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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 17 APRIL 2024

[1:23 p.m.]

[S. MacEwen in the chair]

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Question for the Minister of Health. We all know that our Island has an aging population. According to the Province's own estimates, there were 35,000 people over the age of 65 in 2022. Again, according to the Province, that number will rise by 9,000 over the next eight years.

In other words, there will be a huge new pressure on our current system of long-term care if we expect to provide appropriate service to an aging population, and part of the answer should be public government owned facilities.

Long-term care: public vs. private (further)

My question to the Minister of Health: Are there plans right now to significantly add to the number of public long-term care beds in our province?

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

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question.

[1:25 p.m.]

Yes, we understand. They call it the grey tsunami that is kind of coming in Canada. We know we have an aging population. We have made additional investments in home care; we're up to 2,500 visits a month. That's a great program that allows our seniors to be cared for in a great way. I will continue to look at our public facilities. It's a capital budget exercise that we must go through in order to expand those facilities, but we will continue to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

There is a very clear pattern with this government. Instead of using government to provide many services, there appears to be a willingness to hand these responsibilities over to others. I've heard many times a suspicion that it is part of an agenda to privatize public services, and in part, I do believe that is true. But I think there's a simpler explanation to this agenda. I believe this government wants to run away from its responsibility and avoid the kind of health scrutiny that accompanies public delivery of services.

A question for the Minister of Health: In the face of a rapidly aging population, why isn't the government aggressively building public long-term care facilities?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Mr. Speaker, I tried to do this yesterday, but I would again plead with the opposition to please stop making up an issue that isn't there. This is totally and utterly ridiculous from every aspect. When I brought this up to the hon. Opposition House Leader yesterday, he smiled as if he knew how ridiculous it was, but he's just playing out the string because we're in here.

Let's get real here. We have a growing population, we have an aging population, and we need all hands on deck to deliver it. Islanders want to help out. Islanders need that help. I want them to help.

We've hired every nurse we could possibly hire. We've gone around the world to hire 107 nurses for our public system. I've hired every doctor we could hire. We've hired 23 alone this year. We're partnering with the University of Prince Edward Island for a medical school to train 20 doctors a year every year here, and they fought against it every step of the way.

I hope all of the union and government officials out there understand where this is coming from, who it's coming from, and what utter nonsense and waste of time it is in here.

All hands are on deck, and we need to provide the best (Indistinct)...

[Interjections]

Hon. D. King: ...stop this foolishness.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I guess that just confirms the preface I used, which I believe this government wants to run away from responsibility and avoid the kind of health scrutiny that accompanies public delivery of services. The Premier didn't even answer my question in his little spin.

I believe in the great ability of government to truly respond to fundamental needs of the public. While I certainly respect the role of the private sector, I think it's important to remember it's a single motive, and that motive is profit.

When it comes to long-term care, why is this government so intent on inflating the profit margins of the private sector?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: We are working with everybody within the health care system to provide health care. I don't know if the hon. member knocked on doors during the election, but every door that I knocked on, from Tignish to Souris and every door in between, talked about the need for health care delivery to improve. Islanders expect us to lean in and to work with everyone within that system to make sure we're doing the best job that we can. They don't care who wears the coat; they want service.

I can't believe that we continue to see this attack on Islanders. These are Islanders. He just referenced in Tignish, there are individuals who provide care up there. They're wonderful, caring Islanders who care for Islanders in need. We need them all together.

Can we stop pitting one against the other here and for once in this Legislature, this session, look at what's best for Prince

Edward Island as a whole and stop this utter foolishness, please?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Yes, I was at the doors. Health care, housing, and the cost of living – top three issues for the last two times at the door, and the by-election also, and this government fails to address any one of those issues.

In 2021, the Province released a report called the *Internal Long-Term Care Review*. Within that report, which was released less than three years ago, there is an alarming warning. I will quote from that now: "If PEI continues on its current path...a 35 percent increase in the total number of long-term care beds will be required by 2025..."

That's a huge increase.

My question for the minister: Since that report was released in 2021, how many long-term care beds have been added on here on here in Prince Edward Island?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Mr. Speaker, we just added 54 beds last week in a record pace, and all I've heard from the other side is complaints.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

[1:30 p.m.]

Fifty-four beds that were announced after licensing; we have yet to see that because, again, this government loves to throw out big headlines but cannot back it up.

