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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 2015

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

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

Internet service costs and government (further)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday the Member from Kensington-Malpeque asked how much government has spent on high-speed Internet coverage for Prince Edward Island. The answer to that question is zero. We signed an extension to Bell's contract providing Centrex services to the province. In return, Bell made an investment to provide this service to Islanders.

In fact, the deal extension saved the province almost \$2.5 million over the life of the contract. No subsidy is being paid out by the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Number of Canadian cases of bacterial ring rot

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

I want to go back to the minister of agriculture on some points that he made in the last couple of weeks in the House.

How many cases of bacterial ring rot have been detected on potato farms across Canada in the recent years?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

There have been five cases of seed lots detected since 2008. Five seed lots across Canada. When the seed lots go out, of course, there are a few more infections than that. But there were five seed lots since 2008 detected with BRR.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I want to make this very clear. You're telling the House that there's only been five cases of bacterial ring rot across Canada since 2008. Yes or no? (Indistinct) stand by that answer?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

Five cases of seed lots, okay? When seed goes out from the seed lot it may go to different farms. There may have been more numbers than that. But five cases of seed lots since 2008.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Minister, would it surprise you to learn that according to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency there have been 53 cases –

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Leader of the Opposition: – of bacterial ring rot on Canadian seed farms since 2005? Over 53.

An Hon. Member: What's his question?

Speaker: Do you have a question, the hon. Leader of the Opposition?

Leader of the Opposition: The question is: Are you surprised by that? I would say your information's wrong.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

Five cases from seed lots is what I said. When the seed lots spread out they may have had more cases than that. Fifty-three could possibly be the case, but from the starting point of the seed lots, five cases since 2008.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: It still goes against what the Canadian food agency is saying. They're saying 53 cases of bacterial ring rot on seed lots, or seed farms, alone.

Fifty-three cases doesn't sound like functionally eradicated, which you stated. Why did you try to spin the science to justify your budget cuts with inaccurate information?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

I did absolutely no such thing. The 53 cases is possible. What I said was: Starting from the starting point of the seed lots, that's what the information is. Actually, that's what it is, five cases from the seed lots. When the seed lot goes out to different farms it could have expanded to 53, whatever it be. But from the seed point it was five.

The information we gathered with regards to functionally eradicated came from a plant physiologist who is an expert in his field. The potato board, working with my department, garnered that information from that based on science.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: It goes back to relying on an expert that won't put his signature on a piece of paper saying it's been eradicated. We've gone from five cases up to 53 that we now know about. I think at the end of the day it's more important than what we're talking about.

EELC minister and science or spin

Let's switch to the minister of education. To the minister of education: When the time came to defend your cuts, did you flip a coin to decide whether to science or spin?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Could the hon. member please elaborate on that question?

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Your cuts to the school board, minister of education, did you base this on science or did you base it on a spin? Is there a plan?

Chair: The hon. Leader of the Opposition, the word "spin," in my belief, is unparliamentary.

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct) it's in Beaufort.

Speaker: Withdraw the comment.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) got about four words we can use.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

An Hon. Member: Doesn't seem to hold you (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: Minister of education, what did you base your decision on? Was it based on science or was it based on the best interests of the children?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any decision that we make with the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture is based on the best interest of our students, of our students' achievements. In fact, our budget has grown from 176.6 million in 2007 to 242.7 million today. That's a 37.4% increase.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Weakening of education voices

Leader of the Opposition: By merging the Kensington-Kinkora families of schools, minister, aren't you weakening the voice of parents and students in both families?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What the Leader of the Opposition, I'm assuming, is referring to is the combination of these two family of schools for the purpose of the family of schools district advisory council only, not within the English Language School Board. They still remain as individual family of schools for the operation and functional purposes of that board.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Merging of Kinkora and Kensington families of schools

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

To the minister of education: Is there any plan or intent to merge the Kinkora and the Kensington families of schools into one?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time we have no plans to combine them for the function and operation of the English Language School Board.

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

Student representation in education system

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the education minister: Who will select the students representing the family of the districts advisory council?

Who will the students be represented and how will they be represented?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The students will be selected from the family of schools that they represent.

Thank you.

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

Principals' instructions re: selections

Ms. Compton: Christmas season is fast approaching. It's already the end of November. I'm just wondering what instructions have been given to the principals of these schools to ensure that the selections are made.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Letters have gone out to the principals asking for a selection from the parents council organization within each school to either appoint or elect a representative for that individual school and also for the selection of students to represent the family of schools.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Have the school principals been given a time frame to make this happen?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are wanting to have these councils up and running in January and we've asked the principals to send us along a name as soon as possible.

