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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2015

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

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

Dementia strategy (further)

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

I rise to update the Assembly from questions from yesterday's Question Period on the provincial dementia strategy.

We are grateful for the many partners that created, particularly the Alzheimer Society and dementia experts from across Canada.

The framework for the dementia strategy is complete and the Department of Health and Wellness has received it. The work has been well under way.

For example, the new geriatric program has provided 1,444 consults; 534 had Alzheimer's, which is a diagnosis of 51%.

A major component of this framework is the additional new money of 95,000 in funding provided to the Alzheimer Society this spring for their First Link program.

Other initiatives are well underway: the expansion of \$270,000 to the seniors' mental health resource team in working with families and individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia; the investment of \$90 million in our new public manors to respond to the changing needs of patients living with dementia; the additional investments in dementia care services to both the private and the public facilities in support for dementia care; and the 78% increase in home care spending.

As well, the Department of Family and Human Services has an ongoing partnership with the Alzheimer Society, which is my other department. Family and Human Services has also provided the Alzheimer Society with 29,500 of funding to continue support for the First Link. The Alzheimer Society received a seniors' Secretariat grant of 4,000 for the Just For You volunteer campaign.

This year the Alzheimer Society received another grant from the Seniors' Secretariat

of 5,000 to support the creating dementia-friendly communities.

We are committed to working with key stakeholders as we continue to embrace the challenges of dementia and Alzheimer's with individuals and families in communities all across Prince Edward Island.

Thank you very much

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Amalgamation

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

Question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: What does the minister think is the proper number of municipalities to have on the Island?

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

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

It's certainly been no secret since this government has come to power just a short six months ago and we have said that –

Mr. Myers: Eight years ago.

Mr. Mitchell: – as a government we fully intend to implement recommendations –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) years.

Mr. Mitchell: – of Judge Thompson's report.

Mr. Myers: Six months ago - 2007.

Mr. Mitchell: That report clearly stated that 73 municipalities on Prince Edward Island is certainly not sustainable or viable.

Mr. Myers: I read that (Indistinct).

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, in my –

Speaker: Order, please!

The minister has the floor.

Go ahead, minister.

Mr. Mitchell: In my conversations with the federation, that certainly for me has confirmed that message.

It's also no secret that there are several communities across Prince Edward Island already in discussion with their neighbouring communities about forming larger regions.

I would like to take the opportunity at this moment to commend the members of those communities for their show of strong leadership and of great courage to go out and begin these discussions with their neighbours.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: There was no number in that question but that answered that question.

Back to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: What supports will be put in place by your department to consider the benefits and drawbacks of amalgamation?

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said in this House in the previous session, in the springtime, the way these successful regions will occur on Prince Edward Island is with discussions at the local level, with neighbours talking to neighbours, with a strong vision of how their communities should look as we move forward, with stronger economies, with stronger local governments, with 30-, 40-, 50-year vision out as we move forward.

That will be how this will be a successful move into the future.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Back to the minister, question number two, still had no answer to that question. So there'll be no supports put in place to help these municipalities.

Is there a dollar value cap on the amount of planning supports your department will make available to communities considering amalgamation?

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Since I became minister of this department I have had many conversations with municipal leaders all across Prince Edward Island regarding their interest in going out and addressing neighbouring communities because they know they are not viable and sustainable into the future.

I made it abundantly clear to these municipalities that our department would be there to assist them. We will be there to stand beside them. We will be there if they have concerns or questions as we move forward. And yes, there will be some transitional help there if required, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

So we have no number of municipalities, we have no mention of any support, and we have no dollars on the table.

Amalgamation plebiscite

If a group of communities decided to pursue amalgamation, does the minister support letting affected residents have a direct say through a plebiscite?

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said in my earlier response, we feel and municipalities feel success will be obtained by neighbours talking to neighbours. One

way that they will do this is to sit at tables, to sit at town halls, and have discussions and voice their concerns, and view their common interests of how they see their communities moving forward.

