



Session:	2/65
Date:	22 November 2016
No:	28

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

TUESDAY, 22 NOVEMBER 2016

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

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

Write-off date for IIDI egaming loan (further)

Mr. MacDonald: I'd like to table an answer to a question taken as notice in regards to loan write-offs for the Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Summerside tax centre job losses

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

The tax centre in Summerside is a major employer in Prince County. Hundreds of Islanders from across the province work at the tax centre. According to the 2012 study by McInnes Cooper, the estimated average value of a full-time equivalent federal government job with wages and benefits on PEI was \$78,000.

Question to the Premier: Have you had any conversations with the federal government or our four MPs over plans announced last week that could result in significant job loss at the tax centre in PEI?

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

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

As soon as the announcement was made and as soon as there were some reports of potential job losses, Bobby Morrissey and I were in contact with each other. Bobby Morrissey is the MP for the area.

I can assure everybody in this House, if Bobby Morrissey has the file on his desk, it will go all the way.

Mr. Morrissey has indicated to me he has spoken to the department. The bottom line is that there are 78 new jobs coming to PEI. The tax centre is changing its role from a T1 processing centre – T1B and personal

income tax – to a corporate income tax centre. Those people have to be notified that they're no longer going to be working in the T1 section, and they'll be asked to go to the T2 section.

As of today –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: No, there's where you're wrong. Get your facts right. They should get their facts right, Mr. Speaker, and I'm trying to pass it out there today to them.

Anyway, as of today Bobby Morrissey has indicated that he's spoken to the department and he has assured us that there will be no job losses (Indistinct).

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I think this is something we should hear from the Premier about. What was originally celebrated in this House last week by your government as a possible increase of the 70 full-time equivalent jobs or positions is actually a decrease of up to 182 positions.

Question to the Premier: Why does your government think that the potential loss of 182 full-time jobs is need for celebration?

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

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

We are very confident. We're very proud in this House to have such an MP as Bobby Morrissey in the House. Bobby Morrissey is one of the MPs that got the tax centre to Prince Edward Island. Bobby Morrissey fought hard for this and Bobby Morrissey knows what's going on there.

As I said earlier, if there's a unionized department, when you change job descriptions or eliminate jobs in one area and create them in another area, you have to give notice to that area in order for them to

apply for the new area. That's what's going on I'm told, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier needs to read the letter that was received by some of these workers.

According to a 2012 McInnes Cooper study, the federal government is the single largest employer in PEI. Close to 1,000 people work at the CRA on the Island, the tax centre, with the bulk of these people working up there.

Question to the Premier: Does the Premier realize that not standing up for these 182 jobs will have a major impact on these people's lives and their livelihoods?

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

Mr. R. Brown: We are standing up for them, Mr. Speaker.

That's why Mr. Morrissey and I were on the phone last night at 10:30, we were communicating back and forth all day. We understand.

The federal government has recognized the good work of the people of Prince Edward Island in their tax centre. That's why we're getting additional jobs in that area. If they didn't respect that area they wouldn't be putting more jobs here on Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Morrissey is fighting hard for this centre, but most of all, the workers at the tax centre have proven their worth to the federal government and to the people of Canada, and that's why they're going to remain there in Summerside.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

That 2012 study also said that: In smaller communities, the loss of federal government jobs has a bigger impact than in large and urban centres. The loss of spending power in the local economy is felt more in Summerside than in Toronto.

I guess the question directly to the Premier – not you, to the Premier: Will you guarantee that there'll be no job losses in Summerside?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I'll guarantee that the province will take timely action.

We'll work with our federal colleagues, as the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning has already demonstrated, very ably, I should say.

May I add that in the past year there have been positions added at Veterans Affairs in the regular workforce, and a regional office reestablished that had been taken away by the previous government for veterans to get services here in Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Deleted government email accounts

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a question for the Premier. Last week during Question Period the Premier stated that two email accounts of senior government officials were deleted.

Mr. Premier, who were these two individuals?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Clearly the AG has taken considerable time to work on this particular file. There was additional staff. She made a number of very clear recommendations. She went before the committee to speak of that and she outlined a number of recommendations that she had put forward with respect to that.

With respect to that we will be replying and working on those. Many of those have already been met and we'll continue working on the few that are left. At some point in the not-too-distant future the Auditor General will come back and she'll review those recommendations to her satisfaction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Another question for the Premier: Mr. Premier, what are the dates when these email accounts were deleted?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the AG clearly pointed out in her reports, she had the opportunity to review over tens of thousands of documents, and many of those –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: No attempt to even answer the question is a rule, no attempt to answer the question.

Speaker: Members, let the minister answer the question.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Members, I just ask you, let the minister answer the question. You may not like the answer, but let him answer.

Mr. Aylward: There is no answer.

Mr. LaVie: There is no answer.