According to that report, there were 1,244 long-term care beds in 2021. That's both private and public. Three years later, in February of 2024, government gave a presentation to the Standing Committee on Health. At that time, government reported that there were 1,245 long-term care beds on the Island. That represents a one-bed

increase in three years. One bed in three years. I'll table the relevant documents today.

A simple question for the Minister of Health: You knew a massive shortage was taking place, and in three years, you added only one bed. What on earth was the reason for all this delay?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Mr. Speaker, could we ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition, quite honestly, to pick a lane here? Do we want to invest in health care beds, as he said, or do we not want to do it? Every time we lean in to do it, they say, "Well, you can't do this. You can't do that. You didn't do it fast enough."

Can we pick a lane? Can we find out what you want? I know it's not possible to make any one of you over there happy, but can you pick a lane, and pick the lane that Islanders are in? And that is, let's get the best health care that we can get; whoever can work in and lean in on this to do the best job they can. That's what we should be doing. I'm working with all partners. Anyone who wants to deliver health care out there to Prince Edward Islanders, I'll pay for it and we'll get it done.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: He won't be paying for it. It's the taxpayers of PEI that will be paying for it, and there needs to be accountability from this government to the taxpayers of Prince Edward Island. They need to know where their dollars are going.

I think this delay is quite obvious. This do-nothing government waited around until a crisis clearly emerged, and then they turned over all the responsibility to the private sector. Now, it's relying on the profit motive to solve their problems.

I will go back to an earlier question, which is also a request to this government: Why isn't the government taking an aggressive approach to build public long-term care beds and deal with the shortages that you identified yourselves three years ago?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Mr. Speaker, I didn't need to wait for a crisis. I inherited it in 2019 after 11 years of total, utter chaos from his government, which, I would add, he left the PC Party to join. So, he rolled into the fire –

[Interjections]

Hon. D. King: He rolled into the fire and he grabbed a handful of grass and he spread it all across Prince Edward Island.

I will take no lessons in this province from the health care delivery of the Liberal Party of Prince Edward Island after 11 years of utter chaos.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'll say it here today: I left the PC Party because there was a feeding frenzy from the trough in the back room.

Going back to the internal report on long-term care, it's clear...

[Interjections]

Hon. H. Perry: ...that there's an opportunity for this Province to take a greater role in the public delivery of this essential service.

According to this report, only 28 percent of long-term care homes across Canada are held by profit-making businesses. In New Brunswick, only 12 percent are held by privately owned, profit-driven businesses. In Newfoundland, only 3 percent are profit driven. On Prince Edward Island, 47 percent.

So, why aren't we pursuing a model which promotes public care instead of handing over so much of this much needed service to the private sector?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: I would again stand here, Mr. Speaker, and tell you that I'm very, very proud of the hybrid model of health care delivery we have in this province. It's the

realistic position that we find ourselves in, in a small jurisdiction. All I've heard is complaints from the other side for five years running now: We don't have enough people for this; we don't have enough people for that. Every time we lean in to do something, they say, "Oh my gosh, please don't fix it."

I think they love the chaos. They created it for 11 years, but we've been working every day for five years to fix it, and every day, it gets a little bit better in this province.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[Interjections]

Hon. H. Perry: I would love to say that the Premier's calendar reflects that he's been working every day. However, I can't say that.

Last week, the Province issued a news release to go along with its \$25 million payout to the private sector. It says: "The Province will be issuing a tender requesting proposal from private homes to build hundreds of new beds over the...years..."

Will you be providing grants and loans to the private sector to do this? Furthermore, will you be handing out 2 percent loans to the private sector? All this, to achieve those goals.

How much money does the minister expect to hand over to private businesses to do all of this?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

[1:35 p.m.]

Hon. D. King: Mr. Speaker, I know the opposition leader is not a stickler for details, but the Minister of Health and Wellness outlined in great detail what our plan is; our plan to build the beds that he talks that we haven't spent any time on. We've actually been spending hours and hours and hours and working with the private sector and the public sector to deliver what we need to deliver on. There'll be a capital budget coming this fall where we will address the public side of this and we're also going to be working with our private sector to deliver the beds that we need to do.

I could get the minister to read it again, give them the information, but they don't go to meetings, they don't listen to anybody, and they don't read any documents, so I don't know if it would do any good.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. H. Perry: That's hilarious coming from a Premier who wouldn't even go to a health meeting in Summerside and had been asked to go to that.

