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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2015

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

E-gaming legal costs (further)

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On Friday the hon. Opposition House Leader asked about legal costs, the up-to-date-costs, in regards to the e-gaming file. I checked with my department and they advise me that the bill is currently \$118,000. At the end of this process I will update the House on the final total.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

School water system safety (further)

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday during Question Period a question was asked on water testing in schools. School water is tested four times a year for bacteria for those schools that use well water. For those schools that are on municipal water the municipality ensures the quality of the water. The school board reports that there's an average of two water quality issues each year.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On Tuesday, when we were in Committee of the Whole House to consider *An Act to Amend the Sheriffs Act* –

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) respond. I'm sorry (Indistinct).

Premier: (Indistinct).

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Whistleblower legislation

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

Question to the Premier. Whistleblower legislation is a tool used widely to ensure transparency and accountability by giving public servants the safety (Indistinct) identify wrongdoing.

Mr. Premier, you announced plans for a whistleblower policy. Did you give any consideration to whistleblower legislation instead?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, yes we did, and this was part of our platform in the course of the election campaign .

Apparently it suited the voters that we would bring in whistleblower provisions and protections through a policy that has been developed and implemented and with which we're working with the public service to make it effective.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Question to the Premier: Why did you decide not to introduce whistleblower legislation and instead go with the a policy?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the initiative to bring in whistleblower protection is part of a larger program that our government has of openness and transparency and good government.

It's our view that by bringing it in as policy it's an opportunity to work with the workers and with the units and with the bargaining units or unions in the public service, and that's exactly what we're doing and what we have done in bringing forward this policy.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

Mr. Premier, why do you think the policy offers more protection to employees than legislation?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the policy offers the same protection to the employees as legislation.

By bringing it in as policy it's something that you can work with the employees in its development and its implementation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Premier, is there something about giving employees protection through legislation that you object to?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, of course I'm not objecting to legislation or I wouldn't be sitting here in this Legislature.

There are really three levels at which you can implement the kind of changes that we're talking about. You could bring in legislation, it could be done through regulation or it could be done through a policy. Our view is that a policy was the effective way to bring it forward in a timely fashion and then to work with the public service, with whom we work very closely on all matters, to make it effective and to value their work. That was exactly why we brought this in and we're proud of it and it's in place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

History has shown that even the best mentioned policies, intended policies, are sometimes ignored in practice. That's less the case with legislation. Don't you think that a whistleblower law would be a better way to go?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it's obvious that we believe that a policy is the appropriate way to proceed and what we laid out in our platform and what we've implemented, and I'm proud to say that it's at work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Ethics commissioner

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

Under the Premier's plan an employee can forward a complaint ultimately to the provincial ethics commissioner. Premier, who does that commissioner report to?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the commissioner of ethics reports to the Premier and I'd be happy to table her report here in the Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Premier, have you discussed this policy with the ethics commissioner?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I have, and I've discussed it with other officials and folks who are bringing this into action in the public service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Question to the Premier: Is that ethics commissioner position an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the ethics commissioner is appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

The person that we've appointed is a long-serving senior public servant, a former deputy attorney general, former deputy in several other departments, and someone who is regarded with the highest integrity by the government and by all of her colleagues in the public service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: (Indistinct) confused there with that answer. I'll ask it again.

Is the ethics commissioner independent of the Legislative Assembly?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: I'm not sure exactly what is meant by "independent of the Legislative Assembly." The ethics commissioner, Shauna Sullivan-Curley, a name that's well known and respected, is appointed by Lieutenant Governor in Council and her work is going to be the subject of a report on a regular basis, and we'd be happy to make that available to the Legislature.

So I don't think, if I can interpret the question properly, that we had in any sense intended for her to be independent of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Under your proposed policy, Mr. Premier, what powers will be awarded to the ethics commissioner when dealing with these complaints?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it's not a proposed policy, the policy has been adopted and it's in place.

The powers of the ethics commissioner are, in the first instance, to work with employees who bring complaints forward, which is a very important part of her role, or the role of that office, to work with the deputies and the senior leaders in the public service to be sure that the policy, and other policies regarding ethics and integrity as attached to her office, are being developed and implemented and made effective throughout the public service, and then to receive complaints where they come forward and then, if necessary, to bring them forward to me as Premier.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I want to ask one more question, I guess. I sort of question if we put the policies in place, we give it to the ethics commissioner, why would she answer to the Premier?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I, as Premier, am politically responsible for the leadership of the public service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Auditor General access to sealed documents

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

First and foremost, I'd like to thank the finance minister for bringing us back some information with regards to the cost so far incurred by the court case with regards to the \$25 million lawsuit against this government, but I would like to remind the minister that it was actually the hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque that

asked the question and not the Opposition House Leader.