Mr. R. Brown: You're questioning the Speaker, are you?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Now, don't forget to just have some respect for the institution.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Auditor General, as I was stating, she reviewed over tens of thousands of documents and a great majority of those were emails. In the normal course of a person leaving government, the email file of a person that was going to government would go to HR. HR would take that email file of all of the emails for the person that's leaving and they would take those emails, print them off, and they would go directly on a file. Many emails that would be going back and forth, they would be cc'd to another person from within government or copied on it. All of those would be reviewed by the Auditor General.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For the period of the egaming scandal the tourism department was responsible for upholding and policing the *Archives and Records Act*, so this is a question to the minister to the minister of health who was minister of tourism and culture at that time.

Why were these email accounts deleted in violation of the *Archives and Records Act* while you were the minister responsible, Mr. Minister?

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

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

As the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture I do have the responsibility of records information management. I'm very aware of the recommendations that have come from the Auditor General's report.

I must compliment my colleague for the immediate response to the recommendations from the Auditor General's report. We will be doing our part to continue to modernize, resource up, and continue to work across government to improve and modernize record information management on the

recommendations of the Auditor General's report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, the current minister of health was the minister responsible and needs to accept his ministerial responsibility, as his Premier preaches.

Minister of health: Why did you fail to uphold the *Archives and Records Act* when you were minister of tourism and culture and allow these email accounts to be deleted?

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

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

I'm very pleased to be part of this debate because I don't get to talk about records information management very often.

But once again, I've been a Cabinet minister in government for over 10 years and am very familiar with Auditor General's reports, and very welcome to respond, and respect the work of the Auditor General, and will continue to respond with the recommendations from her work.

As part of the review, the Auditor General's office is examining departmental records, keeping policies and procedures. The Record Information Management, RIM Program, administered by the Public Archives and Records Office, which is my responsibility – during the course of their investigation they appear to have had difficulty assessing the records as pointed out. We will be responding to the recommendations, bringing in legislation this spring to make sure that the records information management is responding to the Auditor General and modernizing this process.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I mean, it's clear that there were several members on the other side, many who are ministers right now, that were involved with this file and were partially responsible, including the Member from Tignish-Palmer Road who was also minister of education and responsible for the *Archives and Records Act*.

Now, the Auditor General did write that she was not provided with any emails or other government records from key senior government officials.

Can the current minister of education who is responsible for the *Archives and Records Act* explain why the auditor was provided with nothing from this government? No emails or other government records. Nothing for these individuals.

Thank you.

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

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

I recognize as the minister – I've been briefed on the Auditor General's report. Moving forward in respect to how records information management will respond – and we recognize the lack of electronic records management (Indistinct) government, which has been an ongoing reality with governments for decades.

The inability of PARO to enforce compliance on the existing legislation, which recognizes that the new legislation has been put in place – we're working on that. That legislation will be brought forward in the spring. The limited staff – I understand that there was a Treasury Board memo that has gone through for approval. We welcome the additional resources to modernize our responsibilities all across government, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Amendment of *Archives and Records Act*

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While we're on the topic of changing legislation, a question to the Premier: Why did your government amend the *Archives and Records Act* last fall sitting?

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

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

My mandate as the minister responsible – I'm Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture – my responsibility is to respond as part of government, and my duties in Executive Council, and out of respect for the responsibilities that have been directed to my department from the Auditor General.

We take those recommendations very seriously. We are acting and obviously putting resources in place, working to bring in legislation, to modernize legislation, and we're responding to the auditor –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) act! That's the question.

Mr. Currie: We're responding in respect to –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) act.

Mr. Currie: We're responding, Mr. Speaker, to the recommendations.

I have tremendous respect for the work of the Auditor General's office and will continue to implement the recommendations in timely fashion, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister's head is stuck in some loop about a question that I didn't ask. He's still answering questions from the member from Rustico over here because I didn't ask anything about the Auditor General or egaming or anything.

I asked the Premier why he amended an act last fall, so you just take a deep breath and listen to me here. Give me five seconds of your time, be good listeners, as the Premier would say.

Premier's office and *Archives and Records Act*

This change removed the Premier's office from the jurisdiction of the *Archives and Records Act*.

Question to the Premier: Premier, why did your government remove your office from legal obligations that were in the *Archives and Records Act*?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I'll take that question under advisement and I will reply to the House on that tomorrow.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now we all have been following pretty closely what's been happening with the egaming file and deleted emails and a lot of secrets that you fellows seem to be collectively trying to keep for previous government members and whatnot. Quite embarrassing, actually, for this province, let alone your whole party brand over there, but I guess that's something you fellows will have to worry about.

The way I see it is that the Premier removed himself from the records act. Now, it's free game in the Premier's office. So the next time we have another egaming fiasco, which I'm sure we'll have under your rule, there's going to be nothing stopping you fellows from deleting whatever you want because you removed yourself from the act.

