We don't have the true numbers because we're going through a study. We know because we're looking at the LiDAR that it looks bad so we can take a pretty good guess and anybody who drives around could probably have a similar opinion that we would have on the issue.

I'm not going to rush and try to make a decision in the Legislature here without having met with experts in the area and have expert input into this. Those are the people that I'm going to rely on.

That said, there will be nothing that won't be on the table. I'm open to anything that could come forward that will help make this better for everybody.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Native Council of PEI, yesterday, issued a blistering press release in response to the recent investigation into allegations of discrimination at Bedford MacDonald House. The statement says that the findings of no evidence to show discrimination is unacceptable to NCPEI and that the off-reserve Indigenous homeless clients that it serves.

It states that NCPEI met with the Salvation Army and offered to fully cooperate with the investigation by connecting investigators with the Indigenous clients involved. This assistance would ensure that those Indigenous clients had a safe place and support person present to share their experience.

However, NCPEI was never contacted further by Bedford MacDonald House or the investigators.

Investigation report at Bedford MacDonald House

A question for the Minister of Social Development and Housing: Do you still have complete confidence in the investigation report and its findings?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First, let me reiterate that I think the allegations that were made are very, very serious allegations; ones that we take very seriously and I believe the Salvation Army takes very seriously, as well. I think the process they went through to hire a third-party firm, HR Atlantic in this case, one that has experience and professionally does these sort of investigations was acceptable. I read the press release from NCPEI. I haven't spoken with NCPEI, but that's where we're at right now.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Belvedere.

Ms. Bell: As I stated in this House last week, the report shines a spotlight on the systemic issues with this government's approach to the provision of services and

support for our most vulnerable. People with a lived experience do not require investigators to corroborate their narrative.

This investigation provides further evidence that shelter and housing initiatives for Indigenous clients must be Indigenous led. This was a recommendation in the community needs assessment for homelessness provided to the department in October 2019 and it's a recommendation from NCPEI.

Question for the Minister of Social Development and Housing: NCPEI is one of the outreach centre advisory board partners and a critical community stakeholder. If you're not listening to them, who are you going to listen to?

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the member for pointing out that NCPEI and the Mi'kmaq Confederacy, for that matter, are both members of the working group, the advisory group that manages the outreach centre from a board perspective.

They are at a position where they can have direct control over what happens and they can guide the Salvation Army in how they do the operations management. At least this is my perspective. I'm glad to have them there. I think they're in an influential position and, of course, as always, my doors are open to discussing these things.

I will as well, as always, we work across departments. I want to talk to the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs as well and do this through the proper channels and in the proper way.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On the final day of the previous session, I asked the Premier if he agreed that plebiscites are not to be taken lightly and that the referendum conducted with the large election was inconclusive. He responded that, quote: I would agree that I think the bar

that was set for the referendum was probably one that was designed to get an outcome, or at least designed to confuse perhaps. I've been on record as saying that. I think it was a difficult bar to get to. End quote.

Given that answer and the fact that the Premier himself was a proponent of proportional representation, I would hope to see him pushing for democratic reform with his position of influence.

Democratic reform and proportional system

A question to the Premier: Will you be working to affect democratic reform, specifically in a movement to a proportional system?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the preamble from the hon. member in the question. I feel we have been working very, very hard to bring much needed reform democratically to this province and this Legislature. So I hope, as long as I'm here, I can continue to do that.

I do sit in a position of influence for sure, but – the Leader of the Opposition and I disagree on much, but I do agree with him that, in this Legislature, all seats are equal. My voice will be with those who want to continue to pursue changing democratically in this province these institutions so that it best reflects our society.

Whether or not I'm prepared to stand up right now and say we're going to have a certain process, I wouldn't be prepared to do that, but I'm open to seeing what the temperature of this Legislature is as well as what the temperature of the Island is to try our best to get it right.

