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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

TUESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2015

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Tryon River

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

Question to the minister of the environment.

Have you had any conversations or discussions with the minister of transportation in the last 72 hours?

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

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, yes, the minister of transportation and I have (Indistinct) caucus today and had a discussion on several items.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

Back in the last couple of months there's been talk in this government that every measure had been taken possible to deal with any possible damage or runoff to the Tryon River to lessen any damage to the fishery or to that river.

What measures have been taken in the last 72 hours? Because last night on the news we heard how the place had been flooded, it's been washed out, the berm ways have given way, and the river's now full of silt and everything else. What have you done?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just to give an update to the House, yesterday, as you are aware, there was a heavy rainfall. Actually, 100 millimetres fell in the Tryon area. The (Indistinct) construction of that project started in July. The construction part ended on November

13th. The remediation to finish up the Branch Road in particular was in progress during this period. The remediation we're taking on that is to install a rock-lined ditch that will carry the water from the Branch Road into the Tryon area and then released into the river.

We have been in the process of finalizing and formalizing the environmental requirements there. The silt catchers are still in place. The department has been out there on site inspecting it. We'll continue to work with the contractor to ensure that the final part of that project is finalized and that rock ditch is installed.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Question to the minister of transportation. I was actually out there on Sunday and I was out there again yesterday and I drove by there this morning. I didn't see any work being done.

I'm asking the question: Will there be a commitment from the department to do everything possible to lessen the damage to that river and to make sure this doesn't happen?

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

Ms. Biggar: Again, thank you, hon. member.

Just to continue on with the explanation again, actually, during the construction we certainly did some improvements on the fish habitat area, as part of that project, to ensure that there's adequate structure in place for the fish transportation.

But also, in terms of the actual construction, as I said, it was on its final phase. We are continuing to work with that contractor to finish up that project. Then, following that, of course we're working around the weather. We couldn't work on it yesterday, as you can imagine. We also will be doing hydro-seeding and mulching to do the groundcover for the winter. We will continue to monitor

that diligently and ensure that that work is completed up as soon as possible.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Premier and Budget

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

Question to the Premier. How long did you serve in the role, Mr. Premier, as the Minister of Finance?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I was Minister of Finance from February 23rd until May 24th, I'll say, whatever was the date of the swearing in of our Cabinet posts after the election.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Would it be fair to say that you had a great degree of influence in making and developing the budget that's before us?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the budget that's before us, may I ask, does that refer to the capital budget or the operating budget?

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Operating budget, Mr. Premier.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the budget development process would have begun in the fall of 2014 through a process that involved – included a public consultation and of course the development of management plans by the departments.

By the time I became Minister of Finance and Premier on February 23rd we were in a process that would be known as budget

review. My role at that stage would be more in that of Premier, which is, as Premier one does, and I will in the future, chair that budget review process.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Premier and disinfection service cuts

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

When the issue of cuts to the potato disinfection service came out up to the committee, the minister says his hands were tied. The minister of agriculture said his hands were tied because the Budget was already set when he arrived.

Were you the architect, Mr. Premier, of these cuts to disinfection service?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

What I said at the committee was that when the budget came through those numbers were put in place. We took responsibility for that going forward, we brought that forward as was proposed, fully accepting that's the way it was.

We were asked by our Premier and by the government that we have to get to fiscal balance. Each department worked with that and found areas in which they thought they could level the playing field to some degree, find some dollars to help us get to that point.

That's where that came from. It was started in the previous government, when it was handed over to this, we took responsibility for it and brought it forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The question is – back last week the minister of agriculture said in the standing committee

your hands were tied on the budget you presented. Your hands were tied.

My question is to the Premier or to the minister of agriculture: Who made the decision to make these cuts to the disinfection services? Was it the Premier or was it the minister of agriculture?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: That's exactly what – thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I explained in the standing committee was the fact that the budget was brought forward. When it was being brought forward, as the Premier has explained, when it got to our table and the new government came in, we took those numbers, looked them over, and decided we would take them forward.

We took full responsibility for that. That's what we put forward for budget. That's what was brought to the Table in the House, that was discussed in our budget at the Table, and was passed by the Legislature.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Disinfection motion free vote

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. We'll go back to the Premier.

