

fingers. It's an opportunity right now, in this Speech From the Throne, to build a province where we can extend products and services to all Islanders, so that they can make choices for themselves.

I truly believe that that is where dignity starts and dignity is so very important to the human spirit. We all want to be seen and heard by one another and we owe it to every Islander that is struggling and, just as important, we owe it to ourselves. Government will continue to build on the investments that we have made and build on the capacity of Islanders who are already contributing out there, for it's only together that we will thrive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker for the opportunity to rise this evening and respond to the Speech From the Throne. The start of a new session can be incredibly invigorating. The order paper is cleared, we hear a new throne speech and the session is full of possibilities. Add to that, as we had last week, the excitement of a by-election and it's easy to get caught-up in the day-to-day sport of politics and forget about the real reason that we are here.

I often hear politics compared to Canada's other favourite obsession: hockey – and it can be a fun comparison. Like a hockey game, politics moves quickly and play sometimes can get a little rough and the sport is rich in metaphors that easily apply to politics.

I can, for example, applaud Doug Currie's gamesmanship as he hangs up his skates; I can accuse the Premier of ragging the puck on electoral reform; I can complain even that government members may have set up a neutral zone trap to prevent me from passing any legislation.

And it may be impolite to point this out in public, but we all know who the other team's enforcers are and who is vying for the Lady Byng Memorial Trophy. We can even identify our own team by the colour of our jerseys, be that red, blue, orange, or green. And also, like hockey, it's easy to get

caught-up in the game and focus too much on trying to score. But, it's not the colour of our jerseys, or the number of goals or assists that we accumulate that determines whether we are winning; rather it is the values that inform our play.

We need to remember that we are here to represent the people, not the interests of our party, or our personal gain or fame. We cannot win the game of politics unless we focus all our efforts on making life better for all of our citizens. So, when I lace-up my skates and head out onto the ice, I try to think about whether the work I do makes the province a better place in which to live; whether the things I say make my children proud to call me Dad; and whether the way I conduct myself brings honour to this Legislature.

Shortly before the Legislature opened, I released a mid-term report card on how well the government has kept its promises that were made in previous throne speeches. That exercise might seem to be a little bit cheeky and therefore easy to dismiss because who am I to grade government? I'm well aware that I am the lone member elected for the Third Party, at least until the new representative for District 11 is sworn in. I also appreciate that my grades may be filtered through the lens of my own policy preferences.

However, it's important for us as legislators to step back and honestly examine whether we are truly heading in the direction that we intend. Politicians are very good at developing exciting new policies, and announcing initiatives, and scheduling photo ops, but we often fall far short on the actual implementation of our ideas. This is, in part, because we underestimate the challenges of advocating for change; or we fail to provide the support and resources to the civil servants who are tasked with its implementation; or, maybe, it's because we are a bit like the crows who immediately fly off to investigate the next bright, shiny object that catches our eye.

As much as we may long to build our reputations on the introduction of new policies, governments can be overwhelmed by the incredible challenge of trying to meet the demands of so many people with such diverse needs and expectations on limited

resources, but this challenge does not absolve us from the responsibility to do so.

Since the current administration has reached the half-way point in its mandate, or thereabouts, I thought it would be a good time to review previous throne speech promises and grade them in the familiar A-F report card format. Reviewing the implementation of past throne speeches also offers a sobering lesson on what we can realistically expect when it comes to the implementation of this throne speech. But ultimately it is not me who will grade government, but the people of Prince Edward Island during the next election and if the results of this week's by-election is any indication, some members of this Legislature may not be getting a passing grade.

But beyond the next election, we will also be graded by history and it is possible to win many elections and still find yourself on the wrong side of history. In 50 years will our decisions be seen as improving the lives of Islanders and protecting the future for our children and grandchildren? As we debate carbon pricing, marijuana legislation, and electoral reform, we must not only consider how our actions will impact the party of our choice, or our chances of getting a coveted Cabinet post, or being reelected in 2019, but also, how it will impact Islanders years into the future and how each one of us will be graded on history's report card.