But I would reiterate one more time, that never mind the outcome of the plebiscite, look around this Legislature, the Islanders sent here – what I think is a very proportionally representative government based on the three parties that are here. Perhaps we should take our guidance from Islanders on this as well because they did a pretty good job.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Howard: Absolutely, we have a Legislature here that's sort of representative of a proportional outcome, but that's coincidence and it's an outlier. If you have a look at the histories of our elections here, they tend to sway drastically one way to another.

Since the last election, much of the fear of a hung government due to more frequent minority governments has not only been put to rest, but we, in the House have shown that, indeed, it's a better way of doing things. It will take some time for Elections PEI to be ready for a new electoral system. Soon it will be impossible to implement a new electoral system in time for the next election.

Legislation to amend *Election Act*

A question to the Premier: Will you work collaboratively to develop legislation for the upcoming fall session that will amend the *Election Act* to hold the next provincial election under a proportional system so that Islanders experience the proposed system and can make a truly informed decision on any future referendum?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, in the lead up to the preamble of that question it felt like the Member from Summerside-South Drive was giving up on the resurgence of the Green Party in this province, but I can say that I'm not. I don't think that we're going back and forth from one colour to another, if we have done that historically. I think that's in our rearview mirror and I think that's a really, really good thing, quite honestly.

As I said, I would like to be part of a process from this Legislature to determine how we go about doing this. I'm not sure we need further plebiscites and et cetera to do this. If we are to have one, I hope we can ask a very simple question and do like we do in this Legislature and have a simple majority rule in that decision.

I'm open to the discussion with members in this Legislature, absolutely. Let's see what that brings forward. But I would again say Islanders are pretty wise in their political choices and they made 27 really wise decisions in my mind.

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

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Premier, I certainly have not given up on the Green Party I'm just very pro stronger democracy.

The Premier also noted last session, I quote: I would continue to support a system of electing representatives that are reflective of the Island population and I think the more Islanders who can see themselves within the government reflected back on them is a really, really good thing and something we should all inspire to do. End quote. I completely agree.

First past the post system

Does the Premier believe that the first past the post system we are using today achieves this, other than the result that we just had last election?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, coincidence or not, Mr. Speaker, I think the last election we got a pretty good result. I think as Islanders become more engaged, as we dial down the rhetoric in here and make this a job that more people want to aspire to, I think we bring forward good people to represent, not just colours of parties, but philosophies of how we want to live in this province. I think that's a good thing. I think the choice is no longer one colour or the other. If you look around, there is diverse views and opinions, people who have come from all walks of life in this Legislature and I think they set a good example for the next generation to come.

Whether or not we need to change how we elect people is up for debate again. I think we want our Legislature that's representative of Islanders, absolutely. I think we've done a good job last time, but I think a lot of our political growth and

change to democracy here is seen from what we do in here on a daily basis. I think in two years, we've done amazing things. We should continue to do that and set a good example and if we set a good example, good people will come to politics and for once and for all, we can say to heck with the colour or party they represent.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

The future of AstraZeneca vaccine is being questioned across the country, due to a risk of blood clots. To be very clear, I'm not asking this question to create any fear, I'm asking these questions as a matter of public concern, since it's been in the media over the last couple of days. I'm simply looking for some clarity.

AstraZeneca vaccine to Islanders

My question is to the minister of health: How many Islanders have received a single dose of AstraZeneca and will they be receiving a second?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I would say thank you to the hon. Leader of the Third Party and I don't think this is anything but a good question, an informative question.

I will get the exact number from Dr. Morrison, but I think you're seeing Ontario is now not going to use the AstraZeneca vaccine. We have a tremendous influx of vaccine coming that is mRNA, which is Pfizer and Moderna. Québec, the Province of Québec is now using the mRNA vaccine for a second dose for those who had their first dose of AstraZeneca. While Dr. Morrison will deal with more of this tomorrow in her briefing, I think that we would probably see the rest of the country move toward that as well.

