

Renew PEI: Economic Recovery and Growth Submission

Michele Beaton, MLA District 5 Mermaid-Stratford

The following recommendations are based on conversations I've had with constituents and Islanders across the province. While I hear about a multitude of issues which either directly or indirectly impact the economic health of our province, I have focused on four areas that I hear about most.

Address land use and land ownership concerns through legislation

Challenge: Not a day goes by that land use or land ownership is not discussed. Islanders have asked for changes to address many known issues. The province does not have an official plan and this is causing issues straight across this province. It is easily understood that air and water are shared resources but when land is discussed it is often referred to as ownership. However, land is a shared resource.

Recommended Actions:

- Implement recommendations from the Thompson commission, Carver Commission, and Task Force on Land Use Policy. If a recommendation is deemed unreasonable, or unsuitable, Islanders deserve to be informed as to why;
- Review legislation that received Royal Assent but has yet to be enacted and openly share why the government has not yet enacted the legislation;
- Create a land review investigation process that is timely and efficient;
- Develop a province-wide land use plan with emphasis on preserving agricultural land.

Improve rural internet connectivity and telecommunication costs for all Islanders

Challenge: The COVID-19 pandemic amplified our dependence on telecommunications to work, study, and stay informed in a safe environment. While the footprint of my district is largely covered by high speed internet and cell services, increased use on over-subscribed networks is causing issues. Islanders require internet services to be reliable with high upload and download speeds.

Farmers and businesses in rural communities have increased their reliance on technology and communications to conduct business. High speed internet has more gaps in geographical service but cellular also has significant gaps and that is unacceptable. Dropped calls and inaccessible data are costing Island businesses revenues. Now more than ever, we must ensure everyone can stay connected.

However, connectivity isn't enough. The cost of telecommunications is rising at a concerning rate. Islanders spend thousands of dollars annually for phone, cellular, television, and internet

services. I hear mostly from seniors who do not have the ability to reduce services through streaming and other internet/technology services. The rising costs and the fact they are on fixed incomes means reducing services. A phone/internet/tv bundle is costing Islanders more than \$2000/yr. For low-income Islanders this is in the vicinity of 10% of their annual income. This is too much and ends up pushing Islanders to reduce services. This jeopardizes their ability to stay informed and connected with their community.

Recommended Actions:

- Immediately renegotiate the agreement signed with Bell and Xplornet to bring high-speed internet to rural Islanders, including moving up the timeline of completion;
- Lobby CRTC for more protections against rising costs to end users;
- Continue to lobby the federal government to disburse more funds now from their national broadband fund and allow program stacking so Islanders with long driveways, line site issues, and costly builds can leverage more than one funding program to cover the cost;
- Commit to providing high-speed internet access that meets standards CRTC has set for all customers by the end of 2021;
- Demand best technology from providers including wireless to the home. The population of PEI is similar to telco pilot projects. Introducing new technology here should be encouraged;
- Declare the internet an essential service.

Strengthen PEI agriculture through sustainable local supply chains and crop diversification

Challenge: There is untapped potential in Canada's value-added food sector. While the food processing sector is already one of the country's largest employers, there is plenty of room to grow. Prince Edward Island can be instrumental in creating a model to engage farmers and entrepreneurs to increase international and interprovincial trade, inspire innovation, and break down barriers to economic growth across the country.

Selling a pound of raw agriculture product creates margin squeeze and it impacts our farmers the most. Investing in research & development to create high margin value-added products from our high quality crops creates an environment where all participants benefit. Businesses within the value-added food sector are usually small in size and cannot afford R&D. Government support to provide collaborative spaces creates opportunity, lessens initial capital investment and creates working relationships to provide more options for raw agricultural crops to be incorporated into value added products.

Recommended Actions:

- Invest in federal regulation-standard food manufacturing work spaces and equipment to be used by small businesses owners for research and development using a rental agreement to subsidize the investment;

- Cold storage facilities are needed to store raw crops in preparation for processing as well as for distribution and storage;
- Remove interprovincial trade barriers, with priority for food, manufactured food products, and essential supplies;
- Lobby the federal government to remove CFIA regulations for Island Abattoirs that only sell product in PEI;
- Implement sustainable and local procurement practices.

Implement Results-based Management practices across all government departments

Challenge: It is not enough to say a program is working. Government needs to be able to show that programs are working through setting measurable goals and measuring against those goals to remain accountable.

I have spoken to countless constituents that feel over-taxed, with little to show for where the public money has been spent. There are hidden taxes that disproportionately impact lower-income islanders. There needs to be greater accountability for how we collect revenues and how those funds are spent.

Government departments need to understand what the government strategic plan is and how they contribute to that overall vision. All programs need to measure the contribution to the plan.

Recommended Actions:

- Invest in assessing all current government programs using Results-based Management;
- Implement open government practices;
- Review all general revenue sources to identify disproportionately impacted groups including revenue sources through Crown Corporations (PEILCC, PEI Lotteries Commission and PEI Cannabis Management Corp, etc.).