Thank you.

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

Education system democratic elections

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The loss of a democratically elected voice for the school board and for all Islanders and all students is a concern. It's been something that this government has made a few stabs at trying to make a difference as far as school reform goes.

Does the minister agree that having a democratically elected voice on these councils has value?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes. Within these districts of family councils, there will be a representative from the organization within, whether it's a parent, the home and school association which will be appointed or through an election process within the school. Also, the students that are representing the family of schools could possibly come from the student council in which they were elected.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Are you concerned that representation on these advisory councils will not be equal?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can assure you that every council, every school, will be equally represented. Each school will have a voice in deciding and shaping the future of our education system which is focused on our learner and focused on student achievement here on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

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

School representative numbers

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So if each school is equal representation, can you explain to me how the Souris family of schools will have one representative or two representatives while the Montague family of schools will have possibly four or five representatives?

Mr. LaVie: Yeah, thank you. That's a good question.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the Souris family of schools there is only one school with the English Language School Board and in the Morell family of schools there are three.

Thank you.

Mr. Myers: Montague we were talking about.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We realize the Souris family of schools is one school so we'll have one representative. The Montague family of schools is five schools so we'll have five representatives. That is not equal. Could the minister explain the math there?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually the Montague family of schools has eight schools with one high school, so they will have possibly 11 representatives on that council –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) get one! (Indistinct) the minister of health.

Mr. Perry: – and the Morell-Souris in combination will actually have 10. So that's – 10, 11, that's pretty close to being fair.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Taxpayers and Wes Sheridan's legal fees

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A couple of days ago the finance minister brought back what the legal costs are to date for the \$25 million lawsuit that has been brought against this government to the tune of I believe it was \$118,000.

Can the finance minister confirm here today if taxpayers of PEI are on the hook to cover the legal fees for former finance minister Wes Sheridan who was also named in this lawsuit?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I find it interesting that the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock – and I recall what he said the other day, he said – and it's in Hansard – he said that it was an illegal scheme. He also pointed out that myself, that I was deeply involved, and that I was part of a larger group that were deeply involved.

Now he's suggesting that the former – making accusations with the respect that the former minister of finance is also guilty of something. In this Legislative Assembly and certainly in this country, you know, we deal in facts. I would suggest that if the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock is so confident in his accusations towards myself and others that he take that conversation outside the rail.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

It was not I that said that this former finance minister Wes Sheridan was guilty of anything. I simply said that he was also named in this lawsuit that was brought against this government to the tune of \$25 million.

My question was very simple, I'm asking the minister: Within the \$118,000 of taxpayers' dollars that has been spent to date to fight this lawsuit, are Islanders also paying for the legal fees for Wes Sheridan, who was also named in this lawsuit? Yes or no?

Mr. Trivers: Who's paying the legal fees?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock can stand up and say that when he says I – paraphrasing him – I didn't do this, I didn't do that. He's the one that's bringing it up in the House, therefore he's taking ownership of it whether he likes it or not. He's the one that brought it to the House.

This government clearly stated when this government came into power that it was going to – when they asked the Auditor General to look into various things that had taken place – were looking for the facts as well. While there's a case outstanding before the courts, it would be totally inappropriate, particularly when this member continually accuses people of illegal activities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

It's quite obvious that the refusal of this minister to answer a simply question, whether or not taxpayers are paying for the defense of Wes Sheridan who was named in this lawsuit against this government to the tune of \$25 million, so his refusal to me is acknowledgement that yes, taxpayers are paying for his defense. So, not going to get any answers here.

Virgin Gaming

Let's move on to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism. To the minister. Back in December of 2012 the current finance minister announced that Virgin Gaming would be expanding to PEI and that Virgin Gaming was to create 35 jobs and received \$800,000 of taxpayers' dollars towards servers and other equipment, as well as other incentives including tax breaks.

Can the minister confirm how many Islanders are currently working for Virgin Gaming here on PEI?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During my short period of time as Minister of Economic Development and Tourism we processed many files in regards to driving the economic development in Prince Edward Island. We indulge ourselves in many businesses, our door's always open. We have a major loan portfolio of \$380-some million across Prince Edward Island, and we will continue to do so.

I would have to come back to the House with those answers for the hon. member.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

I would think that a minister so involved in his portfolio would know that a company that was loudly touted as coming to PEI of the calibre of Virgin Gaming, whether or not they were still actually here on PEI. They were housed at the Atlantic Technology Centre. If you go under the directory they're nowhere to be seen.