For example, like other Islanders who voted in favour of proportional representation in last year's plebiscite, I felt betrayed by government's refusal to honour that vote and the voters. I watched in horror as MLAs, who had been elected to represent their constituents, scrambled to find lame rationalizations to justify putting the Liberal party's interests ahead of the democratically expressed will of the people who elected them. Yet, even at the height of my frustration, I knew that electoral reform is inevitable. The will of the people may be thwarted by the current batch of MLAs who vote unquestioningly in lock-step on so many issues, but eventually, progress will be made and future generations will look back and be amazed that we clung so long to an antiquated electoral system that distorted democracy by giving 100% of the power to parties that win less than 50% of the popular

vote. And like so many obvious reforms such as extending the franchise to women and Indigenous people, they will wonder why on Earth it was such a big deal.

I know you're sitting there thinking that I'm looking at the world through green-coloured glasses, but I'm not the only one who feels this way. Andrew Coyne, writing in the *National Post* – hardly a newspaper known for promoting radical progressive politics – also asserts the inevitability of proportional representation. And about Prince Edward Island, Mr. Coyne writes this: Turnout, however, was only 36% – and Mr. Coyne put 'only' in quotation marks – as high as for most municipal and many provincial elections in this country. On the basis of which Premier Wade MacLauchlan has ordered a do-over. Even Mr. Coyne seems to realize that ordering a do-over is like trying to move the goal posts after the other team has scored. He then ends the article by saying: Change is coming – somewhere, somehow, and soon. And when the sky does not fall; when the Nazis do not take over; when we do not turn into Israel or Italy; then, at last, maybe we can have a proper national debate.

Now, when the *National Post* claims the inevitability of electoral reform, surely I can feel confident that it is just a matter of time.

However, in spite of this confidence, I still feel compelled to address some comments made by the Premier during Question Period a couple of weeks ago, in response to my questions regarding the legitimacy of government's refusal to honour the results of the plebiscite vote.

The first comment that struck me was when he said, and I quote: There is a big difference between a by-election that will elect somebody to be here until the next general election, and changing an electoral model that has been in place for 160 years. I fear the Premier underestimates the importance of district representation and exaggerates the immutability of our electoral model. His feelings about district representation are clearly demonstrated by the fact that Liberal votes are whipped – whipped votes – no matter the interest of an individual member's constituents. As for the unchanging nature of our electoral model, the current one has only been in place since

1996 – hardly 160 years – when we switched from the dual-member system to a single-member system.

Indeed, Prince Edward Island's electoral system has always been living and vibrant and has changed and adapted to keep pace with democratic reforms for almost two centuries. In 1830, the right to vote was extended to Catholic males. In 1921, almost a century later, women were granted the franchise, and in 1963, Indigenous people were allowed to vote for the very first time. In 1940, amendments to the *Legislative Assembly Act* allowed women to sit as elected members – 1940. And even though it has been over 75 years since that particular innovation has happened, it hasn't quite caught on as much as I would like – last week's events notwithstanding.

Also, the structure of the Assembly has changed. Before 1861, PEI had a bicameral system with an upper house that was appointed and a lower house that was elected. In 1893, the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council were combined.

Up until 1963, there was a separate franchise for councillors, and only landowners could vote for their district councillor. Then, in 1996, the dual member system was replaced with our current single member system with 27 districts that we see in front of us today.

All of these electoral reforms radically changed the nature of democracy on this small Island, and all of them occurred without a plebiscite, never mind a plebiscite and a do-over. So yes, change is possible. Indeed, change is constant and it is inevitable.

The second thing that struck me in the Premier's response, and he has since repeated it, was his accusation that, and again I quote: "The logic of the Leader of the Third Party changed at about 8:00 p.m. on the night of the plebiscite." That is not only inaccurate, it is offensive.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Between the third and fourth ballot.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** The Premier's speculation on my state of mind implies that I did not expect to win, so my logic somehow changed at 8:00 pm. Well, for the

record, yes, I was not certain of victory that night. Those of us who campaigned in favour of PR never assumed that just because we believed it was the best and most democratic system, that other Islanders would support it.