The disinfection motion that we brought on the floor will be coming to the House, hopefully today. Will you commit, Mr. Premier, to allowing all members of your government – all members – to vote freely, totally freely, without any influence from your office on this issue?

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) pressure.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, this is something that we're still discussing as a caucus and I'm not sure that it's in order in Question Period to be asking the Premier what his caucus is going to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Doctor's English-language test

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This spring there was a case of a doctor who wanted to work right here on PEI forced to take a test to prove that she could speak English.

To the minister of health: At the time when there was a shortage of family doctors on PEI, particularly in rural PEI, why is the PEI college of physicians forcing English-speaking doctors trained in English-speaking universities to take an English language test?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

As a department we take recruitment and the number of physicians that are located in communities across Prince Edward Island very seriously. I am very aware of the ongoing discussions publicly, but I do want to clarify for the Member from Souris-Elmira that the college of physicians and surgeons is independent. They have the regulatory responsibility to license physicians currently in the Province of Prince Edward Island. We are, have been, and will continue to have discussions at ways that we can continue to expand.

I would caution the Member from Souris-Elmira to refer to a physician shortage because currently 95% of the population of Prince Edward Island has access to a family physician and compensate some of the best salaries here in the Province of Prince Edward Island. We are very committed to making sure that we alleviate the few shortages and are committed to addressing these issues, particularly in rural communities in Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would advise this minister to get outside the Charlottetown area and get in to rural PEI and see what we have for doctors in rural PEI. We've been talking about this issue now for four years. Premier came to Souris – you promised doctors in Souris, you promised them. You wanted District 1 seat, that's what you wanted. You promised –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) question.

Mr. LaVie: You promised the people of Souris four doctors.

The doctor withdrew from PEI. Within 48 hours she was approved for a medical license to work in another province in Canada. For some reason doctors who are qualified to work in other provinces in Canada are not qualified to work in PEI.

Minister of health: At the time of family physician shortage – particularly in rural areas – why is the college of physicians enforcing a higher standard to start practicing on PEI than other provinces use?

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

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

I'm very well aware of the situation in the community of Souris. I want to reiterate to the Member from Souris-Elmira that as a department which oversees the *Health Services Act* here in the Province of Prince Edward Island, we're extremely committed to making sure that every islander has access to a family physician. We continue to build a very robust primary health care network across the province. I'm very well aware of the situation in Souris.

When we took government in 2007 we were on the brink of closing the hospital because of physician shortages. We built it – the complement which was at four, which went down to three, and currently right now we have a third physician who is on a temporary locum license who is practicing, and we're very committed to make sure that we provide the best access we possibly can and

to make health care strong and sustainable in rural Prince Edward Island, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This minister right here, he has full control right here, and Premier, you're over him. You're the one that promised the doctors, you didn't invite him up to the announcement, you have control over him, you make it happen.

This doctor who left stated that she felt this language policy is discriminatory against English-speaking Canadians who get their medical degrees abroad. The PEI college of physician applies a cookie cutter approach on applicants, which is failing our province.

To the minister of health: Why is government allowing the PEI college of physicians to have policies that discourage fully qualified doctors trained in international medical schools from practicing medicine right here on PEI?

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

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

I am very aware as the minister – I've been the minister responsible for health care in the Province of Prince Edward Island the majority of my time as an elected official. Very aware of the frustrations and the challenges. It's probably in all of our best interests currently that the elected officials not start getting into granting physician licenses here in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

We are committed to working with the medical society –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct).

Mr. Currie: Very committed, Mr. Speaker, to making sure that we work on potential opportunities to improve access for Islanders here in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

I do respect the work by the college of physicians. They have the regulatory responsibility, just like every other jurisdiction and territory and province in this country, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

College of physicians' policy on lack of doctors

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is well documented that not having access to a family physician in a timely manner negatively impacts one's health.

To the minister of health: Minister, are you aware of any policy or position the college of physicians has regarding the health effects of having no doctors available, especially in rural communities?

