



Session:	2/65
Date:	15 November 2016
No:	24

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

TUESDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2016

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Egaming accountability

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

Over the last 18 months Islanders have grown increasingly upset and frustrated as they have learned more about the egaming scandal. Secret loans, sweetheart insider deals, conflicts of interest, and destruction of documents.

Mr. LaVie: Shame. Shame.

Leader of the Opposition: Question to the Premier: Why don't you feel anyone should be held accountable for their actions on the egaming scandal?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Nine days after being named Premier I called for the Auditor General to conduct a thorough review with a clear mandate to look into all of the events surrounding the situation raised by the Leader of the Opposition.

The Auditor General had full access through interviews and documents to everything that went on around that, around the egaming proposition, I'll call it. The Auditor General has reported. She has made 15 recommendations, all of which have been accepted by government, and the great majority of which have been implemented or are well in the course of being implemented

Leader of the Opposition: The rules were already there –

Premier MacLauchlan: – and that's exactly –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) all the rules (Indistinct).

Premier MacLauchlan: – what we've done to respond to that situation and to learn from it, and to ensure that the people are getting good government going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The lecture began: We waited nine days. We shouldn't have had to wait nine days. Islanders are offended that this government was so reckless with their tax dollars pursuing a scheme that was legally dubious at best.

Question to the Premier: Why should anyone think things would be different in the future if you refuse to hold anyone accountable for this scheme that has cost taxpayers somewhere in the area of \$2 million?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I realize that the Leader of the Opposition has suggested that there be particular discipline against leading or senior public servants.

Those public servants have not done anything wrong, notwithstanding allegations to the contrary. The Auditor General has looked into the matter –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) Auditor General (Indistinct).

Premier MacLauchlan: – has found where we should be paying more attention, where we should be complying with policy –

Mr. Trivers: Not what she said.

Premier MacLauchlan: – and indeed, that is exactly what is taking place.

It is not the practice of our government, nor my practice as Premier, to throw public servants under the bus.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Premier doesn't think that anybody did anything wrong. You were quick to say that this isn't how you do business, Mr. Premier. Sticking your head in the sand is no better.

Mr. Premier, how do you expect Islanders to not be cynical when they see no consequences for these reckless actions by senior government officials that were elected or appointed?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there is a consequence, and it is the direct result of the work of the Auditor General and of the commitment that I made when I said this is not the way we do business.

That is, we have taken up the advice on all 15 of the recommendations. We have committed that we are going to give good government, that we're going to do –

Mr. LaVie: Wrong.

Premier MacLauchlan: – due diligence, and anything that comes up in the way of an opportunity for development and we're not – and I have to say, if you go back in the history of this province there have been governments that have made errors in those lines that have been a lot more money involved –

Mr. Trivers: The rules were already there.

Premier MacLauchlan: – than you're talking about here.

We are going to give good government where the responsibility ultimately rises to Cabinet and where –

Mr. Trivers: Follow the rules.

Premier MacLauchlan: – the decisions will be made by Cabinet or the public servants will fulfill their roles of speaking truth to power and giving professional advice. That's what we appreciate and what we look for, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's all well and good to crow about new rules in place, but one of the points of this scandal is how the rule book was thrown out the window to make a quick buck.

Question to the Premier: What good will new rules do if there are no consequences for breaking the old rules?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, immediately upon coming to power we brought into place conflict of interest rules regarding senior public servants and political officials.

We brought in disclosure of expenses for those same people that had not been in place before. We appointed a commissioner of ethics and integrity who works directly with each of the senior public servants –

Mr. LaVie: Because of opposition.

Premier MacLauchlan: – with meetings on an annual basis.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) opposition forced your hand.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, that's what we're doing.

We're building a culture of –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct).

Premier MacLauchlan: – good government where we have confidence –

Mr. Trivers: Accountability (Indistinct).

Premier MacLauchlan: – in the public service and where, in fact, we're continuing to improve going forward, and that's exactly what we're committed to, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Auditor General and Office of Superintendent of Securities

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

I find it very ironic that the Premier says that they're implementing immediately the 15 recommendations brought forward by the Auditor General when all he has to do is go back to 2012 and look at the scathing Auditor General's report of the day then, which reflects many of the same problems that we're experiencing right now with this report.

Mr. Premier, you can implement all the procedures and policies you want to put in place, but over on this side of the floor all we're asking for you to do is follow the rules.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, the Premier promised that the Auditor General would have the full cooperation of government on the egaming file, yet the Auditor General states her office encountered resistance from the Office of the Superintendent of Securities.