My first question is actually for the Premier. Premier, you witnessed here yesterday where I attempted to find out answers for Islanders that are very concerned over this situation that has occurred under your government's watch to the tune of where we're at now with the \$25 million lawsuit against your government. Unfortunately, there were no answers forthcoming, Mr. Premier. However, you have campaigned, you have spoken, it has been your voice – talked about transparency, openness and doing things differently.

Mr. Premier: Will you assure Islanders that the Auditor General will have full access to the documents that your government sealed through the securities commission regarding the e-gaming scandal?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General, it's my understanding – I'm not directly involved – that the Auditor General has been in touch with officials throughout government and has been gaining the cooperation and full openness and cooperation from all of our officials.

On the particular question I cannot say with absolutely certainty, because of the way the question was asked, whether there may be other privacy issues that concern the ability of those officials to disclose the documents that may be asked for.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Premier's letter to Auditor General

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

Previously the Premier was asked to table a copy of the letter that went to the Auditor General asking for the scope of the audit that he had requested of the Auditor General. The Premier came back and said, basically: You can find that information on the Order of Council which we did and went to. It was very vague, so again, what we're asking for is openness, transparency.

Premier: Will you table the letter that you sent to the Auditor General requesting the audit and the scope of the audit?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I have no hesitation whatsoever in tabling the letter.

I'm sure it will say the same thing as is said in the Order in Council that set out the request to the Auditor General, which is the proper way that it's done. But in any event, if it will help anybody to see that the communication with the Auditor General was the same as is in the Order in Council, which is a public document, then of course I'll be happy to table the document, the letter.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

School system improvement re: dissolution of school board

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A question to the minister of education. Minister, you claim collaboration to be the cornerstone moving forward and you've risen in this House a number of times and said you would work with all stakeholders. You're the same minister who cut teachers here last spring so Islanders obviously can't trust you.

Question. The government made a commitment to more public engagement in education, but all they've seen is an announcement that does away with an elected school board. How does this improve the school system for Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The changes in the education system will now ensure that all of our resources are focused on learner excellence.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier made sure that there were two other ministers and himself attended the education announcement, and the minister promised Islanders that he would do the right thing for the children.

Question to the minister: When will we hear from you on the details of your plan on education and these new changes?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now, instead of the department and the school board and principals and teachers working separately to help Island students, we'll all work together to help Island students. As we move forward with our new advisory councils, everyone works in a very collaborative and engaging effort to focus on learner achievement.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's pretty shy on details, and of course all Islanders want to know what the details are on this and they're waiting quite patiently for it. Based on the minister's answers yesterday and so far today he doesn't seem like he's up to speed with what's going on in his own department. The minister said he'd look at holding public meetings with the sole trustee during transition.

Transition group public meetings

Question to the minister: Can the minister confirm today that teachers, communities, and parents will have an opportunity to be consulted and consult with this new transition group and that public meetings will be held on it?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As our new education system moves forward, teachers, parents, communities, and the students will all be engaged in the process with the advisory councils from several different levels.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

School system improvement re: advisory councils

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister seems unable to explain anything at all when it comes to his new changes.

Can the minister explain how the new advisory councils work? Isn't it just a little bit more window dressing? What will improve in the education system because of these new councils?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The education system will now be moving forward with collaboration from all stakeholders to ensure that student achievement is our number one focus. Our focus is on the learner and we will have input from all stakeholders.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

EELC minister and education changes

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is the minister that was responsible for teacher cuts back in June, and a wrong decision that he eventually had to overturn.

Question to the minister: How can we expect you not to overturn these new announced changes in education? Why should Islanders trust you to make the right decision for them?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As minister of education, I take the education of our Island students very seriously. We as a government take the education very seriously and make it a priority. Therefore we're creating these new councils to engage the community, to include all stakeholders and to listen to all stakeholders as we shape the future of the education system on PEI, focused on our learners.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Advisory councils and school closures

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know that's (Indistinct) long since your plan over there to close schools on Prince Edward Island and the minister seems to be talking about these advisory councils and how they're going to save his bacon every day.

If your new advisory council advises you that no schools should be closed on Prince Edward Island, will you commit today that you'll listen to them or will you fire them too?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I will commit to is working with all stakeholders from all levels, all advisory councils, and to listen to these advisory councils. We will shape our education system to better enhance learner achievement on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Classroom caps

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister has failed students and teachers in this province time and time again. Teachers have been pushing to have their voices heard for quite some time.