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

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

I've said numerous times on the floor of this Assembly that the quality and the sustainability of how we service constituents in rural Prince Edward Island is the utmost priority here.

We understand the current challenges in sustaining a provincial health care system, but we recognize that the stronger our health care delivery is in rural communities to manage the volume of chronic disease, the stronger our acute service will be for all Islanders who are coming to Charlottetown and Summerside at the two major referral hospitals.

Very committed. I'm working consistently and working with the college of physicians to look at opportunities to continue to enhance our ability to attract and address the access issues in a number of areas which, I believe, I think there are possibly three vacancies in rural communities across Prince Edward Island.

When we came in to government in 2007 there was 199 physicians working in this province. Today we have approximately 250

physicians, approximately a 48% increase. We continue to work hard. Our current residency program, which was implemented four years ago, we've retained 17 out of 25 physicians. The five that are graduating, I believe that two are from the community of Souris, this coming spring, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

He said they were from Souris, but will he let them work there? Or will these students have to take an English test?

To the minister of health: Are you aware of any recruiting support or strategy that the college of physicians has to address the shortage of family doctors in rural PEI?

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

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

The college is not responsible for recruiting physicians to the Province of Prince Edward Island. Their mandate is to license physicians that are coming. I recognize that we have seen an increase in the number of med students graduating from Canadian schools, but we're also seeing an intense volume increase from internationally trained physicians that are coming back into the country.

We're very committed. As I shared in the previous line of questioning, our numbers and the growth and the increase that we've made in attracting physicians has been positive. I'm very confident. We've got a very robust, very committed team on recruitment and retention working inside the department who works very closely with the college and the med society to make that we continue to address the physician opportunities, particularly in rural communities, which I believe is in O'Leary and in Souris, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's the same answer I've been hearing for four years now, the same answer and you know it.

The minister is not aware of the college of physicians having any support for recruitment of family doctors. Why they're holding a higher standard of acceptance than another province. Or most importantly, why the College of Physicians are still turning away fully trained English-speaking doctors who are quickly employed by other provinces.

Mr. Myers: It's a country club, that's why (Indistinct).

Mr. LaVie: Minister of health: Why does the college of physicians have all the authority and none of the responsibility regarding the family physician shortage here on PEI?

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

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

I'm fully aware of the frustrations and the challenges. There's been public conversations from physicians who've been trying to come to the Province of Prince Edward Island and have been extremely frustrated.

Currently, under the *Medical Act*, the college of physicians has the regulatory responsibility to license physicians which is very consistent in every province and every territory in this country. We've been working very closely with the college of physicians. We've got a good working relationship. We've been working towards opportunities. I'm very committed to continuing to improve access for constituents in various communities across Prince Edward Island, particularly in the community of O'Leary, the community of Tyne Valley, and the community of Souris. Very pleased at the progress we've made.

Our residency program has been very successful in retaining and attracting physicians after their second year of residency here. We're going to continue to promote our provincial health care system. I believe that we've got a strong health care system – not without its challenges – but we are very committed to making sure that we knock that 95% of people that have access and we eliminate –

Mr. Aylward: Eighty-seven per cent –

Mr. Currie: – we eliminate the 7,500 Islanders currently sitting on the registry to get us to 100%, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Aylward: Talk to your CEO.

Mr. Currie: Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the minister of health: Why does this government allow the chasing away of qualified family doctors in the face of shortages right here on PEI? Why not keep them right here on PEI, our family physicians?

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

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

I think we're doing that we're doing a reasonably good job at attracting physicians. I did share that in 2007 we had 199 physicians practicing and working, some of which are specialists. Today we've got approximately 250. That's a 48% increase. If you look at the CIHI data that recently came out as far as how we're compensating our physicians here in the Province of Prince Edward Island, we're doing reasonably well so we've been able to retain and stabilize our physician supply.

We're currently looking at and reviewing our physician complement to make sure that we get good value and that our productivity numbers are consistent and balanced as we continue to improve access. I'll continue to work with the college of physicians, and

have been working very closely with the college of physicians, to look at modernizing and looking at ways to be consistent with licensing practices with other jurisdictions.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Tryon River and local construction

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

I would like to expand on some questions that opened Question Period today from the Leader of the Opposition. Like him, I was at the Tryon River yesterday during the height of the storm, and like him I saw no government employees working, and certainly no mitigation efforts at all in the area of the worse siltation.