The fact is that Virgin Gaming, after two and a half short years, is no longer here. My question to the minister is: Has the \$800,000 been repaid?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again to the hon. member, we're a progressive government. You can see we're making changes as we move forward. For a short time period, six months, we've taken everything into consideration. We're accountable, we're transparent, we're adopting –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct) answer the question!

Mr. MacDonald: – we're adopting new legislation on write-offs. We've campaigned on this. We were elected to a strong mandate by the people of PEI and we'll continue to work forward.

Mr. Myers: Forty per cent.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Grace period for companies on taxes

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

Question to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: Minister, how many companies on PEI have been given grace periods where they pay no corporate taxes?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have many tax incentives on Prince Edward Island to draw businesses here. It's no different from any other province in Canada. It's a very competitive market. Every time we make a decision we try to ensure that the taxpayers of Prince Edward Island are going to benefit from that decision.

Growing business on Prince Edward Island is utmost important. We hear it all the time

from the opposition that we don't do enough in rural development. There's over 20 members sitting in this Legislature that represent rural PEI. So if we're not doing our job, everybody in this House is not doing their job.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

Again, I find it ironic that this minister would stand and talk and go on about how they're doing things differently, how they're being open and transparent, they're great to deal with. They're certainly great to deal with if you can come in here, employ four people for two and a half years, get \$800,000 in servers and computer equipment, and then walk away and leaving taxpayers on the hook for that.

Again, with what you said, minister, with regards to being open and transparent, I now want to move down to the Premier.

Premier, you campaigned hard on doing things differently. You talked about transparency, you talked about being open. And certainly we weren't accustomed to seeing that in the past eight years by the crew that was there then – and some of you are still there.

Government assistance to businesses

Question to the Premier: Will you make public and table all government assistance that has been provided to businesses over the past eight years so that Islanders can see how their hard-earned tax dollars have been used?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there's no reason to be secretive about the assistance that's been provided.

You have to keep in mind what was said and what is in the bill regarding loans that's currently before the House, but I think the best thing for the opposition or the hon. Opposition House Leader to do would be to

pose some questions in a written form and we'll bring back the answers, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Long bus trips and young children

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

A question to the hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture: Does the minister feel that lengthy bus trips to start and end the day of four- and five-year-old Island children is conducive to optimal learning conditions?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know we do have some transportation problems and some challenges within the system and we're working hard to address those issues.

Thank you.

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

Move to rural schools

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

In trying to achieve one of this government's stated goals, which was to reinvigorate rural Prince Edward Island and to attract young families to move or perhaps to stay in small PEI communities, it strikes me that a school is a vital component of a vibrant and attractive rural community.

While the trend in PEI has been – well, and everywhere, actually – towards centralization and bigger schools, modern communications could allow us to return to smaller schools and recapture the benefits of that more intimate learning environment, not to mention shortened bus trips.

Now that the rezoning process will be controlled by the department of education, will the government commit to studying a possible move back to smaller rural schools?

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You know, schools can't do it alone. Everyone has a role to play in this. Communities have a role to play in it, parents, any stakeholder within the education system. We all have a role in playing to shape the future of our education system on Prince Edward Island. That's why I'm very happy to say that moving forward we're going to do it in a very collaborative way, that we have people from communities represented, parents from all ends of the Island, from tip to tip, that will be representing their schools, and each and every school will be represented equally and each school will have a voice in shaping the direction that education takes on Prince Edward Island, which is focused on the learners.

Thank you.

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

Government caucus in classroom

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

The minister has often stated in this House that learning is something that starts at birth and continues throughout our lives. In an effort to educate all members of this House, would the minister encourage all of the members of his caucus to join me in committing to spending one full day in an Island classroom in order that we can see firsthand what the life of an Island teacher is really like?

Some Hon. Members: We've done that, (Indistinct).

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Would you do it again?

An Hon. Member: Yes, good idea.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a very good suggestion. I can't commit on behalf of everyone else without

speaking to them first, but I will commit myself to that. It's a great idea, thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors.

HWFHS minister's actions re: poverty line

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday the Leader of the Third Party brought up a distressing statistic in regards to child poverty on Prince Edward Island. According to Campaign 2000, a coalition of more than 120 organizations that have lobbied governments to take action against poverty, the child poverty rate on Prince Edward Island has risen from 17.5% to 18.7% in just one year, putting Prince Edward Island slightly below the national rate of 19%.

A question for the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and Family and Human Services: What is the minister doing to keep Island families, especially Island children, above the poverty line?