Question to the minister: Now that you are in charge of education as per your announcement the other day, will you listen to teachers and commit to hard caps in classrooms that teachers have been pleading for for so long?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Absolutely.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Classroom staff reductions moratorium

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Classrooms are bursting at the seams. Teachers, EAs, support staff, are always on the chopping block. You cut teachers last June, and EAs. Parents have legitimate concerns over the number of teachers and EAs that are in the classrooms.

Question to the minister: Now that you're responsible for education as per your announcement the other day, will you commit to a moratorium on any staff reductions in Island classrooms?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member from Georgetown-St. Peters said that we cut EAs this year. We did not do that. In fact, we put eight new full-time equivalents back into the school system to focus on students and the front line.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously EAs came out of the classrooms in Cardigan, and I know full well that they did, so that's a cut.

School system improvement re: advisory councils

This minister's newly minted advisory councils have no mandate and they have no legislative protection. They are at the whim of the Premier. Islanders want more action. How do we know that these aren't just window dressing?

Question to the minister: How will these new councils improve education? Will your new advisory committees' recommendations be binding or will you simply listen to the things that suit your own interests?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're a government that believes in transparency. We believe in collaboration and engagement. That's exactly what we're doing, going forward with our new education plan for Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

EELC minister and confidence

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier made good and sure that he had two other ministers and himself attend the announcement. One was just the emcee but it was very clear that day that the Premier had lost confidence in you as minister and he brought other strengths along.

Minister, isn't it true that everyone in Prince Edward Island has lost confidence in your ability to lead education here in Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wouldn't be here today if I didn't believe there was a better tomorrow for our Island learners. I will do everything I possibly can to engage our frontline workers, to engage our stakeholders, to do what we can for student achievement. Our focus, and our one and only focus, is on learners and their student achievement.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Psychiatrist's salary and audit

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I want to start by thanking the Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services for promptly reporting back to the House on the matter of the \$1.13 million payment to an Island psychiatrist.

I was shocked to read in that report that there is no formalized auditing process in place within the department so in the meantime we have to work with the existing process. The minister's response stated that: During periodic reviews of physician billing, and I quote: any irregularities discovered may trigger an audit.

A question to the minister. Could the minister give the House the average amount that psychiatrists charge under the fee for service in Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

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

I don't know the exact numbers but I want to be clear. I'm not sure if all the information did get in the note, but there are annual audit work plans that are designed by Health PEI under the *Health Services Act*. If you go back to the Auditor General's report back in 2009 there were clear recommendations on physician billing.

Currently we have a claims billing system that is tied in very directly to the Master Agreement which is a negotiated contract. I would like to reassure the Leader of the

Third Party that audits are ongoing and they're based on a range of activity. Audit work plans are identified, but also if we identify billing practices that we see variances in billing payments, we certainly have the ability to go in and start audits.

I do want to reiterate that these are ongoing and the work plans are built and they evolve through the course of the year.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All of the information that you just stated, minister, was not in that note. I would like to know from the minister: Can you confirm whether or not this particular psychiatrist billing did indeed trigger an audit?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

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

One of our priorities in government, as the minister of health who oversees the *Health Services Act*, is to make sure that we get good value for every dollar we have in our over \$600 million health care budget.

I do want to confirm that there is an audit that has been going on on psychiatry. That is part of the audit work plan and that is ongoing. We'll continue to allow that work to go on and we'll allow Health PEI to sort of evaluate that audit and also to look at recovery practices, if necessary.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm still not clear whether the audit is on psychiatry or on this particular psychiatrist.

Could the minister please tell the House how long these audits typically take, who is doing it, and when the results will be made available to the public?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services.

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

I will bring that information back. It is on a group of psychiatrists. This particular psychiatrist that has been referred to by the Leader of the Third Party has a very full practice. He's a fee for service. I do want to reiterate that fee for service physicians in the province are responsible for payment of all their staff, all their operational costs, which is part of their responsibility.

We do have a Master Agreement that's negotiated in good faith. We're currently in Master Agreement negotiations. But I'll bring all of that information back to the Leader of the Third Party for his clarification.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Personal tax exemption

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is to the Minister of Finance, but in asking him the question, I just need to allude to a statement made by the minister of agriculture this week.

He said: A balanced budget is important because it will give government the capacity to explore new alternatives. One alternative I have heard over and over is: Once this government reaches a balanced budget, could it increase the basic personal tax exemption?

Mr. Minister, would you be exploring an increase in this exemption once fiscal balance has been reached?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The quick answer to that question is yes. Once we reach a fiscal balance it's our government's position that we will do a broad view of tax in the province.