Heavy rainfall in the last few days has led to significant –

Mr. LaVie: Shame, shame!

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – runoff and siltation in the Tryon River, amongst others on the Island.

Last spring engineers with TIR promised fishers in the area that no silt would enter the Tryon River.

A question to the hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Does she agree that the devastating siltation that occurred yesterday in the Tryon River is a direct result of the recent construction in that area?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, I think you could hopefully agree that there's no 100% guarantee on when it comes to weather events, and I don't think there was a 100% guarantee given at the time of construction. However, there was a commitment that every effort would be made to ensure mitigation measures were put in place to protect the surrounding areas. I know that was carried out.

Just to expand a little bit again, the Branch Road area of this particular project is still under completion. Unfortunately, during this period of time is when this rain event has hit, and we will be continuing to finalize the environmental side of that project to ensure that there is proper runoff that will prevent siltation. We had people out around yesterday, not on site. We had people inspecting. You cannot put machines on site to do mitigation measures in the middle of a 100-millimetre rain event.

However, to follow up on that, I drove from Tyne Valley to Charlottetown yesterday and every ditch I came by was running red. So I wouldn't say that –

Mr. LaVie: Oh, you're (Indistinct) doing your job –

Ms. Biggar: – it was –

Mr. Aylward: So was the (Indistinct) –

Ms. Biggar: – a one area event. However, anything that we can do to protect the fisheries in Prince Edward Island we certainly will do that.

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

Tryon River siltation compensation to fishers

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

I, like every other member of this House, has access to weather forecasts. I'm sure the department of transportation also has access to weather forecasts. It was no surprise that yesterday we ended up with 100 millimetres of rain.

Talking of the fisheries on Prince Edward Island and their protection, a million oyster seeds were planted in that river this fall, an annual practice that is carried out to sustain the fishery that supports over 70 families in the Tryon area. By the way, that gives a daily economic activity of over \$30,000 in the local community, \$30,000 a day.

Will the government be compensating fishers if this siltation impacts the fishery?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our particular department works very closely with the oyster industry in providing assurances that they have access to their fishery areas. This particular year we did upgrades to the Hurds Point Road to help them access their fishing area. I work very closely with the PEI Shellfish Association to ensure that they have the funds there as well to provide programs, and we will continue to work with the PEI Shellfish Association and other fisheries for access to their fishing areas.

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

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

I shall tell the two fishers I met with yesterday that I can't tell them whether they're going to receive compensation if this is an issue.

River protection standards

Climate change is projected to bring more storms and more extreme precipitation to Atlantic Canada. The situation that we saw yesterday in Tryon is going to become more commonplace as we go into the future. Does this government intend to increase standards for protecting PEI rivers into the future?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As part of this particular project, I think you would agree, if you drove by there when we installed that culvert, you wondered what was going on, but that was a plan for the future for our next 100 years' events. Part of our mindset in planning our projects is to take in mind climate change, just like I said with the Cascumpec bridge. We're raising that level as well to accommodate future climate change events that may occur in different areas.

However, that is part-and-parcel of when we do a project, we do go through environmental assessment as part of our

whole project assessment, and we will continue to plan any of those projects, keeping in mind – unfortunately, as I noted, this particular project, the final mitigation environmentally had not been able to complete and we will be continuing to finalize that particular project and putting mulch down there which prevent any further runoff over the winter.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

Rural Action Plan update

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question's for the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism. The Prince Edward Island Rural Action Plan was implemented in April of 2010 in hopes of reinvigorating rural parts of the province. This program has had numerous successes and has been the driving force behind some great initiatives. I see that progress has been made in several of the goals outlined in this plan.

There are also many new initiatives and programs coming from the Department of Economic Development and Tourism recently. Would the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism please give an update on the Rural Action Plan and if there'll be a new plan put in place once this one is completed?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the Rural Action Plan was highly successful. There were 40 action items outlined in the Rural Action Plan and I'm confident every action has been addressed to some degree over the last number of years.