So yes, the Premier is right on that count. On the night of the plebiscite I was prepared to lose, and it was my intention to accept that loss with good grace and honour. Believe me, if there's one thing I have learned during my many previous attempts to win elected office – nine in total – it is that when the people have spoken, we must always accept their wisdom with humility and grace.

So, on November 7<sup>th</sup> last year, I was indeed prepared to lose, but unfortunately the Premier was not. He was not prepared to humbly accept the wisdom of the people. Perhaps it takes a few electoral defeats to learn humility. We are all here to serve the voters and their interests, not our party executive, not the corporations that finance our election campaigns, and definitely not our own egos. And although I had been prepared to lose that plebiscite, I had not been prepared to win the plebiscite and then have that victory nullified by an executive decision.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier is fond of pointing out that everybody on the committee knew that a plebiscite by its very definition is non-binding. Yes, of course, I did know that; but I also firmly believed that this government would honour the results. I certainly would not have put in so much effort, if at the very start, the Chair of that committee had announced: As you know, plebiscites are non-binding, and the Premier fully intends to make an executive decision if he is displeased with the results.

The whole point of a plebiscite is to provide the people with the opportunity to guide government on important issues. If government does not honour that guidance then the exercise becomes political theatre, a magician's trick where you create the illusion that you are empowering the people, while never actually relinquishing any of your executive privilege.

**Ms. Biggar:** (Indistinct) that's personal.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Now you may accuse me of being naive or even unsophisticated for assuming that government would honour the vote – of that, I am guilty as charged – but do not accuse me of being inconsistent in my logic or beliefs, or of being self serving.

Much of what we do as members of this Legislature is determined not by a strict set of rules, but by democratic norms. I am an advocate of ensuring that Prince Edward Island has some of the most stringent rules in the country with strong independent oversight, but I also see the importance of respecting democratic norms. We've been hearing a lot about democratic norms recently, as the current leader in the United States has built his presidency on violating these traditions. We can see from a distance the chaos that can ensue when a leader indulges his authoritarian impulses, behind the rationalization that there are no rules to stop him. The unwritten rules that govern our behaviour are often based on the assumption that we are individuals with honour and integrity, and that we will act in the public interest.

So when I said that the Premier's refusal to implement proportional representation set a very dangerous precedent for our democratic institutions, I was not suggesting that he was breaking any law; not at all. Instead, I meant that he is violating the democratic norm that governments act on the results of a plebiscite whether they like them or not.

When Premier Joe Ghiz held a plebiscite on building a fixed link, he personally voted no, but the majority of Islanders who voted were in favour, and the bridge was built. In violating the democratic norm of acting on the results of the plebiscite, the Premier erodes public trust and feeds the cynical belief that politicians are only looking out for themselves.

This betrayal is especially destructive because for the first time we invited younger Islanders, aged 16 and 17, to participate. We tried to engage them in the democratic process; we promised them that their voices would be heard; but in the end we turned their first opportunity to exercise their right to vote into a farce and reinforced any beliefs that they already had on the futility of trying to implement grassroots change.

**Ms. Biggar:** Check the percentage.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** But the most telling aspect of my exchange with the Premier that Friday was not my cheeky suggestion that he intends to put Doug Currie back in office, but his inability to answer my original and very serious question: Does he still plan on making the second plebiscite a binding one and if so, how?

His refusal to answer whether his fantasy referendum will be binding and how he can make that consistent with the democratic principle of parliamentary sovereignty, where a current administration cannot dictate the actions of a future government, shows that he still does not have a plan. He has no idea how he is going to extract himself from this ridiculous mess that he has created for himself. So far, his strategy seems to be to remain silent in the hopes that people will forget his betrayal. Well, based on the by-election results in District 11, people are willing to neither forget nor forgive.

On the whole issue of electoral reform, government has painted itself into a corner. The Premier really has nobody to blame for this situation other than himself. From his original throne speech commitment to democratic renewal, to failing to set minimum standards for action before the plebiscite was launched, to his panicked morning-after decision to reject the will of the people, to forcing all Liberal members to vote down Motion 54, even when their constituents voted in favour of PR, to placing the Government House Leader on the Special Committee for Democratic Renewal in order to maintain the Liberal majority, the Premier must take full personal responsibility for every misstep that has led us to where we are today.