That conversation has been going on in a lot of communities over the past months and I know will continue on into the future, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Involuntary amalgamation

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

I take it from that answer that the affected areas won't be able to voice their opinion or have a plebiscite saying yes or no.

To the minister. The minister says he supports a volunteer approach for now for communities to amalgamate. For now. At what point will this process stop being voluntary?

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At my desk as minister I've had a lot of phone conversations with those individuals in regions who have concerns about the process of regionalization or amalgamation. I've taken the time – and I know it's been much appreciated by these individuals – to have a great conversation and to give them some great information as to why this is taking place.

I can assure you, when you take time to communicate with these individuals they certainly have a better understanding of why this process must continue.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

So five questions, no answers. We're no further ahead at the end of the day so we might as well go to the Premier.

If communities don't want to amalgamate, will you be forcing them to?

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's been my experience in life that if you force people to do anything it's usually met with opposition and resistance. There's no question about that.

I understand that the Leader of the Opposition may have received a petition in regards to this for this topic last evening. That's democracy in action. That's people having their voice. It begins conversation, it opens the door for communications and questions. That's a very positive thing, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I will take that, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I did receive a petition last night. I've heard loud and clear from people out there that they're scared this government is going to force them to amalgamate when they don't want to.

Are you going to force amalgamation on rural residents in PEI?

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

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, as I think I clearly stated, any time you force people to do anything it's met with opposition and resistance.

What we're willing to do and what we've been offering to do, and what we will continue to do, is to talk with residents of these communities to give them the full information that's available in regards to why the process is underway and why it will be continuing into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Early learning and education plan

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The opposition has been making much ado about education in this House sitting. We're going into day four on the new school act, the education act, we've brought it up in Question Period a number of times, and I think we'll continue to make it an issue.

Question to the minister of education: How does early learning fit into your new education plan?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Early learning, as we mentioned right from the start of this, we're looking at a very broad sense of delivering of education to Islanders from birth through formal training, former schooling into the post-secondary training and into the workforce. Our early learning is very important in our process as we move forward.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, where does it mention early learning in your new education plan?

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

Mr. Perry: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear the question.

Speaker: Could you repeat the question, hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid?

Mr. MacEwen: Not a problem at all, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, where does it say early learning in your new education plan?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, we've mentioned on several occasions that learning is from birth through formal schooling into the workforce and beyond. Early learning starts at birth. It starts with the parents at home and there are programs in place for that.

I have to mention that our early learning system here in PEI is actually being modelled by Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and there are other jurisdictions across Canada that are coming to look at us to see what we're doing because we're doing it right.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a great early learning system right now in PEI. Although I find it quite ironic, but when you look through the entire new education plan for our province the only time it mentions early learning in that is when the minister's own title is mentioned. Why is early learning important enough for the minister's title, but not important enough to be mentioned in the education plan?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Part of the learning partners advisory group will have someone representing our early years centres and our early learning system on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: That's great. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's great to hear, minister. Can you be more specific on where you've got your early learning member in that whole system?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There will be someone representing the early years in the learning partners advisory. There will also be the deputy of Education, Early Learning and Culture who will be sitting on that same council.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm wondering where exactly it says that, or who would that person be from the early learning sector that will be part of that committee?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I mentioned this the past several days that we will be making a statement in this House regarding the early learning partners and the makeup of it.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Early child educators' pay scale increase

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, I don't tell you how hard that the early child educators work in this province, how important their role is with our system in the early years. We have early childhood educators who have not seen an increase in salary level in five years.

When will we see an increase in that pay scale?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm committed to listening to all of our educators. This is an opportunity, with the creation of this new system or the new delivery of education on Prince Edward

Island, for those people to voice their concerns and have that heard.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These educators, I see them every day. Many people in here see them every day. They're shaping our youngest minds. They're an extremely important part of our education system. It's an integral part, actually.