Mr. LaVie: When?

Mr. Aylward: This'll never happen.

Mr. Roach: I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that we've made some moves toward that already.

In the past spring and summer –

Some Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. Roach: – Legislature we brought in reductions with respect to the low-income tax reduction. That put savings to those people that it affected in excess of \$1.7 million.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Supplementary question to the same minister.

I'm sure there are many ways for the government, once they reach balance, to leave money in more pockets of Islanders. This is one way.

Could the minister tell us if there are other alternatives under consideration? I know this is early, but is there anything we could expect once the books are balanced?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. LaVie: Who wrote that, the minister of workforce?

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, there are a number of different ways. I know that it may seem early but we're preparing for budget for 2016 and I know that my staff is considering all of those avenues as we speak, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

O'Leary early years centres

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Education, Culture and Early Childhood.

The PEI government has invested in establishing early years centres on PEI to better prepare children entering the kindergarten and, eventually, the provincial schools system. Early years centres are an integral part of communities with working parents and promoting certifiable curriculum to our young children in their formative years.

I notice on the government website there are 47 early year centres registered on PEI, but yet none between Tignish and Tyne Valley. With the recent closure of KinderStart Early Years Centre in Bloomfield, this is leaving a huge void for working parents in the riding of O'Leary-Inverness with limited access to affordable child care.

Will the minister be calling for proposals in the near future for a government-supported early years centre in the O'Leary area?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, we will be putting out a call for interest in the very near future for anyone that's interested in that particular region for licensing. There are regulations in place where to become an early years' centre they have to be a licensed facility for six months prior to that. We do have two in the area that are applying at this time for licensing, one for daycare and the other for full day child care.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness, your first supplementary question.

Mr. Henderson: Thanks, Minister.

Would the minister consider more than one early years centre designation for the region as in Bloomfield, where the previous one was, it's quite a long drive from West Point

to Bloomfield, it's a lot drive from Portage to Bloomfield, Haliburton to Bloomfield. So would he consider – with 47 across the Island, would he consider two in the O'Leary area?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, it's the child care facilities board that considers licensing for these establishments and it's based on a needs basis per region, but I'm certain if there's a need and there's a need for two, they will be certainly more than open to looking into it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously the one that is a private operation in the O'Leary area is the Mother Goose daycare. What is the criteria for an early years centre that would be supported by government so we can understand the full complexity of what it takes to qualify?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I mentioned earlier, a licensed child care centre must be in operation for a minimum of six months before being able to make application to the child care facilities board.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member for Belfast-Murray River.

Atlantic Gateway and TIE minister

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Atlantic Gateway and Trade Corridor Strategy, a partnership between the Government of Canada and the four Atlantic Provinces, was released March 23rd, 2011. This government has a signatory to the Atlantic Gateway Strategy.

Question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Minister, what are your priorities under the Atlantic Gateway?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, we have had some meetings, actually, on that particular area. We're looking at making sure that our roads for transportation are there for our exporting industries. The ferry is also another priority for us. In my discussions, actually, with the new Minister of Transport at the federal level I raised those particular two issues with him.

Speaker: The hon. Member for Belfast-Murray River.

Wood Islands ferry and government support

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Atlantic Gateway is an integral part of Canada's national system of corridors and gateways. Improving our reliable and secure transportation network, which this province is touting as part of our Food Island strategy, we do need to have a great infrastructure in place. A vital component of our transportation network is the Wood Islands ferry. The service was up over 30% in the month of September alone as per this government's own statistics.

Why, then, has this government failed to invest in or support the Wood Islands ferry and surrounding infrastructure?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, I'm not sure if you're aware, but the responsibility for infrastructure and upgrades to ferries is a federal responsibility.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm well aware of that the ferry is a federal issue and I'm looking forward to working with our MP for the riding, Mr. MacAulay.

This government has divested, not invested, in the ferry infrastructure around the Wood Islands hub since this government came into office. Just last month the minister closed the permanent scale house to our ferry complex –

Mr. LaVie: Shame, shame!

Ms. Compton: – to the detriment to the industry, to all truckers in our area. Does the minister support investing provincial dollars from her budgets into maintaining and perhaps enhancing our ferry service?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)!

Speaker: Order, please!

The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just in response to the scale house itself, we actually have extended services on the roads in eastern PEI by putting two of the employees out on the road and increasing inspections of heavy trucks that are on the road. We still maintain that service as well for the trucking business that is going across the Wood Islands ferry.