The same is also true as the Premier tries to wiggle out of commitments he made concerning campaign finance reform. I was disappointed to hear in the throne speech that government will continue to kick this issue down the road by putting forward a discussion document on campaign finance reform. It would be so much easier to simply do the right thing, which is introducing legislation that will fulfill the Premier's original commitment.

In May 2016, the Premier stood in this house and promised to table legislation that would ban corporate and union donations. But instead of following through on his promise, in December 2016 he announced that he had reconsidered the issue and would not be banning corporate and union donations. This must have been yet another one of the Premier's famous executive decisions. He made this decision in spite of the fact that a ban is clearly the future of political financing.

The federal government, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta and very soon British Columbia, will have legislation to ban corporate and union donations. It's coming and we'd better do it now.

The Green Party strongly believes that these types of donations have a corrupting influence. I cannot accept that it is merely a coincidence that some of the biggest donations to the two largest political parties on PEI come from construction companies, accounting firms, legal firms, as I had referenced in my questions in Question Period today, and telecommunication companies. The one thing these donors have in common is that they are businesses that either receive millions of dollars in government contracts, or they are regulated by government.

Yet, the Premier expects us to believe that his change of heart is because he is, and I quote: Concerned that this may limit legitimate political participation by those who have a real interest in our province and its democratic process.

**An Hon. Member:** Hear! Hear!

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** I can't help but speculate that these corporations of real interest in our province and democratic processes relates more to a desire to influence government in their favour, than to encourage thriving policy discussions that will benefit all Islanders.

It is not just corporate donations that concern us. During the last election, a full 39% of political donations made to the New Democratic Party came from unions. We, in the Green Party, strongly support labour rights. Indeed, my only piece of – my only

legislative initiative for this sitting is a bill that will provide whistleblowing protection for all workers on Prince Edward Island.

However, I grow concerned when a party becomes that indebted to organized labour for its very existence. Could a NDP government, for example, enter difficult negotiations with civil servant unions knowing how dependent they are on those union donations? Could they still put the public interest ahead of their party and the unions that support it?

The Green Party believes that no matter how hard you may try to separate party financing from public policy, the interests of one can never be fully disentangled from the other. Therefore, it is better to completely remove that temptation and any appearance of impropriety.

For these reasons, the Green Party only accepts donations from individuals. We do not accept money from either corporations or unions and we believe that all parties should be required to do the same.

**Mr. Trivers:** What if the individual belongs to a corporation (Indistinct) corporation.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** They are fine to donate as an individual, not through their corporation.

**Mr. Trivers:** Same difference.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Unfortunately –

**Mr. Trivers:** Same difference.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Not at all.

Unfortunately, the Premier has decided that the citizens of Prince Edward Island do not deserve to be protected from the obvious conflict that arises when political parties are dependent on moneyed interests.

Needless to say, I was absolutely delighted to hear the new Leader of the Opposition state very clearly that he, too, supports a ban on corporate and union donations and I'm looking forward to working with him to ensure that Islanders get the legislation that they deserve –

**Ms. Biggar:** (Indistinct)

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** – when a new *Election Expenses Act* is finally tabled –

**Ms. Casey:** Let's see his donation (Indistinct)

**Mr. Trivers:** (Indistinct)

**Ms. Biggar:** I know.

**Mr. Trivers:** Mixed member (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacKay:** You ain't seen nothing, yet.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** I would also like to invite him and the Progressive Conservative Party to immediately join me in the Green Party in our refusal to accept all corporate and union donations now. We may not have a majority in the Legislature, but by putting our principles ahead of partisan gain we can show a level of moral leadership that appears to be lacking in the governing party.

**Mr. Trivers:** Or we could just work Islanders.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** As leaders of political parties we can choose to lead or be led. When reform is so clearly the way of the future can we accept that our elected officials are content to be followers, or even worse, obstructionists?

If given the choice of being a leader of a follower, I would like to be seen as a leader. I would like to be remembered as someone who embraced the future rather than someone who clung to the old order for fear of losing traditional privilege of advantage.