Can the minister please commit today, or commit to the House, when these salaries will be increasing? They've stayed the same for a number of years now.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our early years educators are very important to us. They're very important to this system. They're very important to our learners to prepare them, again, for the real world and make sure that they get off on a very good start. Our program, again, leads with Quebec in Canada in early childhood education as the best in Canada. We have other jurisdictions coming to us to model, asking us: What are you doing there that is right?

That's great to know that we have that success and it's because of these educators, and I'm committed to listening to their concerns.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I couldn't agree more, minister. We've got very hard-working employees working at the liquor stores who are making more than our educators in our early childhood educating system. I think it's \$15.00 to \$16.88. There are some of them who come into the system at \$16.88 and have been paid that.

Will you commit to at least indexing their salaries?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, our early childhood educators are very important to our system. They do a tremendous amount of good work for our young learners, and I am committed to listening to their concerns and meeting with them.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's great that you commit to meeting with them, minister. I want a commitment that you'll seriously look at these pay ranges. I can't disagree. We've got a great system here. I'm glad that other places looking at us. But the association – the whole system right now feels that: We did all that work five years ago and then forgotten about. Nobody is talking. Nobody is listening right now.

I want a commitment today to if you will seriously look at their salary levels.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I said it the last three answers, replies that I had: I am committed to listening to our early child care educators.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, we've talked about all of the hard work that the educators do. They've got a number of additional responsibilities, just like our teachers. They chart, they do curriculum and lesson planning. They do parent-teacher interviews and special event planning. They're stretched during the day.

Will the minister look at the option of having – or considering an extra position or an extra half-position or some sub-time at these centres so that they can have extra time to get some of this planning done?

When you go into some of these centres – and I've been in Charlottetown and of course out in my own area – you're there – you're supposed to have 15-minute breaks, but these are caregivers. They will take a half-hour, they'll take five minutes here and there. They'll eat their lunch while the kids are having their cereal. It's a big issue for them.

Would you consider looking at additional time for each of the schools?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We work together with the early childhood development association and we continue to work together with them on common objectives and to deliver quality programs to our young learners, and I am committed to listening to these educators.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Early learning association funding

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, the early learning development association itself plays an important role in the system. We've got the new act coming forward and that's going to increase their role. Recently they've lost a position at the association.

Will you commit to stable funding for the association going forward?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, I will commit to sit down and listening to their concerns.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's great that you're going to listen to their concerns. You've been listening to their concerns for five years now. Minister, you know what it's like to be over on this side and to ask the questions and not get an answer. I would love to hear an answer about stable funding for the association. They've been cut.

Can you please commit to the stable funding moving forward for the association, especially in light of the new act coming in?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm committed to listening to our early learners, our educators, and the association –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Perry: That's a great move forward. I'm willing to sit down and discuss any concerns that they may have in person.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Conscious discipline program

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, you've been a strong proponent of the 3P program for parents or for families. It's a costly program, it's very worthwhile in PEI, I think. There's similar programs out there but for early childhood education, and one that I've been made aware of is the conscious discipline program.

This is where self-awareness and self-discipline is taught from an infant age straight through to school age. It's really important. I understand there's a number of educators that have started the process, but it would be really good if they could continue on with it.

Minister, will you look into this program and can you partner with other departments to get these type – funding in place for programs like this, offered across the province to our educators?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We were very proud earlier this year to announce that 3P will be available to Islanders, and it's an invaluable asset and resource to parents. I wish I had had a program like this when whenever my kids were younger.

But I am committed to sitting down and listening to the concerns and moving forward and shaping it with some direction.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Infant spaces waitlist

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Another important aspect of early childhood education that parents – that every member in here I know has heard about – is infant spaces in our centres. We've got people going on the waiting list as soon as they find out they're expecting a little one.