According to the 2021 internal report, this will be very, very expensive. I will quote from that report: The 35 percent in beds will have "an approximate capital cost of over \$134 million and additional...operating cost of more than \$30 million."

Now, this is a huge investment, and I'm sure that all private operators are very excited about this. But from someone who believes in the public role and public services, I am certainly not that enthusiastic.

So, before we go any further down the private track, will the minister table all of the agreements that were signed with private operators to support the \$25 million he handed out last week?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Mr. Speaker, I would also go back and list the documents, of course, that the hon. member and his government used to be a part of; the investments they made in Medavie for home care, which just irritated the public sector who thought they were taking jobs away from RCWs.

I could talk about the investments they made in long-term care. The same people we're investing in; the hon. member over there was part of a government who invested in the very same and even the Member from O'Leary-Inverness, in his brief stint as the Minister of Health, would have signed documents to give money to those wonderful people who provide care in this province.

Hypocrite. I don't know what else you can call it, Mr. Speaker.

[Interjections]

Hon. D. King: Mr. Speaker, I shouldn't use that word. I shouldn't call him a hypocrite. I'm sorry, but I don't know what other word to use. But I take it back.

[Interjections]

Hon. D. King: I take it back.

Hon. H. Perry: You're the Premier (Indistinct). Great role model.

Hon. D. King: You're right, I am the Premier, and you're not.

[Interjections]

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

G. McNeilly: Point of order on that comment.

[Interjections]

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. member, you can't call a point of order until your earliest opportunity after Question Period.

[Interjections]

Hon. D. King: I withdrew the comment. Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the comment. It's unparliamentary. I shouldn't have used it.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

So, that's getting (Indistinct). But I'm going to quote from the former Speaker. He said that you can't move forward if you keep looking in the rearview mirror. And that's something that this government has a problem with.

You see, this is really about a government that wants to avoid its responsibility, and that responsibility is to provide public service and to be accountable. You would rather hide behind others and let a few

people get wealthy in the process. I'm sure you will be more than happy with that.

Will the minister please give the House some idea of the profits currently being made by the private businesses delivering services that have a public interest?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: Mr. Speaker, I hope that – perhaps when this Legislature ever closes – I could take the hon. member and we could go out and visit Douglas MacKenzie at the John Gillis Lodge. We could go visit Paul Jenkins, who would be no stranger to you, Mr. Speaker. We could go visit up to South Shore Villa, where the hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora would have done campaigning during the election.

I bet he would not have one ounce of courage to stand up there and say what he's saying in here. I know him. I know where they come from. I know the people who work in here every day. I'm proud of the work they do, and as long as I'm standing here, hon. member, I will invest in the health care delivery of this province with any partner who wants to work to make it better for Prince Edward Islanders. But if you don't want investment, I think we know who to call.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I know he is proud. He's very proud to stand behind them. Of course he is. Stand behind them.

Yesterday, the Minister of Public Safety provided Islanders and this House his assurance that immediate action would be taking place to ensure accurate GPS mapping for emergency responders.

Here's a quote from the *Hansard* from the Minister of Justice, Public Safety and Attorney General: "Thank you...for bringing this to my attention... We'll look at that right away."

Accurate GPS mapping for 911 (further)

Given the sense of urgency of this matter, can the minister tell the House what steps he took to address this public safety issue?

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

[1:40 p.m.]

Hon. B. Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do appreciate the member bringing that to my attention, but I wish he hadn't have waited until Tuesday of the Leg. to do that. He knows he can reach out to me any time if there's a public safety issue.

We reached out to the 911 department yesterday and they are dealing with it as we speak.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Premier. I listen to my constituents, and I have three government-owned housing units in my area: Charlotte Court, Rankin Court, and Hunt Court. Continuously, they talk about the assessment formula. Every year, it comes up in June, and it's archaic, it's old, and it stresses people out. They don't like the formula and they don't understand it.

Assessment formula for public housing

Mr. Premier, why are we still doing this? We've capped rents. Why are we looking to our seniors who live in government-owned facilities to get a few extra dollars from them? Will you stand up today and get rid of this assessment formula?

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Hon. D. King: I would have to take the question under advisement to fully understand it. I assume you mean that we would look at their income and assess their rent based on that. I would have to get a little bit more intel on it, to be honest, but I will get back to the hon. member as soon as I can.