In advance of the new throne speech the Premier said, on CBC that, and I quote: the program that we laid out in 2015 is substantially complete and now we have a window when we can really add to that and build further progress of Islanders.

I personally find that quite surprising, since my review showed many gaps and promises unkept on difficult issues that government has repeatedly kicked down the road.

Many of the previous throne speech promises that have either been broken, or not yet acted upon, centre on issues of integrity and trust. Issues that directly affected MLAs or the Liberal Party's ability

to finance and win elections, whether the issue is honouring the plebiscite vote, bringing in promised campaign finance reform, eliminating member's transitional allowances, adopting the Conflict of Interest Commissioner's recommendations on improving access and transparency. There has been a disappointing record of government members putting their own interests ahead of the public interest.

Even something as simple as the Premier's 2015 promise to reduce the size of Cabinet didn't last very long. Cabinet was 11 members under premier Ghiz. It went down to nine under the current Premier, but has since crept right back up to 11, again –

**Premier MacLauchlan:** (Indistinct)

**Ms. Biggar:** Too much (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacEwen:** Broken promise.

**Ms. Biggar:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacEwen:** Broken promise.

**Mr. MacKay:** No deputy minister (Indistinct)

**Mr. J. Brown:** (Indistinct) last Tory cabinet (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacEwen:** Broken promise.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** The Premier was elected on promises. Promises of offering a new kind of leadership, but he now seems willing to allow major policy decisions to be reversed by pollsters or the bagmen in his own party.

What happened to the promise of electoral reform? What happened to his promise to ban corporate and union donations? What happened to his promise to tighten up conflict of interest rules?

Perhaps, the explanation can be found in what the Premier said to *The Guardian*, when rationalizing his changed position on campaign finance. He said this, "When I put something out in the public domain, it's not a promise. It's more to say, 'This is proposed. Let's find out what people think about it.'"

Now, with campaign finance, I'm not sure if 'the people' meant the citizens of Prince Edward Island or his own party's insiders, or was that just another executive decision?

This is still one of the Premier's most honest and revealing statements, I believe, and one that we should all keep in mind when evaluating his commitments.

I know much of what I'm saying today might be seen as an attack on our current Premier –

**Ms. Casey:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Mundy:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Biggar:** No, you would never do that.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** How can the truth be construed as an attack.

**Ms. Biggar:** (Indistinct) do that.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** I know that much of what I am saying today could be construed as an attack on our current Premier and I want to make it perfectly clear that that is not my intention.

**An Hon. Member:** Oh!

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

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Listen and you will –

**Mr. J. Brown:** Oh, here he comes –

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** – understand.

**Ms. Biggar:** Really.

**Mr. J. Brown:** – lily white.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** The differences that I have with the Premier are based on his policy decisions. They are not personal –

**Ms. Biggar:** (Indistinct) hearing any of you fellows (Indistinct)

**Mr. Trivers:** Hashtag: real news.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** I believe the Premier is an intelligent man and an honourable man.

Unlike many Islanders I was optimistic when he was elected. I hoped he would be able to live up to his promise of greater transparency and accountability. And like so many Islanders, I have been disappointed with the results.

Yet, the blame for this failure to implement a new regime of openness is less the fault of the Premier than the fault of the entire political system within which we work. This room can be a very difficult place to maintain one's integrity.

When I was elected I had high ideals about improving the tone of political discourse in the Legislature and helping to build multi-party alliances around serious issues and working together to improve the lives of Islanders. Yet, over the last two-and-a-half years I have realized that simply having high ideals is not good enough. I have sometimes found myself engaging in exchanges that do not highlight my better nature.

I'm extremely blessed that I have a level of independence that no other member of this House can enjoy. So far, I have been the leader and lone member for my party. I do not need to negotiate every decision with a broad caucus or a powerful back group of party supports and funders.

As a representative for a party based on six defining principles, I can turn to the party's core beliefs and seek meaningful guidance on how to act. And when all else fails, my wise and kind-hearted wife, Ann, is always ready to gently remind me when I fail to live up to my own rhetoric.