As you know, Moderna is now being distributed in our pharmacies across Prince Edward Island, there are 12 pharmacies doing it right now. The uptake has been incredible. That's a good thing. That's where we stand, as I say.

But I'll get the exact number back very shortly here to the member.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the Premier had mentioned, with Ontario and Alberta and other provinces having concerns, what is the government's position on the continued use of AstraZeneca, specifically, for those Islanders who received it as their first dose?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I'll be quite honest, I don't know if the government has an opinion as much as the opinion of the CPHO and her staff would be the one that would inform us as we have done all along.

I think, as I said in my first answer, I think the supply we now have of the mRNA vaccine, which is also the more – I don't want to say it's better because I don't want to diminish the others – but it's a more protective vaccine, the mRNA vaccine so we have an abundance of that here now. Everybody who will be vaccinated by the end of June, the 80% mark, including those 12 years old and up, will be done so with the mRNA in this province. I think that's the way we're going, quite honestly.

As I said, I'd like to defer to Dr. Morrison in her public address tomorrow. She will deal with some of these questions and our leadership on this file will come from the CPHO.

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you very much, Premier, for that answer.

Islanders request for vaccination

Just as a follow-up, to my understanding, it had indicated in the media that the second dose was not as – I'll use the word dangerous for lack of a better word, but wouldn't create as many blood clots in your second dosage of the AstraZeneca. That being said, will Islanders be allowed to

request whatever vaccination they want going forward?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I thank the leader for these important questions.

I don't know the science and I don't want to stand here and say I know the science on first dose of AstraZeneca versus the second. We have, through the federal procurement, now have an abundance of the mRNA here, which is a good thing here for PEI and Islanders want to get that vaccination in their arms as fast as possible. I think you will see us more and more with that heading forward.

In terms of – some of the science is still a little bit new in terms of what Dr. Morrison would call the mix and match of vaccines, but there does seem to be increasing evidence in other jurisdictions that an mRNA vaccine as a second dose to AZ is acceptable and will give an increased level of protection. That would be a good thing. But I would, again, defer to Dr. Morrison on that. She'll have more information on that in her briefing Thursday, which was postponed from Tuesday.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When government announced their plans to introduce 300 new child care spaces, many were excited about the prospect of this announcement, but as you drill down into the plan, you realize questions do remain.

Throughout this session, the Liberal caucus has pressed for more answers to the many outstanding questions and still have received no clear response.

Now, we see government lowering the bar on this promise, saying that they may only have 241 new spaces available this fall, instead of the 300 that were originally promised.

Promise of new child care spaces

Question to the minister of education: What changes or new information caused government to abandon the promise of 300 new spaces this fall?

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

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

I'm so pleased to see early learning and child care being discussed in this Legislature. It is so unbelievably important to me personally, it's incredibly important to our government, and that is precisely why we are investing – we've seen a 41% increase in our early learning and child care Budget. 41% – that's historical.

I spoke to staff who were involved in the rollout of community-based kindergarten back in 2000 and they used a very, very similar approach. It took a couple of years for the sector to understand the demand of families of the Island, and the sector reacted.

Is this rollout going to be absolutely perfect? No, but if we were striving for perfection, we would never do anything and that is precisely why we're moving ahead with this.

If I can say one thing to those watching at home, please, please, please, if you have a child that's of the age and they're looking to pre-kindergarten for the fall, please get on the registry. Please get enrolled so we can have a better understanding, as government, as to the numbers for September.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

That still doesn't answer my question of why the change from 300 to 241.

In 2018, Kathleen Flanagan authorized a report examining the feasibility of PEI's early childhood education system. One of the key concerns was the ability to retain early childhood educators and it was determined that 191 ECEs left their position

in the previous two years, over 30% of the ECE workforce.

One of the key reasons cited for departures was a migration to educational assistant positions, which was a great asset to the school system, but those positions required the same level of training but pay roughly 30% more, and also had access to pensions and benefits.