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

R. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Islanders continue to brace for further increases in the electricity bills as we have the Point Lepreau refurbishment, the bill for Fiona, and continuing inflationary pressures. We know that the PEI electrification network is older, and it could be susceptible to distributing efficient power. In other words, the working power available compared to the reactive power available is different. There are shortages within the network where power is lost or wasted.

Recently, BC Hydro set new standards for power quality, and fines are issued when utilities do not meet certain standards of power efficiency.

Power distribution networks

Question to the Minister of Environment and Energy: What are you doing to ensure the power distributing networks work efficiently so power is not lost in transmission so that we don't need to import additional energy to meet our growing needs for electricity in the province?

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

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

For the last couple of years, we've been working on modernizing our act. We had the whole public part of it happen last. We have a report – our final report – that should be released in or around June and we're going to take immediate action to write legislation to match that in the end.

A lot of those things are dealt with, like: What does a modern act look like? How does a modern utility work? There are great examples all over the world of utilities that work differently. If you want to see a great example of an island that works really well, a place like Hawaii would be one that I would favour, probably.

But I'm going to let the process play out and the staff will come back with their recommendations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, minister, and that is encouraging that you are looking into that particular issue, but more efficient power will improve electrical equipment lifespans and improve voltage, reduce transformer maintenance, and increase lifespans while it provides cost savings to the utility and to Islanders.

Question to the minister: Will you look into implementing incentives or penalties to encourage our power distributors to become more efficient in their power transmission in the meantime?

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

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

Yeah, we’ll go back and look at it. One of the things that I’ve talked about it in the House here a lot of times is that we are looking at what a distributed energy model would look like. By definition, we have one of the finest models of distributed energy with rooftop solar now, but we’re looking at what it would look like at a substation level or a community level so that we can ensure a number of things: we can build resiliency for climate change; we can reduce power loss across the grid because the power is being produced close to where it’s being used, which is the whole purpose of distributed energy; plus, there’s opportunity for communities to own and operate, like Summerside is doing, like Lennox Island is working towards, and put the profits back into their own community.

So, there are a number of reasons why we’re doing it but, yeah, we’re going to tackle it.

Thank you, member.

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

R. Henderson: Thanks, minister.

A few weeks ago, the minister told CBC and this Legislature that he’s considering taking over our two power utilities and making

them publicly owned companies. I’m sure this was news to both those particular companies, the City of Summerside as well as Maritime Electric.

If the province was to take over Maritime Electric or the Summerside power utility, as you’ve said you’re looking into, would you commence into looking into the power distribution to be more efficient?

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

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

Yeah, if we were to run it, we would want to run it with the highest level of efficiency possible. We are working our way through that process. We hope to have something to report back in the not too distant future on where we are with our process.

[1:45 p.m.]

I do want to add that this is something that you should get behind. Everyone in here should get behind what we’re talking about and what we’re doing here because I can’t think of a single thing that I’ve participated in as a minister yet that I’ve received so much positive feedback about than looking at taking the utility in to operate it. I mean, I’m hearing from mayors who are in favour, I’m hearing in the grocery store, “I’m in favour.” If there’s ever a time to be on the right side of an issue – which I know Liberals can never be – this is the time.

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

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I recently spoke with several pharmacists who are deeply concerned by this government’s actions which are destabilizing our community pharmacies. Government, without any consultation with community pharmacies, is adding pharmacists into their patient medical homes.

As with all highly trained workers, we only have a limited number of pharmacists. So, when the government poaches them from the community pharmacies, those pharmacies are left with reduced staff and

have no option but to reduce hours, resulting in reduced access to care for Islanders. This, unfortunately, may impact the rural pharmacies and rural Islanders the most.

Pharmacists in patient medical homes

Question to the Minister of Health: What benefit do pharmacists add to medical homes that could not be achieved by partnering with the pharmacies already in place, and that are already providing exceptional services across every community in Prince Edward Island?

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

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question.

Obviously, I'm pretty intimate with the pharmacy profession, for lack of a better term. It should be noted that recently we passed 100,000 assessments in our Pharmacy Plus program. There could be a discussion we're privatizing that, as well.

They're providing health care services where people need it, when they need it. That Pharmacy Plus program is hugely successful. We'll continue to work with our pharmacy associations to deploy them as best we can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

M. MacFarlane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's the Pharmacy Plus program that I'd have concerns about being maintained because we're losing those pharmacists into the patient medical homes.