The other leaders, on the other hand, have to negotiate with powerful partisan interests within their own parties and regardless of their own good intentions, the rules reward certain behaviours. It's easy to get caught up in the game and focus entirely on winning, while forgetting the ideals that brought you to seek office in the first place. We have entered an era of hyper-partisan politics – not just here on Prince Edward Island. There was a time, perhaps mythical, when parties existed to provide politicians with a structure around which they could act in the public interest. Now, we seem to have flipped that equation over, and politicians exist solely, at least primarily, to promote and defend the interests of their own parties.

That is why in the Green Party when we talk about the need to do politics differently; the old way is not serving citizens well.

So when I stand here and criticize the actions of the Premier, it is intended more as a critique of the deeply entrenched systemic problems with which we now we practice politics. And when I may seem overwhelmed with frustration over issues like the plebiscites or campaign financing, it is because I sincerely believe that these are the fundamental reforms that we need to make for meaningful change, and I had hoped that this Premier, with all his earlier promises, was going to be a powerful ally in moving this change forward.

And I would be unfair if I did not acknowledge some of the improvements in accountability that the Premier has pursued. Although not yet passed, the Public Interest Disclosure and Whistleblower Protection Act and the Lobbyist Registration Act are both significant steps forward.

Yet, even when this government has voluntarily brought forward improved measures for accountability, they've done it in a half-hearted way. For example, the Premier promised whistleblower protections for civil servants. Instead of introducing legislation, he created a policy and set up the Office of the Ethics and Integrity Commissioner to oversee whistleblowing and conflict of interests for senior civil servants.

In what has become a pattern for this Premier, he was unwilling to subject his government to independent outside scrutiny. Instead, he created a position within government that would report, ultimately, to him. This is not how government oversight is supposed to work. It would be like replacing the referee in a hockey game with the home team's owner.

Indeed, it is so flawed that in her special audit of the e-gaming file, the Auditor General said this: In our view, the policy falls short in providing the kind of environment that would ensure that employees of government could disclose wrongdoing without fear of reprisal, as the policy intends to do. A policy document is not law. Policies describe the objectives of a government and how it proposes to achieve

these objectives using various methods and principles. Policy does not provide the same level of protection to employees. Statutory protection is better protection and most other provincial jurisdictions have whistleblower legislation.

Government recognized that it could not flagrantly ignore these recommendations of the Auditor General, and prepared Bill 76: Public Interest Disclosure and Whistleblower Protection Act that was tabled in May 2017 and has subsequently died on the order paper. Although I am pleased to hear that government will be reintroducing this legislation, I would be remiss if I did not point out some of the more obvious flaws in the legislation as it was originally tabled.

There are many, but the most troubling aspect of Bill 76 is that it requires a disclosure to be made within one year from the date of the alleged wrongdoing and does not allow members of the public to make complaints directly to the commissioner.

I wrote to the Premier over a month ago explaining these and other concerns, and I remain optimistic that he intends to act on my suggestions. I also wrote to him a similar letter concerning the Lobbyist Registration Act, which will also, supposedly, be reintroduced. These are both important pieces of legislation, and I see no reason why Prince Edward Island should not have accountability legislation that is amongst the strongest in Canada.

This government has not only shown a lack of leadership on the large visionary issues, but also, on the day-to-day decision-making that comes with governance. The administration has wrapped itself in the writing of studies, and reviews, and reports, and strategies; and whenever it is called upon to make a tough decision, it abdicates its responsibility pending the arrival of the next action plan.

In keeping with this approach, government has announced yet another strategy, this one on housing. Having access to safe and affordable housing is fundamental to personal well-being and I applaud any new initiatives that will improve access to secure housing. However, my heart grows heavy when I hear this government has ordered



another strategy. We need more than strategies and reports and advisory committees, we need action.

The Housing Supply Task Force mentioned in the throne speech, which sounds like a very active group of people, the Housing Supply Task Force should be Islanders with shovels and hammers ready to build homes that we know are desperately needed now, not bureaucrats with pens and clipboards drafting, yet, another study. We also need action on mental health and addictions; we need action on access to long-term care; we need action on poverty reduction; and improved child protection services; we need action in so many areas that touch the lives of so many Islanders. Yet this government seems often to believe that studying a problem is somehow often equivalent to solving that problem.