ECEs leaving school system

My question is to the minister of education: How will you stem the flow of ECEs leaving the profession to become EAs in the public school system?

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

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

Again, this is a great question and certainly an area that I have been delving into as a new minister. I am very grateful for the fact that Sonya Hooper has joined us as the new assistant deputy minister within the department. She will be leading our workforce strategy initiative and building upon the great work that's already been done.

It's important for us as we move forward to work with our partners, work with the ECDA, who has been such a strong voice for the sector, and we need to look at ways to incentivize individuals to stay within the early learning and child care sector. We need to find ways to encourage more family-friendly policies. We are constantly reviewing the wage grid of salaries, and I can assure this House that this, for me, will be an absolute commitment as we move forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Your new hire is a very familiar name to me and I do wish her much success.

Early childhood educators don't have access to a pension or benefits, as I stated earlier, something that educational assistants do have access to.

In a survey that was part of the 2018 report, ECE job satisfaction scored very high. However, wages and benefits were not listed as satisfactory.

If government is going to create 241 new spaces, we need to ensure we have the staff to provide care for those 241 new spaces, not only in the first year, but in the long term.

Pension and benefits to ECE workers

Question to the minister of education: Will you follow the recommendations of the 2018 Flanagan report by offering pension and benefit opportunities to ECE workers in order to retain them in the long-term sector?

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

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

I do want to thank Kathleen Flanagan for all of the expertise that she has provided throughout the years regarding the early learning and child care sector. It's critically important to ensure that we not only recruit individuals into the sector but that we are able to retain them. That is something that I've heard, that, yes, absolutely, people – they look to this as a career but we want to make sure that we keep them in it for 20, for 30 years. That is precisely, again, why we have hired an individual to lead the workforce strategy.

I actually had a call with the federal minister this morning and this is one of the items that we had discussed in length. He recognizes the importance of keeping these incredible individuals within the sector. He has prioritized this. Together, I think with the provincial funding, as well as the federal funding, we are on a path to success.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to address these questions to the Premier. Some of them may be redundant a little bit but I think the public is interested.

There has been much talk at both the provincial and federal levels on the issues surrounding the vaccine rollout and the possibility of a vaccine passport. Frontline health care staff have been working extremely hard in coordinating to execute the vaccinations on PEI and I can assure you, as getting a vaccination, I'm thankful for them.

We have been informed that there is certain areas of the health care workers, such as environmental services, nutrition services; administrative employees in our health care system are yet to receive their first dose because of their age.

Strategy for vaccine rollout

I'm just wondering: Can the Premier provide a strategy or a policy from CPHO that the public could actually see and get it communicated to it so it eliminates some of these questions that maybe they're getting, I'm sure, as well as we are?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. It's similar to a question asked by the Leader of the Opposition in this session as well, which I did come back and provide the vaccine rollout strategy from CPHO based on the level of access to the front line. I will bring that, again, back.

Our process has been part of a national vaccination protocol that has been developed at the national level and we have taken here. Obviously, we want everybody in PEI to get their vaccination as soon as possible. I think when we get to that level of vaccination where we can start to move around a little bit more, we'll all be grateful.

I will get back shortly with the particulars of it, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Cornwall-Meadowbank.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we know, young people will step up to get their vaccinations just like they did when we asked them to step up and be tested. I think most Islanders are willing to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

In the media, provincially, federally, the COVID tracker and other sources, the numbers seem to be skewed from one place to another. Maybe there is a reason for this but it's certainly causing, I think, some of the concerns among the public in regards to the vaccinations, and maybe even some of the concerns and the panic of getting a vaccination.