Minister, I really appreciate the listening. I really want to see more acting. Can you please explain your plans to shorten the waitlist for infant spaces in PEI?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That is absolutely – it is a good question. We are committed in early years to provide quality care to our young residents of Prince Edward Island. We're doing all that we can to make sure that we have available spaces and we will continue to work to make those spaces available in quality early year centres.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Child poverty

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

Last week all members of this House received dolls from a delegation of the United Church women in order that we would have a constant visible reminder of child poverty on Prince Edward Island. On Tuesday we learned that rates of child poverty on Prince Edward Island are continuing their upward trend that has been present for decades, increasing by 6% last year, and this has happened despite modest growth in our provincial economy overall and repeated promises to deal with this persistent and depressing issue.

A question to the minister of family and human services: Does his department have any quantitative goals to reduce child poverty on Prince Edward Island?

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

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

We take the responsibility in our Department of Family and Human Services very seriously in looking out for the well-being of families in our province. We have made a clear statement in our recent platform that we are committed to eliminating and addressing poverty in the Province of Prince Edward Island. My department, if the Leader of the Third Party has had a chance to read the mandate letter from the Premier to myself as minister, we clearly state our goals and objectives to continue to work towards the elimination of poverty here in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

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

Basic income guarantee

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

I'm glad to hear you take it seriously and indeed I have read the mandate letter, and I'm aware of that goal, the same goal which has been stated repeatedly by previous governments and, I said earlier, poverty rates continue to increase.

During the provincial election all four party leaders, including our Premier, agreed to explore the idea of implementing a basic income guarantee, a policy which could potentially eradicate child poverty on Prince Edward Island. But we haven't heard much about it since then. Does government still support this idea?

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

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

I also had the opportunity to have a very positive conversation with the federal minister yesterday morning in respect to his mandate letter and how it ties in to the objectives and goals of what we're trying to accomplish here for families, children, and poverty in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Very aware of the basic income question. There's a fiscal reality of that which is a real reality. I think that the last level of information it would be approximately an investment of about \$150 million annually to the Province of Prince Edward Island.

We are certainly very interested. We've had a number of discussions with some key stakeholder groups, but we are very realistic in that in order for us to obtain and accomplish that, I feel that a partnership with the federal government – and we were very clear that we're very open on any initiatives that the federal government would want to work towards to continue to support Island children, Island families, and to eliminate poverty in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

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

Basic income guarantee pilot project

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

I absolutely agree, the federal government will be a critical partner in implementing an initiative like this. In any of the minister's discussion with his federal counterparts, did they discuss in any depth the possibility of Prince Edward Island being used as a potential pilot project for a guaranteed annual income?

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

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

The conversation was the first conversation I had with the federal minister. I was very clear that as a minister who's been part of this provincial government's Cabinet for the last nine years that we feel that we have a tremendous amount to offer and contribute in respect to conversations at the provincial and territorial table, but also at the FPT table.

We will be looking at formally meeting with the federal minister. During that conversation I said that we would welcome any partnerships, any initiatives. We're small, a population of 145,000 people, and we are going to be very collaborative in our partnership and very open on initiatives and pilots that the federal government may want to implement, and we'll do them very well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Voluntary identification program

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy. As the minister knows, government identification is very important in the modern world. There are literally dozens of services that require government IDs. This was particularly noticeable during a recent election where a driver's license was the preferred method of identification. However, there is a voluntary identification in place in our province. Will the minister please explain how this program works?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, yes, there is an ID program that we have here on PEI which allows PEI residents who qualify to get a voluntary identification program. That particular process, we use the same standards in it as we do for anyone and the requirements to obtain it that are obtaining similar to a PEI driver's license. Those standards are used across North America because we have to ensure that those are strictly adhered to because this is a piece of identification that is accepted as a person's ID. You have to follow all the procedures with that and to ensure that the person that has that ID is actually the person that it should be.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The volunteer ID program is helpful, however, I believe it is fair to say that those who require this identification either do not operate a vehicle or they are young and have not yet received a driver's license. In many cases this may be due to the fact that they simply do not have the resources to own or operate a vehicle.