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

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

As it has been recognized in this Assembly over the last few days, the importance and the priority by our government, particularly referenced in the mandate letter to me from our Premier, in two key pillars – one obviously is housing, two is poverty reduction. I would like to acknowledge that in conversation with the federal minister – and I read the mandate letter from the federal minister – their commitment to housing and poverty reduction.

But I also want to acknowledge some of the things that we've currently done and are currently doing: one, the increase of approximately \$2.8 million in the food allowance in the Province of Prince Edward Island; child care subsidy spending of \$3.2 million which reaches over 1,600 children; the National Child Benefit in 2011 was no longer considered as income on social

assistance; increase on housing rent supplements from 10 in 2007 to approximately 200 as well as 350 new rental affordable units for families and children; and also the funding for over 64 school breakfast programs in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors, first supplementary.

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct)

Social assistance eligibility requirements

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, minister.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) results.

Ms. Mundy: I've spoken to many constituents who identify that although there may be adequate funding –

Mr. LaVie: You've got to chirp (Indistinct).

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Ms. Mundy: I've spoken with many constituents who identify that although there may be adequate funding for the social assistance programs, the barriers lie within the eligibility. Many Islanders are in need but may not meet all the eligibility requirements.

My question to the minister: Will the minister reconsider reevaluating the eligibility requirements for social assistance recipients and child care subsidies to ensure that families who are in need receive the supports they need?

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

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

A great question from the hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors. Currently, in the mandate letter it's clearly stated a full review of all programming, one of which will be the social assistance programs that

currently functions, and number two, the child care subsidy programs that are offered.

As minister I recognize that we have an exceptional early childhood division with our EYCs, but I also recognize that we have a population of zero to four-year-olds in this province that still do not have appropriate access. As the minister I'm very committed to working with the minister responsible for early childhood education to review that area and continue to make inroads to strengthen opportunities for our zero to four-year-olds in this province.

I must add, to date we have completed and accomplished six of our 11 platform commitments in six months. One more of those commitments will be an additional increase in the child care subsidy.

So we're extremely committed. We're going to be refining and refocusing our programs and policies in our department to meet the changing face of the needs of our communities in Prince Edward Island, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors, second supplementary.

Poverty task force

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Many groups on the Island are concerned about these issues and bring unique perspectives on how to address it. I believe we need to engage as many individuals and stakeholder groups in this process to effectively reduce poverty rates.

What community groups and organizations is this minister consulting with about poverty concerns on the Island, and does he believe a task force on poverty could be beneficial to this process?

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

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

I strongly believe, and our government strongly believes – and this commitment has been stated by our Premier since having the

honour of leading this province in the next four years – in order for us to truly embrace the realities and challenges in child poverty, it's going to have to be embraced by the communities and all key stakeholders.

Currently, there's funding for 32 NGOs. We meet regularly and have met recently with some of the key stakeholders, the Council of Canadians, Marie Burge and her group, for Islanders for livable income. If we are truly going to address the issue on poverty we are going to have to work with our NGOs. We're going to have to work together.

I think as a province – and I've made this statement very clear to the federal minister responsible for housing and who has the mandate to reduce child poverty in the federal mandate – that we are very committed to working and, as a small jurisdiction, if we can't get it done right, nobody's going to be able to get it done right, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point.

Syrian refugees in PEI

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning. Minister, it's a well known fact that Islanders are very generous by nature, and currently there is a tremendous effort being made to welcome Syrian refugees to Canada and Prince Edward Island.

Minister, could you update the House as to when he expects the first refugees to arrive on the Island and when he expects the process to finish?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

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

In one word I can sum up how things are going with the refugees' resettlement here in Prince Edward Island and here in Canada: great. Things are going great because we have a great team in place and all Islanders are embracing this effort.

I want to thank all the organizations that are involved. Our staff is in the city of Summerside right now meeting with the city of Summerside and reviewing their ability to take in people. Two families are going to arrive early next week in Summerside. One family, I think, has about six members and the other family has two members. One of the families, the father has a PhD, they speak several languages, they speak English quite well.

I think, as we've proven in 1999 with the Kosovo airlifts to Canada, we will do a great job this time as we did in 1999. I want to thank the Prime Minister of Canada for trading in bombs – for going from bombs to aid. That's the way we end these conflicts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, your first supplementary question.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There definitely is a buzz on the Island about the arrival of the Syrian refugees. One of the questions that I've often been asked is: How can we help?