Of course, I would be less discouraged by government's insistence on continued studies and strategies, if I believed that they were being undertaken in good faith, rather than as a stalling tactic to avoid making the tough decisions.

I use, as an example, the government's much cited review of the *Child Protection Act*. Last session, whenever I reiterated the need for a child advocate – and I was barely the only person in this House to do so – the Premier blithely informed this House that he was confident that PEI did not need a child advocate because it was not mentioned in the review of the *Child Protection Act*. This is in spite of the recommendations of the Campbell-Hennessey Inquest Jury, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, both opposition parties, and the collective wisdom of almost every other province in Canada.

However, what the Premier did not say is that according to *The Guardian* article: Although the committee did hear feedback from Islanders calling for a child advocate for Prince Edward Island, review chair Patsy MacLean says the committee felt it was better to focus on the services Islanders want as part of this request.

So in other words, government distorted the consultation process in order to ensure that the review did not call for a child advocate and then used that review as evidence that

PEI does not need a child advocate. That there is a dippy-doodle for the record books.

If that is how government manipulates these processes then how can we have confidence that these reviews and strategies are being presented in good faith?

I find it intriguing that in the new throne speech, government advanced the commitment that, and again I quote: We will launch during this sitting a process to review and update the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, as if it were a new and original initiative. Well, I suppose it has been over two years since 2015, when that throne speech declared exactly the same thing, therefore our leaders can't be expected to remember everything promised, but surely they would recall in that speech in 2015 that they stated: My government will work to make government information more transparent, including a review of our freedom of information legislation. Now admittedly, they did not put a time frame on that commitment. It is these echoes of promises forgotten or never completed that makes me call this particular throne speech the 'we're going to try again and this time might even get it right' throne speech.

But on a more positive note, it's good to see significant progress on the development of the *Water Act*, a long standing initiative that this government inherited from the previous administration and I'm glad to see that government includes some of the outstanding concerns that stakeholders and experts are still calling for, such as a ban on hydraulic fracturing. But as I said during second reading just yesterday, I firmly believe that access to water should be declared a right and I'm looking forward to a continuation of our respectful and informative discussions in the Legislature during this sitting. There is potential for this initiative to be a real success if government puts the interests of Islanders and communities ahead of corporations.

The new *Water Act* also demonstrates the power of true public collaboration. There was very little agreement among stakeholders several years ago when the need for the new act became apparent, but with a thorough and meaningful consultation process, government was able to develop an act that has generated fairly extensive

agreement among all the different stakeholders – a significant achievement.

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

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** This government talks a lot about collaboration, yet last week when I asked the Premier what we, in opposition, could do to improve collaboration, his response focused entirely on collaborating with other people in the community. I found it discouraging that he does not seem to consider us partners in collaboration – the other parties in this House.

However, I will once again reach out to the government side and assure them that the Third Party caucus is still eager to work with all parties to bring to fruition previous commitments for meaningful changes that were promised during the last general election campaign –

**Mr. Trivers:** Good opposition.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** – and in all three throne speeches. There are still two and a half, perhaps three years, to the current mandate, assuming that there is a federal election in 2019, so there is still time to change course and start to live up to the commitments of transparency and accountability that you made to the people of Prince Edward Island. You can honour the vote and implement meaningful campaign finance reform, improve conflict of interest rules, and make good on your promise – and the new member from Charlottetown-Parkdale and I will work with you to achieve each and every one of these goals.

The Premier often refers to PEI as ‘the mighty Island’. Indeed, he named his economic plan The Mighty Island: A Framework for Economic Growth. Often when he references the mighty Island, it is in the context of business development, population growth, encouraging entrepreneurship, and expanding export markets.

When I think about the mighty Island, I see the resilience of our communities, our wonderful interconnectedness, the extraordinary generosity of neighbour to neighbour, our thriving artistic and music scenes, and the beauty of our landscapes and seascapes.