We repurposed the scale that was there into the existing new facility and we have a portable scale that goes across eastern PEI, as you may have seen. I do know from speaking with the employees they're quite happy with their new role. I would congratulate them on the excellent work that they're doing and I'd be happy to continue that discussion with the hon. member. If she has any further questions I'll get that back to her.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the conversation you had with the employees is maybe different than what I had. This is a collaborative government, and that's what they tout. You might want to speak to the truckers from the area and ask them how they feel about it.

Long-term ferry contract

Minister, will you take a leadership role and spearhead a joint investment by the provincial and federal governments towards a secure and long-term contract with the ferry?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Absolutely, that's one of my priorities.

Speaker: The hon. Member for Belfast-Murray River.

Gateways and Border Crossing fund

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Transport Canada has a specific program named the Gateways and Border Crossing fund. This \$2.1 billion dollar fund is focused on strategic trade corridors linking to international gateways. The activities under the Gateways and Border Crossing's fund build on the Atlantic Gateway initiative.

Minister, are you aware of the federal funding under this program?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, I don't have those details with me today but I'll be certainly happy to get some more information on that.

Mr. Myers: Bring her up to speed. You bring her up to speed. (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This Gateways and Border Crossing fund – which I have a copy here, I'd be happy to table it and you can look at it at your leisure – that dates back to the early years of this government and dates back and runs until March 31st, 2018. The Atlantic Gateways portion of this fund is \$2.2 million dollars.

I recognize the potential for Wood Islands' gateway hub under the funding of this program, and I would hope the minister does too.

Minister, will you guarantee provincial support for an application under the Gateways and Border Crossings fund?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, in conjunction with my other partners across Atlantic Canada and the other ministers, we certainly work together on that particular project and we'll continue to work together. Whatever we can get for Prince Edward Island is important as well.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, minister. I look forward to that collaboration because this government's record in District 4 is less than stellar and less than satisfactory. I think that Wood Islands is a gateway to this province. It's something that all Islanders should be concerned about. I know the residents in eastern PEI are.

Minister, will the province immediately undertake work to submit an application for the Wood Islands gateway under this federal fund?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I noted, hon. member, we are in discussions with the new transport minister on the importance of the ferry. With our new MP and Cabinet minister, the hon. Lawrence MacAulay, we will continue to work in

partnership. It is a very key link to our province and we want to engage and ensure and secure that service on a long-term basis. We'll be working to look at extending the agreement that's in place. It ends in March 2016. We believe there should be a long-term agreement and we'll be working towards that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, I'll ask the question again: Will the province immediately undertake work to submit an application on behalf of Wood Islands and the Wood Islands gateway under this federal fund?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. member, we will continue to work on projects that we can partner with on the federal government under the new program. I'm sure we'll continue to explore those options.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: I'll ask the question again.

Mr. Aylward: Ask it slower this time.

Ms. Compton: Will you please commit to applying for funding for the Wood Islands hub under this federal program immediately?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, any funding that we can get for the Wood Island ferries we will ensure that we get it.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Environmental Advisory Council report

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a question for the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment. At the water act consultations the Environmental Advisory Council has been gathering a lot of information and they're going to deliver a report. At one of the meetings the question came up as to whether that report will be made available to the public.

Will the minister commit that the entire report in an unabridged format will be available for the general public to review?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Appreciate the opportunity to bring a little more clarity to that if it hasn't already been made clear at those meetings.

We are currently eight meetings over our consultations across Prince Edward Island, four more to go. I've tried to make it clear at the meetings that once the Environmental Advisory Council has put together what they would consider would look like a draft act, we will take that again and go out all across Prince Edward Island in another round of public consultation meetings.

At that time, myself will be at the table, as well as members of my staff, to present it to the public and to say: Does this respect the message that you brought forward earlier in the consultations and is it exactly what you would like to see going forward?

There will be a full Island-wide consultation program again for that, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, final question.

Mr. Trivers: At these meetings for the water act consultations the question has been asked more than once of the EAC, the Environmental Advisory Council, what their deliverable is out of this, and they have said consistently they are going to prepare a report that contains all their findings. They have said they are not targeting the preparation of a draft water act in any way, shape or form.

Minister of Communities, Land and Environment, can you confirm exactly what the deliverable is from the EAC themselves, who have been the council that has been hearing all the water act questions?

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Of course, the Environmental Advisory Council has been at the table and they're doing a tremendous job listening to Islanders from all across the Island. They are accepting the input. They're documenting it, they're putting it together, they're openly discussing it between themselves, and they will be a big, integral part of forming the new draft act as we go forward. That's where that information will be brought forward out to all the public.
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: End of Question Period.