Premier, you are responsible for this department. What happened to your promise of cooperation?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General met with the then-Superintendent of Securities in the late spring of 2015 after being given her mandate in mid-March or in March.

There was a discussion at that time. The Superintendent of Securities provided the Auditor General with a significant amount of documents. There was a difference as to whether documents obtained by the Superintendent of Securities in the course of an investigation, which are in fact not available under the FOIPP legislation, should be given to the Auditor General. I was not a part of those discussions.

In August of 2015 the Auditor General wrote to the Superintendent of Securities –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Premier MacLauchlan: You're asking the question. In September of 2015 there was a change in the Office of the Superintendent of Securities who took her retirement and who was a very good public servant and, in fact, had acted to impose fines and other penalties in the course of an investigation.

Within a week the Auditor General's people were on the scene and had all of the documents and conducted interviews for all of the information they were looking for.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

The Premier can get up and pontificate and go on and on about how great he is and open and transparent and cooperative, but again, I bring it back to the Auditor General. There she states that the securities office had important records relevant to her investigation, yet she was refused access to these documents.

Again to the Premier: Why was a department of government that you yourself were responsible for obstructing the work of the Auditor General?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, of course I take exception to the use of the word obstruction.

There was a difference of opinion between the then-Superintendent of Securities and the Auditor General. The matter was resolved in favour of the Auditor General, and the Auditor General told our department shortly after that that this matter did not lead to the delay in the production of her report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier should be familiar with the *Audit Act* of this province. Premier, do you believe that refusing to provide important records to the Auditor is in breach of the *Audit Act*, yes or no?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the Office of the Superintendent of Securities did indeed provide all of the documents that the Auditor General sought and did it in a timely fashion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Premier and *Audit Act*

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll take that response as a no. Premier, you were the minister. You requested the audit hoping you wouldn't have to face a judicial inquiry or a public inquiry. Premier, why did you violate the laws of this province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: I think I'll have to ask the hon. member to expand on that very serious allegation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

Obviously, I'm referring to the *Audit Act*.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has evidence that I violated the laws of this province I'd invite him to table it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

Again to the Premier. Premier, the auditor points out that there were instances during her investigation where information requested was still outstanding nine months after her initial request. This is in clear violation of the *Audit Act*.

Premier, you and your government were obviously trying to stall and delay the auditor as much as you could. Why, again, did you violate the *Audit Act*?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the public service were under clear direction and encouragement to cooperate fully with the Auditor General and I'm confident that that was done.

There were more than 10,000 documents provided to the Auditor General. There were hundreds of hours of interviews between senior public servants and the Auditor General.

Our intention from the time the Auditor General was asked to take on that work was that she was the best person to carry out that review, to look into the matter fully, to come back with recommendations, and that's exactly what she did, with cooperation from the public service, and that's exactly what she produced in the way of a report, a report that we're following.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

Again, a report that we're following. Again, on this side of the floor, all we're simply asking you to do is follow the rules.

Premier, early in her work the Auditor General sent out a request to government and department agencies involved in the gaming scandal and the financial services platform files requesting all expenditures related to these files including, travel, legal fees, and consulting fees.

Premier, why did your government departments again refuse to provide this information?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have had an opportunity to interview the Auditor General through Public Accounts, and I have to say, I don't think that's an accurate account of what was done to cooperate with the Auditor General on the question of expenses.

She was indeed provided with hundreds, if not, thousands of documents on this very question. She did arrive at a figure which is in her report. She did say that she wasn't able to ascertain that that was all of the expenses but it was not that she was not provided with the information. She was provided and had the cooperation on a regular basis from the top all the way through the public service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Egaming documents

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a question for the Premier. Mr. Premier, you bragged to the media and indeed in the House today that the government has provided over 10,000 documents to the Auditor General for her egaming investigation.

Can you please explain why emails from senior government officials were not among those 10,000 documents?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General was indeed provided with emails from many senior public servants and from former political figures.

It's my understanding that there were accounts that were deleted. That is not something that will take place again under this government, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: This is another one for the Premier.

Mr. Premier, I mean, there were several senior government officials that were identified as key participants in the egaming initiative. Yet when the Auditor General requested information on emails and other records, nothing was provided, nothing. You just admitted that emails were deleted.

Why did you allow these officials to withhold records and emails from the Auditor General?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it's not correct to say that nothing was provided.