We're seeing, already, hours in the community pharmacies being reduced because of the duplication of roles. Increasing access should be the goal of any medical home; however, if you want to access a pharmacist in a medical home, you'll need to be a patient of the medical home. You'll need to make an appointment, and you'll still need to walk over to the community pharmacy next door to fill your prescription.

So, you're actually taking a frontline health care provider away from Islanders and unnecessarily increasing patient traffic at the already busy patient medical homes.

Question to the same minister: Does this actually sound like improved access to care to you?

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

Hon. M. McLane: Thank you.

You should ask a person who's a couple seats over whether you want to take people from the private sector and put them in the public sector now. We've got a lot of conflicting messages here.

It's important to note; I believe the number is around six or seven community pharmacists that we have hired into the public system. There are about 240 or something – or 260, I think – overall on Prince Edward Island. So, it represents 2 or 3 percent of our workforce.

But we do acknowledge that we need to balance. Like any workforce, in health, we always have to balance the pros and cons of moving people around. Home care versus long-term care is another issue where we try to balance our workforce and do the best we can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

M. MacFarlane: Mr. Speaker, the medical homes, if they're going to be successful, must increase patient flow. Making patients who want to see a pharmacist come through a medical home just bogs up the system, and frankly, doesn't make any sense at all.

If the patient needs a pharmacist, they can simply go to their community pharmacy – any time, no charge, evenings and weekends – and we have medical homes in Kinlock, Sherwood, Queen Street, Polyclinic, Central Queens, and South Shore that already have a community pharmacy in the same building.

Question to the minister: Will you commit to working with instead of against

community pharmacies across the Island to ensure patient access is increased and not decreased?

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

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

Again, not to make light of the situation, I certainly will try to balance the pharmacy – a balance for both my marriage and my job.

We understand that it's important to balance both ways. We have about 49 pharmacies in the province that provide incredible care. We need to balance the workforce, so I do agree with the member. I have met with the association, and will continue to meet with them, on balancing workforce needs that we have in that sector.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Forests provide so many benefits to our province. They capture carbon, they provide habitat, holding soil, cleaning air, regulating hydrological cycles, enhancing the beauty of Prince Edward Island, and on and on and on. They also provide significant economic benefits, creating jobs and producing valuable products.

[1:50 p.m.]

Government itself reports the total economic value of forest activities on Prince Edward Island to be about \$4 million. The Forestry Commission estimates that the value of biomass heating alone is about \$4 million. Clearly, there's a vast underestimate of the economic value of the forests to this province.

Economics and sustainability of forests

A question to the Minister of Environment: What efforts is your department making to provide Islanders – and in particular, private woodlot owners – with a more accurate measure of the true economic value of our forests?

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

Hon. S. Myers: That's a good question. We, as a government, have been working with the industry, for example, with the stamped lumber thing so that we gave them the ability to stamp lumber on the Island and use some of their lumber as lumber.

We've worked to add value to the forest through a carbon credit system that's not stood up yet, which has the intention of leaving wood standing by giving it value standing, which it currently doesn't have. The only value a forest has monetarily is when it's knocked down. From an environmental standpoint and a climate action standpoint, we'd rather it stood because it can sequester carbon; all the great things that you've already mentioned.

It's a great question. I look forward to the second question to get into the real meat of what you're asking, but we're doing all we can for sure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Specially for the minister, number two.

One of the issues that was raised recently by the Forestry Commission is the unsustainable use of biomass for our heat generators. The Auditor General's report from last year found that sustainability audits of sites that were harvested for biomass heating of government buildings were not completed, despite a requirement in an agreement signed with the third-party contractors who were doing the harvesting.

To the same minister: What is your department going to do to ensure that our precious forests – as you've just described, standing forests – when we do have to harvest them, that they harvested in a sustainable manner?

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

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

First of all, it will be mandatory in order to get carbon credits. There has to be a sustainability model and a forestry management plan to get a carbon credit out of it. Hopefully, as people see the value of standing woodland as carbon credits, they'll have to have a forestry management plan in order to attain it. They'll obviously have to leave it standing, or harvest in a sustainable manner.

We'll continue to work towards that goal. Obviously, at the end of the day, we would legislate if we had to, but at this point, I don't think that's going to be necessary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from New Haven-Rocky Point.

P. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The most recent forestry policy laid out plans for major shifts in emphasis from softwoods to hardwoods; to planting hardwoods in favour of softwoods. The problem is, we've never, ever been close to favouring hardwoods in this province. Ten years ago, we reached an all-time high-water mark when just over 9 percent of the seedlings that we produced were hardwoods; over 90 percent were still softwoods. Today, we're at half of that, about 4 or 5 percent.

To the same minister: Why is the department not pursuing our forest plan that favours hardwood seedlings and, in so doing, creating more resilient forests – hardwood forests – here on Prince Edward Island that are better able to weather the more ferocious and frequent storms that we're bound to have in the future?

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

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

Going forward, we will. I think that the Forestry Commission report was important to us. I mean, some of the things are tough, but I think it was extremely fair. We have to do better in a number of areas. I've said right from the start, we accept all the recommendations in the report and we'll make the necessary changes.

I think I said during budget estimates, it's really hard to ramp it up from 30,000 to 500,000. It's really hard just to take your seedling production and change it like that overnight, but we are going to work towards making that change.

Obviously, we can get deeper into the weeds on that, but we accept the report and we will do what we need to do to change.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We used to talk a lot about water here in this Legislative Assembly. I remember six or eight years ago, it was the topic of almost every Question Period. I know the Member from New Haven-Rocky Point killed a water bottling plant before it ever got started. I asked tons of questions on legislation that was coming forward, and I really advocated for the watershed group. We haven't talked enough about it lately.

Water is more important than ever on our Island as the population grows. In particular, I think this government has done some good work. The Water Registry has allowed us to get some great visibility into our water.

Management of Island water

A question for the Minister of Environment: How is the PEI Water Registry being used to monitor and protect our Island water?

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

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

[1:55 p.m.]

For the first time, I think we have complete open access to what's going on. I think that was one of the important things that – it might have been you, yourself, started when you were in the department.

I will say, a number of hands have touched this. The Minister of Education was involved in this file, too, heavily. Robert Mitchell headed across the Island, and I

know I went to a number of sessions that when the act itself was – before it was even drawn up, to get the public consultation. So, there's been an enormous amount of public consultation in this, none of which I did; it was all done before me.

But I think that probably the biggest thing is now you can see all the time. There's nothing hidden. It's there, 100 percent of the time. Everybody can see what's going on, and it's by watershed by watershed so we can closely monitor it. So, the public can keep an eye on it and make sure we're doing what we said we would do.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of the things that doesn't get raised as much to me now, but it definitely does, is high capacity wells; formerly known as deep water wells. That was a big issue and was something Islanders were really worried about in at least two elections.

I really feel like this Water Registry is giving us the data we need to make sure that high capacity wells can exist and be in a form that's not going to negatively impact our water.

Question for the minister: Can you talk about any changes to the number of high capacity wells or what you're doing to make sure that high capacity wells won't negatively impact our water supply?

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

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

The act pretty well lays out, and the regulations, how the water can be used when a high capacity well is there and the things that an entity would need to do prior to being able to get one; dealing with soil health and a number of other things that go along with it. We haven't seen a major ask for them. We've been very fortunate we haven't had a dry summer since the regulations changed to allow the high capacity wells.

But what I will say is we are actively working on getting them in the Dunk River to take away the surface extraction, which arguably is a much better – I'm not a hydrologist, but I am told it's a much better way to draw water and it will have a much lower impact on the Dunk River. But we've said from the start that if we need to stop somebody from withdrawing water because it's having a negative impact, then obviously we would.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Indeed, I have farmers who are constituents who farm in that Dunk River area and high capacity wells are really going to make things more efficient from them, as well as protect our water supply, so that's great to hear.

But you mentioned the *Water Act*. It was a model of public consultation at the time and we asked lots of questions. One of the reasons we voted for it was for future sections that were going to come into play; for example, water management areas, because you have to look at things, for example, on a watershed by watershed basis in order to manage your water properly.

Those areas of the *Water Act* weren't filled in yet.

So, a question the minister: What progress have you made on the *Water Act* and specifically, filling in the blanks for the watershed management area portion?

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

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

We do have the data. They're all still monitored because they've been monitored all along. We obviously have more work to do; we acknowledge that. As we have to bring in some of these new components, the way the business of the world is kind of somewhat changing too – we had to put in regulations, for example, on geothermal wells because there's a lot more people

moving to geothermal wells for climate change reasons and a number of other reasons. That is also part of the act that had to be regulated. So, it's going to be a moving target, I think, forever.