You need only look at the wind power development supported by the province over the last five years. We've installed new biomass heating systems. We've made broadband Internet available across the Island. We've supported our primary industries, especially in rural PEI, with financing and grant support.

Mr. Aylward: That's not what we asked the other (Indistinct).

Mr. MacDonald: We've provided financing grants and business development support to hundreds of companies across rural Prince Edward Island, including Aspin Kemp and Associates, MacDougall Steel Erectors Inc. and many others. We just had to record years in the tourism industry, which is especially important to rural PEI. We continue to support the Food Island partnership, which is usually important in our primary industries and again, in rural PEI.

Through the Island Community Fund we've supported dozens and dozens of community development projects across Prince Edward Island. We are in the final stages of developing a new water act for the province to protect our most precious natural resources.

Mr. LaVie: Answer!

Mr. MacDonald: All of this relates directly to the goals and actions outlined in the plan.

Mr. LaVie: Answer!

Mr. MacDonald: Now, as for the future plans, we await final details from the new federal government on how it intends to invest in rural infrastructure moving forward.

Mr. LaVie: Answer!

Mr. MacDonald: We will continue to consult directly with rural communities across the Island.

Mr. LaVie: Holy God.

Speaker: Hon. minister –

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: I must ask – hon. member, I don't –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) dead under you guys –

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) five minutes to say that?

Speaker: I just want to remind every member, please refrain from asking a minister to give a report.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Murphy: Yes, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

It was an update. I guess an update could be considered a report, for sure.

Job creation in western PEI

Supplementary to the same minister. Alberton recently suffered yet another business closure. Miminigash is also in need of a little shot in the arm. As you know, the federal government has singled potential investment and infrastructure in the Island. My hope is that western Prince Edward Island will benefit from this stimulus.

My question to the Minister: Does the department have plans to focus on the job creation component of this infrastructure investment, especially in the western part of the province?

Mr. Myers: Through a summit.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

We support rural economic development through many grant programs. When we talk about rural development, we talk about \$348 million dollars presently invested in Prince Edward Island through grant monies, capital grant monies, capital loan monies in Prince Edward Island, and over 80% of that monies is in rural Prince Edward Island –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacDonald: – through Finance PEI.

On the other hand, we have \$20 million dollars through IPEI invested in businesses throughout Prince Edward Island and 50% of that monies is in rural PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville, your second supplementary question.

Western PEI and government branch

Mr. Murphy: Thank you.

To the same minister: I've raised questions several times in this House asking the previous government and now I'm asking this government. The western part of the province is in my region – in my mind there's four regions in the province and the western part of the province is the only region that isn't home to a government department or some branch of government. I see this would be a great way to stimulate some economic activity in my part of the province. Will you bring this back to your Cabinet table for some discussion?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, we've been in this position for six months as a newly elected government and our mandate is entrepreneurship, and if we're going to create entrepreneurship we're going to look every aspect and every location across Prince Edward Island to do that.

We're going to invigorate our youth, we're going to invest in our communities, and our rural development, as I'd mentioned before. We're going to continue to do that. If there's opportunities in the western part of the province or the eastern part of the province or central PEI, we're going to be there for those opportunities to help these businesses succeed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton and the Government Whip.

Programs for start-up businesses

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism. One of the primary issues facing business on Prince Edward Island is access to capital. It is often particularly difficult for new businesses who

are struggling to get off the ground. I understand the minister's department has a number of programs.

I'm wondering: Is he considering any new initiatives or changes to current programs to help small start-up businesses get off the ground?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have and continue to do research to adapt our development funding and assistance to address identified needs in this regard. The most recent example of this development is a competitive start-up called the Ignition Fund. In our platform during election we increased this by up to 10 enumerations back to new businesses starting out at \$25,000 dollars each. That money sometimes is used to leverage other funding. A good example of that is most recently, last week, the minister of health identified that one of those companies actually is, through the Ignition Fund, providing some wait or wait time services in the hospital, so it actually does work.

On Friday of last week Innovation PEI's Development Commercialization and Pilot and Discovery fund opened for applications. This is another program that further supports new product and development getting to market. We'll be speaking a little more about that program later in today's proceedings.