Vaccination second dose timeline

I'm just wondering: Are we still on track and will we be on track, based with the numbers that are being presented daily – for those who were vaccinated earlier this year, when can they expect their second vaccination?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, I believe we're working on a policy there where we're at the 6 to 12 week mark, I believe. I think that's all part of our process. We're seeing more and more procurement at the national level, which is great. Dr. Morrison has said from the beginning that we have the capacity to do about 11,000 plus vaccines a week here in PEI. I think we're knocking on the door of 10 right now. So we're vaccinating at an incredible amount.

We've also now added to our provincial roll, 12 years old and up. Dr. Morrison has talked about actually working with public health to go to schools in junior high to do those vaccinations in schools. That's what they're working toward.

Our goal remains that by the end of June, that 80% of the adult population, now the 12 year old and up population, is vaccinated with at least one dose.

As late as yesterday morning, Dr. Morrison tells me that we're on track for that, and even with a little bit of continued good luck and hard work, that we will be even a little bit ahead of that game.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: That's good to hear, Premier. I think everybody's rowing in the same direction on this. It all comes down to communication with the public. I think if the government of the day or CPHO, whoever it is, are working very hard, if communication people could get some of these messages out that we're hearing from you, because I think – honestly, I'll give you a quick example.

Last night I had two young male adults, not connected in any way, call me and say we can't get on to get a vaccination and it's our time. By this morning they were texting me back saying they got on.

There's those types of things and they're lucky maybe. Maybe people can't dedicate as much time as that as possible.

Vaccination procurement

Is there a supply issue? Have we requested more vaccines? Or are we just basically status quo and following the procurement of the national body that's distributing the vaccines?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's quite honest to say that initially there were some procurement issues, and I think our Prime Minister was, in my mind at least, unfairly criticized for that. I think they have reacted positively. I think right now our procurement is at a great level. We're very comfortable with the procurement. As soon as the vaccine is coming into this province we're putting it into the arms of Islanders.

We do have a pretty robust and efficient sign up formula – registration for the vaccine process. I'm sure there's always some challenges along the way, but for the most part, it's been very, very easy to access. I've heard nothing largely but just praise for that as well as the process.

Now with the Moderna vaccine being in our 12 pharmacies across PEI, I think that has even been speeded up considerably as well.

I do think we're on track. I don't have any issues right now with the procurement. I say, again, the Prime Minister took some tough days but I think it's now time for us to say thank you for what he's done because the procurement now across Canada on a per capita basis is getting to exactly the level where we need it to be.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Roadwork is currently taking place on the Queens Road and Princess Drive in Montague to replace storm sewers, sidewalks and pave. I've received quite a few phone calls, probably about 15 to 20 or so between phone calls and emails over the last couple of days from concerned parents dropping off their students at the Montague Consolidated School which is located right in that area, and students also walking to school.

Safety of students re: roadwork

Question to the minister of transportation: Did your department consider the safety of students before they started this roadwork?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

Every construction project that's undertaken by the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure – safety is paramount, first and foremost. We have an incredible staff on hand that does this work that studies it as well.

I can assure you that our staff has also been in constant consultation and communication with officials from the school in the area as well as the Public Schools Branch.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For students who walk to school from the north side of the town, there is no way to walk to the school without walking through the construction zone to get to the school. If you're on the south side of the town you can get there easily, but if you're coming from the north side you have to walk through this construction site. Currently, all the sidewalks are ripped up. Princess Drive is down to one lane, which the school is situated on.

Question to the minister: How can we expect students to safely walk to school with no sidewalks and through a construction zone?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

On any construction project there's always going to be some type of delays, but as I said before previously, safety of our students, safety of the public is always forefront in any construction work that we do.

We ensure that we have traffic control personnel in place. We send out traffic advisors, and again, we communicate closely with the officials at the school and the Public Schools Branch.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Deagle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know that the parents and the residents of the area are quite happy this work is finally getting done. I think, perhaps, they're wondering why this couldn't have been done during the summer months when school was out, because right now there's no sidewalk, the students can't walk to school because there's no sidewalks to get there, and you have to walk through a live construction site.