I'll get you a better update than that on how we're triggering the rest of the components, but I know we're working actively on it all the time. I want to commend our staff for the great work they've done. They've really taken what was a huge issue five years ago and made it an almost non-existent issue for the department today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's why I'm asking these questions, because I think it's critical that water management areas are brought in so our water can be managed properly.

Our municipalities, as we've heard through initiatives like the Water School, have stepped up to the plate and are doing a lot of the work. They've created their own water conservation programs. They have water metering and a vested interest in water conservation, of course, and that was the driving force behind the Water School.

[2:00 p.m.]

A question to the minister: That's great for municipalities, but what are you doing to promote water conservation outside of towns and cities in unincorporated areas?

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

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

Probably not a lot; you probably know that. I've talked about it in the Legislature here before that we're trying to move toward a more holistic approach to water. I remember the Leader of the Opposition brought a bill forward to make water tests free and I talked about it at that point too, where we want to put everything under an entity that's external to government. We want to make it an arm's length or a Crown corporation that would

own, basically, all the abilities for water inside it. So, anybody that was going to apply for any type of a well or any type of service would move there and do that right across the Island.

Obviously, there are a number of issues with that, not the least of which is the number of municipalities, as you talked about, who already have all their system and have a lot of money invested into their architecture. How would we deal with that?

It's a major, major play, but I think the *Water Act* makes that the obvious next move for us to make sure that water is dealt with the same, right across the board, whether you are on a water system or you're like me and you have a well at home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The whole point between water management areas is it gives the minister the power to create special regulations for those areas. We often think of them as being – watersheds would be the water management areas, but it was brought to my attention that perhaps the coast of the Island could be considered a water management area, especially as we see sea water levels rise because of climate change. Frankly, I have constituents who are worried about the impacts of salt water through saltwater intrusion on the drinking water in these coastal areas.

Have you considered treating the coast of PEI as a water management area to help manage saltwater intrusion through climate change?

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

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

No, I haven't, but I think it's a really good point. As you know, we're going through a process now on shoreline protection which basically is creating literal cells. I think there are 17 of them across the Island that would be managed areas of shoreline that would be

managed by, hopefully, the municipality or something in that capacity.

But it would fall right in line with that, if we're already doing that type of work, too, to deal with it because I think it's going to be a big issue down the road – saltwater intrusion – that we haven't seen yet from climate change. As the shoreline erodes and it gets closer to where the wells are, I think you're going to see a lot more people having to deal with saltwater intrusion, and quite frankly, it's not, as you know, an easy problem to fix.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

B. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, we heard in my member statement about the Water's Cool/Water School. It's just a great initiative and it has really a fantastic potential for water education and spawning action on the conservation of water, and of course, watersheds and the work that's done in watersheds.

Water School

Question to the Minister of Environment: Will you commit to supporting the rollout of the Water School across PEI?

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

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

Yes, I think it's a great idea and I was really excited. You showed me the video and stuff the other day, and I was really excited about the whole concept. I'm trying to think of how that would work, rolling it out. It might be better suited for the Minister of Education. Perhaps we could have a chat offline and talk about it.

But yeah, I'd be 100 percent in support of it because I think it outlines a number of things that are concepts that we deal with every single day with water. It's kind of like climate change: if we can catch them at those primary ages, it's a great time to have a lifetime worth of environmentalists help protecting water for us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

G. McNeilly: Question to the Minister of Health. In my area, there's Beach Grove Home with over 120 residents, amazing staff, and people who work there constantly.

Repairs for public long-term care homes

Minister, what do I say to the staff at Beach Grove Home who watched you give a private grant to private nursing homes when they've been sitting on issues around doorways just getting access to courtyards? I've brought this up numerous times, minister, and still, nothing is happening. Eleven doors now, almost \$1 million investment, but yet you so cavalierly give it to private nursing homes. When are you going to fix the doors at Beach Grove Home?

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

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

I know we're supposed to answer questions here, but I would pose a question to the hon. member. If he's sitting across the table from 10 nursing home operators and they offer to supply us with 50 beds, would he say no? I doubt he would.

[2:05 p.m.]

Back to the question on Beach Grove Home, we've shared the RFP and the letter process that those improvements are going to be made. We've made those commitments. We've emailed you the documentation. I agree, you can't go fast enough, building capacity and getting a contractor on site, but the work is going to happen at Beach Grove Home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]