There were, as I understand it, two officials who, following their departure from government, the emails accounts were deleted. That would not happen again. But let me assure this House that there were many senior officials who on request of the Auditor General did indeed provide emails as she desired.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Premier and *Audit Act* (further)

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Premier, under the *Audit Act*, it says the Auditor General: shall have free access to all – not part, but all – files, documents, and records relating to financial matters of every agency of government or Crown controlled or owned corporation.

Mr. Premier, you are the minister of justice in our province, and this is your responsibility, so why did you allow the *Audit Act* to be breached and indeed obstruct the role of the Auditor General in her investigation?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, from the time the Auditor General's inquiry or review started there was clear direction from the top, and throughout the public service, to cooperate with the Auditor General, and frankly, we wouldn't expect anything else.

That was done, as I've said, to the tune of providing more than 10,000 documents, hours of interviews, many initiatives to work cooperatively with the Auditor General.

I would not consider the way it's been characterized to be fair or accurate. Indeed, it was our objective to ensure that the Auditor General have all of the information to enable her to conduct a complete review and to provide us with the guidance, and to provide this House and to provide the people of Prince Edward Island with the guidance, to ensure that we give the best possible and good government going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Egaming documents (further)

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, it was clear that the rules were not followed.

The Premier has just said that emails were deleted when they shouldn't have been, and the Auditor General is quite clear in report. Because these emails were illegally deleted she could not do the job that she wanted to do.

Mr. Premier, it seems odd to me and to the member of the public that information from key officials, both present and former, was destroyed.

Can you please tell me: How did this happen under your watch?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it did not happen under my watch.

The events described by the hon. member took place sometime probably prior to 2012.

Let me be very precise in this. The word illegal and earlier references along those

lines is a very serious allegation to make and there are ways to deal with that. Indeed, it's my understanding that there has been a reference to the RCMP and, presumably, they are looking into that question, but I don't think it's something that should be thrown around lightly on the floor of this House.

Let me say on the point of the emails, we do take that seriously that there should be records, that the records should be kept. I've spent months, if not years, of my own life in the archives when there are paper records and complete records, and I understand the value of having a continuous and a permanent archive of the important work of government and what that means in terms of the continuity of good government in this province.

We stand by that, and we in fact are acting on policies to ensure that those records are identified and will be kept for longevity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Premier and PAC

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, the picture that has just been painted by the Premier is a case of deleted emails.

We have accounts that were also deleted. We also have BBM PINS, and for those who aren't familiar, those are codes that users can use with their BlackBerry Messengers to send messages without having to share their personal phone numbers or email address. Those are nowhere provided. They were all gone.

This is a huge issue and it's something that bears further investigation. Obviously, we're not going to get complete and full answers today, so this is a question for the Premier.

Mr. Premier, are you, as the Premier, willing to come before the Public Accounts Committee to outline to the committee how this information was destroyed or not provided while most of it – and some of it, we believe – while you were Premier and minister of justice?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it's, I think, unusual to be invited in the course of Question Period to come to Public Accounts.

I fully respect the work of Public Accounts and the issues that Public Accounts Committee is addressing, but –

Mr. Trivers: Are you (Indistinct) down the question right now, too?

Premier MacLauchlan: – let me be sure that the inquiry – if it's something that I can respond to, I will. If someone else can respond to it I'm sure that's the way the information will be given to the Public Accounts Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Plebiscite threshold

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

A question for our Premier. Prior to this month's plebiscite on electoral reform we have had eight previous provincial plebiscites on Prince Edward Island. Can the Premier inform this House how many of those plebiscites resulted in the government of the day following the wishes of Islanders as expressed in those plebiscites?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: I wouldn't have known the answer to that question if I hadn't read this morning's *Guardian* newspaper in which the Leader of the Third Party says that all of those plebiscites resulted in the government acting, or not, according to the results of the plebiscite.

I think you could go back then through those various events and exercise some discernment as to the level of participation and the way in which the government took the indication of the will of the people from the plebiscite. I'm sure that's what will happen with the plebiscite that was recently conducted in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

That is a correct answer. Thank you Mr. Premier.

Some of those plebiscites had higher voter turnout than the one we've just done, some less. Some of those plebiscites had a larger margin of victory than the one we just carried out, some less.

Can the Premier tell this House, by convention, what is the threshold required to enact legislation based on Islanders' wishes as expressed in a plebiscite?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell the House and the Leader of the Third Party what was said in the second report of the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal on this point where the committee pointed out that the 2005 plebiscite on the proportional representation had a 33% participation and the plebiscite on the fixed link had in the order of between 64% and 65% participation.