It is \$50 for this ID and that can cause difficulties for many Islanders. Therefore, has the minister considered lowering the fee for this voluntary identification?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I mentioned, this is the same process used for a driver's license and it certifies that that is a legally recognized identification. That includes the requirement that we must have the infrastructure in place to secure that through security measures, and so that is why the fee is put in place.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale.

Inspections on Brand New Vehicles

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the same minister, the minister of transportation and energy. Everyone in this House agrees with the need to ensure that our streets and highways are safe and part of that effort means that the vehicles operated by Islanders are judged to be roadworthy. That is part of the rationale behind the annual safety inspections.

However, I've always been puzzled by the requirement for a safety inspection on new vehicles which are being prepped before being released to the new owner. Also, a vehicle that has only been on the road for a single year is, in all likelihood, roadworthy and in all likelihood under warranty.

My question: Why are inspections required on brand new vehicles?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. member mentioned, new vehicles do have to be inspected before they're turned over to the owner, through whoever you're purchasing them from. He also mentioned warranty. There's a lot of stuff on cars that is not covered by warranty, like your braking systems, your fluid systems, your lights. We do require an annual inspection to ensure that the lights and other requirements like that are working on a regular basis and that people do ensure that those are kept up to date.

Speaker: The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, first supplementary question.

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Has the minister considered a two- or even a three-year inspection on brand new cars? This would be the responsibility of the dealer and would reduce costs to those who purchase new vehicles.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is an annual inspection fee of \$30 that's in place. That does cover – including what I already previously mentioned – to ensure that things like the tires and lights and brakes and other incidentals like that are working.

But also, on a regular basis, even new cars do get recalls on them. A number of years ago there was recalls on a steering system. We do enforce an annual inspection of cars to ensure that when something like that is recalled that those are taken in and they are fixed so that we can ensure that the roads are safe when you're meeting another vehicle and that something doesn't malfunction due to something that was recalled. We want to ensure they are inspected on an annual basis.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Percentage of homes with high-speed Internet

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions today for the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: Minister, what percentage of Island homes has access to high-speed Internet?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Back in 2008 the Liberal government undertook a broadband initiative to ensure that all homes on Prince Edward Island would have Internet access. At the present time, if you consider what Internet access is, that's one notch up from dial up access.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Cost of high-speed Internet

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, the province has spent millions of dollars to try and meet their promise of high-speed Internet access to Islanders, most notably, over \$8 million to Bell Aliant and millions more to put Wi-Fi in Island schools.

How much has the province spent to date on high-speed Internet access without meeting its commitment?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As Economic Development and Tourism minister, it's very important for us to have high-speed access right across Prince Edward Island and willfully support that initiative. We have supported that initiative and we will continue to support that initiative.

Just to take the member back a little bit, the federal government was proposing to put in wider Wi-Fi broadband on Prince Edward Island but it was –

Mr. LaVie: Don't blame somebody else for your promises, broken promises!

Mr. MacDonald: It was withheld by the previous federal government prior to the election for some reason that's unknown, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

An Hon. Member: Shame, shame!

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. Aylward: Could have paid for it by yourself if you didn't gamble all our money away.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, I asked the amount, so, typical, no answers from across that floor. There have been 25 questions today without a single answer.

High-speed Internet and competitive advantage

High-speed Internet access can help small business access new export markets off-Island, especially for small businesses in rural communities. Does the minister agree that reliable access to quality high-speed Internet can be a competitive advantage for Island businesses?

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

Mr. MacDonald: I'll repeat, Mr. Speaker, that as Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, a crucial aspect of our business in Prince Edward Island is export business and a crucial aspect would be having –

Mr. LaVie: Losing business (Indistinct).

Mr. MacDonald: – Internet service across Prince Edward Island, especially rural Prince Edward Island, and we fully support rural broadband.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) four years later (Indistinct).