Islanders are deeply connected to the land and the sea – many have been rooted in this land for generations – this land has sustained human life for millennia, was wrestled away from the control of absentee landlords, provided trees for the shipbuilding industry, and fertile fields for farmers. But today, Islanders are anxious because they see the land and water under constant threat and one of the primary threats is the economic development model being promoted by this government. The industrial-style agriculture that must be practiced in order to compete in global commodity markets results in larger farms and more chemical interventions, such as fertilizers and pesticides. These chemicals leach into our groundwater and destroy our rivers through anoxic events and fish kills and the land is slowly stripped of its capacity to grow crops until it becomes nothing more than an inert medium for chemicals. And as our land withers, so do many of the hundreds of rural communities that have for so long defined our province.

I am reminded of a previous experiment when government encouraged farmers to go big with the hog industry here on Prince Edward Island. Government provided incentives to farmers to move away from small-scale mixed farming and build larger operations focused on a single product so they could compete in the international commodity markets. Many moved to hog farming, building specialized barns, and placing their future prosperity on this single commodity. But then, the global price of pork plummeted and farmers found their input costs were higher than the value of their pigs. The local hog plant closed and farmers were left on their own to clean up the mess.

These attempts to be global players make the Island economy vulnerable to forces well beyond our own ability to influence, like changes in the value of the Canadian dollar, the costs of fuel and transportation, large international trading agreements such as NAFTA, and massive government subsidies in foreign jurisdictions. But it is usually the little guy – the farmer, the pork plant worker who lost his pension benefits, or the small business people who end up suffering the consequences of these miscalculations and cleaning up politicians’ messes.

I can appreciate the temptation to focus on export markets. It gives politicians the opportunity to sponsor high profile trade missions with all the attendant pomp and photo-ops. And success can bring in impressive numbers with a quick hit to the Gross Domestic Product or an infusion of foreign cash. But just as an emphasis on exports can generate an economic boom, that boom is inevitably followed by a crash. It is my experience that when this happens, an elite few garner most of the benefits of the boom, while ordinary folks lose much more in the crash. In some ways, these schemes resemble a reverse Robin Hood, with government taking from taxpayers to give to the already wealthy.

In my vision of the mighty Island, we build on what is special about this Island. It is a place where, in addition to measuring the Gross Domestic Product, we will measure the well-being of Islanders. And not just their material well-being; but their physical and mental health; their access to good food; a clean environment; and a broad range of opportunities, both large and small, that contribute to a high quality of life – that's how, minister.

In my vision of the mighty Island, government policy will strengthen the interconnectedness and self-reliance of communities by decentralizing power from the fifth floor and not only consulting communities, but inviting them to be active participants in the decision-making process.

In my vision of the mighty Island, government will work to promote small local markets, where the focus is in developing a sustainable economy and ensuring the prosperity is spread more evenly across districts and between urban and rural Islanders.

In my vision of the mighty Island, politicians will put the needs of their constituents ahead of the demands of their party. The will of the people will not be distorted through the lens of an electoral system that allows a party that receives less than 50% of the vote to have 100% of the power. Elected members will be encouraged to collaborate across party lines and seek common goals, rather than exaggerated, partisan divisions that seek to increase discord and distrust.

And most of all, government and parties will be held to account by a robust system of independent oversight.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Buckle up

**Mr. Palmer:** I'm happy to speak to the great vision of this government and talk about some of the successes and exciting plans for the future.

I must start out by talking about the 2,500 new jobs created this past year.

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

**Mr. Trivers:** Did you write that yourself?

**Mr. Palmer:** I did so.

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

**Mr. Palmer:** Jobs at places like Vector Aerospace in Summerside in the aerospace sector, jobs at places like ADL in Summerside in the food processing sector.

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

**Mr. Palmer:** Jobs at New Leaf in Slemon Park in the agriculture sector, and jobs at IOS in Summerside in the IT sector.

It is great companies like these who are helping to grow our exports –

**Mr. Trivers:** What about jobs at Island Coastal?

**Mr. Palmer:** – and they bring new money into our province.

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

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

**Mr. Palmer:** Our Island workforce is second to none –