Minister, would you bring the House up to date as to how Islanders can help with this effort?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

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

There was a great story last night on CBC, and I commend the reporters of CBC for the great story they did there last night.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. R. Brown: Hey, you got to give credit where credit's due, Mr. Speaker.

It showed that Islanders are coming out and Islanders are working hard. One thing Islanders know and I know Canadians know: diversity is our strength. Canada is a better country, Prince Edward Island is a better province, because of our diversity. Just

today we have a go funding program for one of the families out of Summerside. I can report, within 24 hours over \$20,000 had been (Indistinct).

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: People are calling in with donations. I want to report also that a centre will be open on the waterfront, the old wharf on the waterfront, the warehousing down there, in order to help the refugee resettlement here.

Things are going great. I know one thing, and Islanders will come up to the challenge, Islanders will prove one thing: People with means will help people with needs, and Islanders will show that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Huntley used tire stockpile

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, we have a beautiful Island here.

We have farmers that are dedicated to the stewardship of the land, we have watershed groups with limited funding that are driven by volunteers. When I recently received some pictures of beautiful wetlands filled with ducks I wasn't too surprised. But unfortunately also there were thousands and thousands of tires.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, a question to the minister of transportation: Is the province still stockpiling used tires at a shale pit in Huntley which is located in a wetland area?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is a tire storage facility in Huntley, hon. member. We are continuing to shift those off-Island. We are not able to take as many off as we would wish to because we're dependent on how many can be received on the other end, but that process is continuing

and we are working towards removing those tires from Huntley.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Tire contract non-compliance

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, a maximum of 100,000 tires – that's a lot of tires – were to be allowed on that site at any given time.

In 2013 it was discovered that the company exceeded that maximum 100,000-tire limit and that the tires weren't being processed and removed, as the minister stated. Were there any provisions in that untendered contract to recover payments for non-compliance?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't have that contract with me, hon. member. I can look into those details. But the particular company that had that contract, subsequently there was a death of one of the partners there and they have experienced great difficulty in that regard.

Again, I reiterate that we are continuing to ship those off-Island and will continue that process.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, this really is an ongoing issue.

In fact, I would expect that the minister of transportation would be intimately familiar with this issue because she asked questions about it as a backbencher back on May 4th, 2010.

Mr. LaVie: Had the contract then.

Mr. Trivers: I'd like you to table the Hansard later on with those questions. Her memory is failing but that's all right.

Now, this question again to the minister of transportation –

Mr. LaVie: You had the contract then.

Mr. Trivers: What actions have you taken since you became a minister to address this? I have the pictures and the thousands of tires are still there from this summer, 100,000. I'm going to table these pictures, Mr. Speaker.

What actions have you taken, minister of transportation?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Island Waste Watch Management oversee that particular contract, hon. member. Again, I note that we are continuously shipping those off Prince Edward Island to our supplier in Quebec who can only take so many of those tires. We will continue to work towards eradicating that number of tires that are there and we'll keep working towards that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Pay-out on untendered tire contract

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These poor ducks are there living in these tires in this wetland. Really, in 2008, as you well know – because you asked questions on it – your government awarded a six-year untendered contract. Your questions back then were specifically about whether the Treasury Board processes were followed. They were paid \$2 for each tire and they were receiving about 200,000 tires a year, roughly \$400,000 annually.

Now, I want to know how much was paid out on this untendered contract.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, hon. member, I'll take that question under advisement and find out the details of what I can.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Tabling of tire contract

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, a question for the minister of transportation: Will you table the contract and an accounting of what has been spent to date on the project?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. member, I'll go back and speak to the department and find out what details I can get for you and take that under advisement.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Tire site environmental impact assessment

Mr. Trivers: Question for the minister of transportation: Have you carried out an environmental impact assessment on this site?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll look into that, hon. member.

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

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, basically it sounds like you're saying that no environmental evaluation has been done on potential pollution at this site, or perhaps you don't know.

Maybe I should have asked the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment, I know she looked back to him.

So you don't really know if there's any oils or contaminants leaching into nearby waterways.

My question is: If a farm or business did this, it's guaranteed with the conservation officers they'd be under heavy scrutiny. Why the double standard, Mr. Speaker?

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

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

Our department takes any environmental issue of utmost concern. Yes, we are aware of a situation in the western end of the province where these tires exist and we are working closely with the department of transportation and infrastructure to keep an eye on that.

We do not want any catastrophic events to occur that would affect the environment in any way, shape or form. As always, we will be working closely with the department as we do on a regular basis on any types of needs of this situation all across Prince Edward Island, to assist the removal when the opportunity arises where a contractor becomes available to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: That ends Question Period.