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

High-speed Internet and tourism industry

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, we hear a lot from tourism operators who say that their customers are often looking for high-speed Internet when they're on holidays at cottages, campgrounds and motels. What steps is the minister taking to improve reliable access to quality high-speed Internet for our tourism industry?

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

Mr. Trivers: Eight thousand people in a campground (Indistinct).

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) come to Cedar Dunes (Indistinct).

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've actually progressed to – if you're talking about Cedar Dunes, as my friend to my left of me says, that we have high-speed Internet connection at Cedar Dunes campground and many other campgrounds.

Mr. LaVie: You don't have it at Red Point park!

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, since I became Minister of Economic Development and Tourism –

Speaker: Order, please!

The minister has the floor. Have some respect!

When somebody is talking be quiet and listen to what they – you might not agree with what they're saying, but let them talk without being interrupted.

Carry on, minister.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'll take you back to – we've been in power here for six months and it is an initiative of this government to ensure everyone has high-speed broadband across Prince Edward Island.

Again, I can take it back to the previous federal government on why that initiative was held. There's been (Indistinct) allocations of monetary funding across Canada, but for some reason prior to this federal election, there was no monies transferred to Prince Edward Island to enhance broadband Internet connection.

Now that we have a Liberal government in power, perhaps we can get that deal done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: I'm truly amazed that every question goes back to the blame of the previous Harper government which

continues when the man's not even there, continues to still get the blame.

Mr. LaVie: Welcome to politics.

Mr. Myers: Paid clappers over there, paid clappers.

High-speed Internet and student access

Mr. MacKay: Government is spending millions to put Wi-Fi in Island schools, but learning takes place both inside and outside the classroom.

Minister, what are you doing to make sure your students have reliable access to quality high-speed Internet outside of school support for the learning?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Connecting Canadians Program, if that rings a bell with the hon. member. You should look it up. It's in Wikipedia. It's an initiative of the past federal government. The past federal government promised Canada that we would be connected from coast to coast. For some reason prior to the 2015 federal election it seemed to stop. Perhaps it stopped at the bridge, I'm not sure, but it was done for a reason unknown to us by the former Conservative government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) no bridge, no schools (Indistinct).

High-speed Internet 2009 contract

Mr. MacKay: Minister, will you table a copy of the untendered 2009 –

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, order, please!

Carry on.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, will you table a copy of the untendered 2009 contract for high-speed Internet this government has signed?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If there are documents that I can table legally without affecting any legal binding contracts, I'll table them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

MiFi untendered contract

Mr. MacKay: Will the minister confirm that this untendered contract has a stop-gap plan for using MiFi technology in place of wired high-speed?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Can he repeat the question, Mr. Speaker?

Speaker: Can you repeat the question, hon. member?

Mr. MacKay: Certainly. Will the minister confirm that this untendered contract had a stop-gap plan for using MiFi technology in place of wired high-speed?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what he's talking about.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: An honest answer. Finally, in Question Period, an honest answer. I have no idea.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

An Hon. Member: Well, perhaps (Indistinct) shouldn't be the minister if you don't know what you're talking about.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct). Explain to him what it (Indistinct).

Internet service costs and government

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister of transportation can tell us when the Cascumpec Bridge was last inspected, but the minister of economic development can't answer that question.

Minister, will you confirm that the difference between normal business costs and what customers are paying for this service is actually being covered by government?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are three different businesses right across Prince Edward Island that are actually issuing broadband at the present time. I think all those costs are different from each business to business. It would be hard for me to stand up in here and start quoting cost relevant to broadband on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque, final question.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, you might not have heard that question right. I want to repeat it.

Will the minister confirm that the difference between normal business cost and what customers are paying for this service is actually being covered by government?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If the hon. member can likely wait two months, the new Liberal government will have in place likely a Wi-Fi broadband

across Prince Edward Island from coast to coast on PEI that will have major effects on our economic development and tourism portfolios.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Aylward: That's in Hansard.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: That ends Question Period.