The committee in its wisdom, and I respect that, said that this is something that should be weighed, taking account of both the level of turnout and the margin of support that is voiced for the question posed. It was clear – certainly to be read between the lines and in an associated comment – in the report of the committee that the committee did not feel that the turnout in the 2005 plebiscite was – let me say, it was something that they wished to see happen again.

I also note that the Leader of the Third Party himself suggested that a 50% turnout would be an adequate basis or a desirable basis on which to act on a plebiscite.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I want to thank the Premier for the opportunity to clear the reference he made up right now. Not that you made it up, but I want to clear it up right now.

The figure referenced by our Premier is not a limit that I, myself, was proposing. It was my guess at what the Premier might be looking for.

Now, I'm very flattered that the government

—

An Hon. Member: Question.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: — when developing its position would take into account what the Leader of the Third Party is guessing what the Premier is thinking, but to me it hardly seems relevant, and I hope that this government in defense of their position of not honouring the vote will hang its evidence on something a little more substantial than that flimsy twig.

The answer to my previous question — by convention what threshold is required — is that there is none. There is none. In fact, none of our plebiscites previously have ever had the clear majority that our Premier has talked about so often in the last few weeks.

When is the Premier going to honour the vote in this month's plebiscite fostering, as he answered earlier in this Question Period, the culture of good governance and bring in legislation to conduct our next provincial election under a mixed-member proportional system?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the vote will be honoured by a debate in this Legislative Assembly and I look forward to it, and I will be speaking through a minister's statement to that very question shortly after Question Period.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Government and Internet technology changes

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today my question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism. Rural Internet is a big issue in my district, as it is in many areas across Prince Edward Island. As the minister knows the technology is constantly changing. Could this minister tell us what the government and his department are doing to ensure that we are keeping up with these changes?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Government House Leader for his question. We recognize the importance of Internet service right from one end of the Island to the other. As economic development minister, I can assure you that we're hearing from different groups that are very interested in our progress and the process of increasing the speed of Internet, because that is the real issue. We'll be working diligently with those organizations, and also the providers, to help solve the problem of Internet services in PEI.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche, your first supplementary.

Rural access to Internet

Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I just have one supplementary to the same minister.

Access to modern Internet service is very important to businesses to thrive in rural PEI. Could the minister please elaborate on his conversations, or is there headway being made with providers that can determine ways for better service across this province?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Most recently we've met with all seven service providers here on Prince Edward Island and some of the feedback coming back from those service providers was to – some were saying that government needs to do more and some were saying government stay out of the way, so it was a varied recommendation back from them.

We're going to work with community groups, if they come forward. We may be able to do some financial assistance if it's relevant to the situation of the day. I can tell you that we're moving quickly to five megabytes or more. We have a national company coming in called Xplornet to deal with this.

We will be doing everything that we can possibly do to ensure high-speed Internet from one end of the Island to the other.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

School review consultations

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture. Minister, in October of this year round one of the school review consultations took place. Could the minister inform the House on the level of participation in these consultations throughout the province and what was learned from these consultations?

Mr. LaVie: Did you write that question?

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

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

Leader of the Opposition: (Indistinct).

Mr. Currie: Step one of the school change policy, which is being led by the Public School Branch, has been activated. That began in early fall. I must say that the conversations – the level of engagement has been high. We've had approximately over 900 individuals attend. As the minister, I continue to encourage parents to be engaged

in the conversation about how we continue to provide the best quality education we possibly can here in the province.

Now, if you look at the family of school discussions, the conversations range from family of schools to family of schools, but at the end of the day, as the minister, the utmost priority is making sure that we continue to build a quality education system here in our province for our children.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, your first supplementary question.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, this month round two of the consultations are to take place. What is the focus of this round of consultations?

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

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

The school change policy, which is a policy which is consistent to every school board across this country – and these are conversations that are happening in urban and rural communities all across Canada. The conversations in the second step are conversations that are looking at solutions and options and getting direct feedback from groups, parents, and community leaders.

The feedback, once again, there's been approximately about 1,000 people attended those discussions, and those discussions have been about community.

As the minister, I value and respect the connection that schools have in communities, but one of the issues that is of top-of-mind for myself as minister is that we as a province continue to build the highest quality of public education that we possibly can, and it's about all children across the Province of Prince Edward Island.