I guess my final question to the minister would be: Can you go back to the department – the construction has already started and the sidewalk's gone so there's

not much we can do now, but if there's any way at all to improve the traffic flow and the pedestrian flow through that construction site – a couple of days ago, there was an accident with one of the dump trucks in the construction site. My phone won't stop ringing on it, so if there's anything that we can do, can we look at it to improve the safety?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

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

The work that's being currently done on Princess Drive is to replace the storm and the sewer infrastructure underground – as well for resurfacing of a road that desperately needs to be done.

As we all know here on PEI, we have a very, very short construction season. I'm not embarrassed to say that this government has, once again this year, looked at record spending within construction projects on our roads and our bridges here on PEI. That's something that we're very proud of and we thank our federal partners, as well, for their great cooperation on the many projects that we've put forward.

Again, the safety of pedestrians or students, the travelling public, are foremost in our mind, and we do have measures in place to ensure that the travelling public is safe, but we do ask the travelling public to please obey signals, the traffic control individuals, and reduce speed.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Altass: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With two surgeons having resigned and a third on administrative leave at the Prince County Hospital, it is no surprise that there are days where surgical services are being left completely uncovered. I'm also hearing that we can expect that this will continue throughout this month and through the month of June, as well.

Residents of Prince County are worried, not only about these short-term extreme impacts while we wait for new surgeons to be in place, but that surgical services may never be fully restored at Prince County Hospital.

Restored surgical services at PCH

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Can you reassure this House that all surgical services at Prince County Hospital will be restored in full, and when we can expect to see this happen?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I do thank the member for the question.

One thing that I would provide clarity on, though, is with regard, certainly, to the information that I have been provided with – is that the diversion of surgeries only relates to unscheduled overnight surgeries, not regularly scheduled surgeries.

With regard to the member's exact question, my answer to that is yes.

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

Ms. Bernard: *Merci, Monsieur le Président.*

These are follow-up questions to the Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

This government committed to, and then announced, 300 child care spaces. Opposition was critical of this announcement, wondering how it would ever be pulled off, given various barriers the sector has already been experiencing.

This morning, I read a CBC article that said government is now only offering 241 spaces, not 300. They are also encouraging parents to sign their children up for a pre-K space despite a lack of any evidence to families that the serious barriers identified during consultation have been addressed.

Promise of new child care spaces (further)

Question to the Premier: The answer was not clear from minister of education. What happened to the 300 spaces that were promised, and have addressed the effect this will have on infant, after-school spaces, the challenges with staffing, the equity issues of this program, or are you just ramming this through to check off a box?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier King: Mr. Speaker, if we were ramming this through to check off a box, we would have did it last year, but we've taken the time to do it right because that's what's important.

We've committed to 300 spaces and we will go far above and beyond that as needed. What we have started with is 241, which in a short time – let me give credit to the minister of education – is a remarkable number in a very short time.

We have not given up on our pledge for 300 and we're not going to stop at 300, Mr. Speaker. 241 is a heck of a good start.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-South Drive, final question.

Mr. Howard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When I asked the minister of communities to commit to helping Summerside get Maritime Electric to the table to get all of Summerside's residents on Summerside Electric's system, he said he wanted them to take the initiative.

However, the city council told him in person at a meeting we both attended in January, and the city has also sent a letter to him since. He said he hadn't seen the letter. I tabled it here for the minister's reference, but it is also in his inbox.

Summerside Electric to all residents of Summerside

A question to the minister: You've had plenty of time to follow up on this long overdue issue that Summerside has been asking for your help to resolve. When are you going to take the initiative and follow through on your expressed commitments in this House, as the minister responsible for communities?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Communities.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I thank the hon. member for this question.

The information provided to me by the municipality of Summerside was passed on to the appropriate department for action.

Thank you.

Speaker: End of Question Period.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

End of Question Period