Incubation and mentoring have been identified as key helps to businesses to get off the ground and we're working to identify subsequent supports through extensive consultation.

Mr. Myers: Could you table that?

Mr. MacDonald: We're working on a project with a network of world renowned business start-up incubators and are hopeful a made-in-PEI model will be announced soon.

Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to investigate what we can do to help with undercapitalization on PEI. It's not a new

issue, it's right across Canada. The CEO of
—

Mr. Myers: Question Period's a joke, officially. (Indistinct) you guys (Indistinct) joke.

Mr. MacDonald: — Capital Venture Association has stated that we're undercapitalized in Canada and we'll continue to work towards creating more capital for new businesses.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not even too sure — this question could've been answered a minute ago but I couldn't hear over all the heckling going on over here.

Mr. Myers: Yeah, because you guys are making Question Period a joke.

Venture capital investment

Mr. J. Brown: Supplementary question to the minister. According to some statistics, about 10% of Canadian venture capital deals in the first half of 2015 took place in Atlantic Canada. That is despite the fact that Atlantic Canada has less than 7% of the national population.

However, the Canadian Venture Capital and Private Equity Association reports that there were no —

Mr. Myers: Question, question, question!

Mr. J. Brown: — venture capital investments in Prince Edward Island during that period.

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. J. Brown: Is the minister considering some type of initiative to channel venture capital investment into Prince Edward Island?

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) making a joke, you're going to take 20 minutes making a joke?

Mr. J. Brown: You're the one making it a joke.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're always looking for new ways to capitalize on venture capital. Private equity, investment, angel investors, what have you. The report I think you're talking about with the 10%, that's based on the first half of 2015. If we go back four years to 2011, per capita, Prince Edward Island is on par through capital investment or venture capital. We're holding our own. It's been a little slow start to 2015, but I almost must add that our exports are up 18% over the next nearest province. We've increased our manufacturing sales by 5.9%. We're presently leading the country in many different areas, especially in tourism with the year we just had.

We're doing okay, but yes, is there room for improvement? We'll continue to strive to do this. We've just finished a new report in November 2015 on venture capital and recapitalizing businesses.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Interest charge debt jump

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll try to make mine short, I guess. To the Minister of Finance. You've just released your second-quarter update. Shows that we've got another \$700,000 dollars in interest charge debt.

Minister, why has it jumped three quarters of a million dollars over budget in the first half of this year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I had stated earlier in the House, there is a number of reasons why our budget has

increased through that quarter. We had increases through Health PEI, we had increases through education, there were some additional costs with employee benefits.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, can you explain to this House how this is living within our means, something that this government is preaching?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think if you look at the last four years we've seen a continuous decline in our budget and it's continuing, and it continues again. We just went through an election where I think pretty well every household of Prince Edward Island was asking us to reduce our costs and get to balance. In order to do that measures have to be taken and we're clearly – we've heard other ministers talk about how well the economy is doing, what a great summer we had with the tourism industry, with all our exports being up.

We continue to work towards a balanced budget and expenditures need to be looked at, and at times we simply won't be spending in a number of areas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Departments over budget

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the minister's update it also shows that a further \$19 million dollars has been added to the yearly deficit just for the first half of this year. Will the minister explain why seven out of the 11 departments in this government are over budget at the end of the second quarter?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at the second-quarter report, that's a time when a lot of our expenditures are being made and we don't necessarily see the total revenues coming in at this point.

But it also provides us an opportunity to look at where we need to be over the next six months. We go back to our departments and we readjust where we can find that we can. If it means reduced spending in some areas – it doesn't necessarily mean cuts, it just means that we're careful where we spend and whether we spend or not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, final question.

Balanced budget in April

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the minister's press release accompanying the fiscal update, the Minister of Finance pledges to get back on track and to balance his budget by 2016-2017.

Does this statement by the minister mean that government will be tabling a balanced budget in April?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said earlier, after the second quarter it gives us six months to look down the road and to see where we need to make adjustments. We have said consistently that we're working towards a balanced budget and we continue on that path.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]