But I respect the conversation, and I continue – parents and communities to lead those conversations in their communities about public education.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot, your second supplementary question.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, I understand the round two consultations will involve viable options for change. How were these options developed?

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

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

I want to be very clear to all Members of the Legislative Assembly that as the minister there's no playbook in respect to the future direction of the envelope of public schools in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

We've been very clear. There's a five-step process. The process is very open and very transparent, a process that is encouraging Islanders to engage. But there's also a conversation going on. There are meetings being held. There are individuals and groups that are not feeling comfortable with presenting their thoughts and ideas about suggestions about improving the quality of education in communities. Those have added up to about approximately 40 meetings. There have also been approximately 200 written submissions that are coming in online. The conversation about the future of public education is alive and well.

I, as the minister, have been very clear that status quo is not an option moving into the next school year. We have schools that are over-capacity with huge class sizes. We've got schools in close proximity that are very underutilized. My mandate is to make sure that we use every dollar to the best of our potential to respond to the changing needs of children in this province and continue to develop education to be part of a very key pillar, and that's around prosperity, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Openness and transparency

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As a number of MLAs said here today, it is great to be back in the Legislature. For me, it's one of the most important responsibilities in this Legislature is standing up for Islanders, all Islanders, to make sure that the tax they pay on their hard-earned income is spent wisely. The government looks after the taxpayers of PEI.

The Premier promised in 2015 in the throne speech openness and transparency, and hold government, and especially leaders, to high standards of ethical conduct and accountability.

Question to the Premier: Has the passage of time changed your opinion of the importance of increasing openness and transparency?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the passage of time – I call it 20 months – has, if anything, demonstrated the importance of openness and transparency, and the importance of the steps that we've taken as government, and continue to take, to build a culture and to build good practices of openness and transparency, one of which will be, in the course of this legislative session, to introduce the lobbyist registration act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to hear that is hasn't, although with the challenges the AG had in obtaining information about the egaming scandal and a cover-up, I have to wonder.

Ethical conduct and accountability

Question to the Premier: Do you feel it is of paramount importance to hold government, and especially leaders, to high standards of ethical conduct and accountability?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, within five weeks of coming to government

we had, in fact, put in place the expenditure disclosures, the conflict of interest restrictions with respect to senior public servants and senior political advisors, and had put in place the Ethics and Integrity Commissioner.

Further to that, have put in place a code of ethical conduct that the conflict of interest commissioner actively applies in her workings and in her work and meetings and in the annual report of senior public servants.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Premier. Yes or no question, Premier. Does accountability include the ethical use of taxpayers' dollars?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Premier: What consequences are in place for senior officials in your government who fail to follow the rules on using taxpayers' money?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the ultimate rule and the one that we live by, is ministerial responsibility.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will put the question in a more direct manner to avoid any confusion from the Premier.

Question to the Premier: What is the penalty for a senior government official who failed

to follow Treasury Board rules around spending public money?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we work with public servants to encourage them and to ensure that the rules are adhered to, that policies are adhered to.

The Minister of Finance is our lead minister in that regard in his responsibility as president of Treasury Board, in his responsibility for the Public Service Commission.

Our approach is that public servants are expected to abide by all of the rules and policies, and if there are exceptions to that that there are in fact ways that you have to deal with people to ensure that we are encouraging good government on behalf of all Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Travel claim approval

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier made an election promise to increase accountability and oversight of expense claims.

Question to the Premier: Who approves your travel claims?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, my expense claims are signed off by the chief of staff.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Premier: Who approves the travel claims of the deputy minister and your chief of staff?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I'll come back and give you the answer to that question.

But let me say that the expense claims for my own expenditures or for deputy minister, or chief of staff, are posted and are publicly available. I think all Islanders can look at that and see that we run a parsimonious shop. My travel expense, or other out-of-pocket expenses related to our office, are substantially below any previous precedents that have been set for the office of the Premier or for the senior officials.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, final question.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The campaign promise stated that in order for an expense to be reimbursed there must be a clear connection between the expense and the value to the taxpayer.

Question to the Premier: How do you determine if the expense has value to the taxpayer?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we are old-fashioned, I'm going to call it.

I'll invite –

Mr. LaVie: Speak for yourself.

Premier MacLauchlan: I'm happy to speak for myself, Mr. Speaker, I am old-fashioned.

We take that approach to public funds and to the expenditure of public funds. I'd be happy to come back and tell this House in detail how we have reduced the expenditure for salary, for the operating expenses, and for the travel expenses that have anything to do with the Office of the Premier, and we're getting results.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]