Premier, why have you removed yourself from the legal protection that Islanders have under the act prior to changes?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: As I said, Mr. Speaker, I'll offer a full response tomorrow to that question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm surprised that the Premier didn't know about it. It came on the floor of this Legislature and was debated.

For everybody that's following along, what's actually going on is this Premier made a special move to help ensure that he could delete emails that came from his office from a previous premier who would have still fallen under the act the time that he changed it so he could delete things, so he could hide things from Islanders, thus tying himself directly to this scandal that he's trying to cover up.

Question to the Premier again: Why have you made it so the rules around record retention and disposal no longer apply to you or anyone in your office?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, a very competent minister looking after all of this now in the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

As I said, I'm prepared to give a full account of this in the House tomorrow, and I'm sure it'll shed some light on the angle that's being put forward by the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.
Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've been trying to shed some light on this file for a long time. I get nothing but roadblocks when it comes to you fellows. I thought when you came along and you said: I do business differently. Like a fool, I believed that because I thought that you actually cared about Islanders. I was mistaken, like many Islanders who believed the false bill of goods that you sold them.

Anyway, now you're elbows deep into a cover up.

Question to the Premier: How many records have you deleted during your cover-up period now that your office is no longer covered by any legislation?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, all the emails that have come my way since I've been Premier can be readily accessed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When this Premier came along he had a wonderful opportunity to actually wash his hands of the previous administration. He tried to tell everyone he was a new government. You guys all remember that. Remember when you were saying: We're a new government, we're not them.

Now here the Premier is right in the middle of a cover up, covering up, changing legislation so that he can cover up deleted emails that were deleted prior to being allowed under this legislation. He changed the act so that no one had broken the law, and now moving forward he can do whatever he wants in that office.

Premier, why do you feel like you're above the law and that your office does not need to keep complete and full records?

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

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

As I indicated earlier on, the line of questioning – as the minister I've been very familiar with the work of the Auditor General, being at the Cabinet table for 10 years in multiple departments, and am very aware of the duties and the responsibilities and the accountability that I have as the minister responsible in implementing and working through the work plan on the recommendations from the Auditor General.

I will bring back and update the House exactly the work that's been done in respect

to the recommendations that have been directed and responded to from the Auditor General's report. The review of existing record information management legislation is underway, policies and procedures are currently underway, and improvements in staff training and implementation are going. I do know that we are going to be staffing up and hiring more staff to respond to the recommendations on behalf of government.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it's unfortunate for the minister of education. Whenever the Premier needs to run and hide he runs and hides behind you. Unfortunately, the horse is out of the barn on this one. The Premier is elbows deep into this cover up. He changed legislation so that he could cover up the past and so that it would never apply to him. When he writes this chapter of his book he will never have to say: I did bad things. No one will ever know because all those emails will be deleted.

The *Archives and Records Act* outlines the responsibility for the preservation of government records, and that has the requirement that the records can't be destroyed under that act.

Question to the Premier: Why are you so eager to remove the legislative protection and the independent oversight as it applies to your office?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me assure the House that I understand the value of archival records and the need to preserve records for longevity.

We are in an electronic universe. As the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture has made clear, we are very actively in the process of dedicating resources, developing policy, and putting government on a footing where this will be fully protected and the records will be kept for longevity.

I've no pretense or I've no expectation whatsoever that that same law would not

apply to the Premier and to the Premier's office, and indeed, I lead by example.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Motion 80 and electoral reform

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

Under PEI's *Election Act* we are supposed to have fixed dates for elections. However, the piece of electoral reform contained a loophole that enables the Premier to ignore that fixed date and call elections whenever he should please. We saw last year that the Premier is not above using such loopholes when the political situation may be advantageous.

The Premier's motion on the plebiscite on democratic renewal contains similar sorts of loopholes.

A question to the Premier: Are the many loopholes in Motion No. 80 simply mistakes or is it a way to avoid taking any action on electoral reform?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, Motion No. 80 is still under debate, so if there are loopholes I suppose it's open to hon. members to move amendments or bring them to our attention.

As regards the *Election Act*, it is standard in those jurisdictions that have a fixed election date that there is always a proviso, which is required by our Constitution, that the Lieutenant Governor retains the ability to call an election. In fact, I can't see how it could be otherwise in a parliamentary democracy.

The reasons for the election of 2015 were well understood at the time. There were four parties, none of which had a leader in the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Like the plebiscite on electoral reform, government's Motion No. 80 is itself not binding.

To quote Marleau and Montpetit a motion is, and I quote, "... a declaration of opinion or purpose; it does not have the effect of requiring that any action be taken, nor is it binding."

Given that this government has not implemented the results of the plebiscite and ignored fixed election dates previously, what assurances can this Premier offer Islanders that they will, in fact, implement Motion No. 80?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, first we have to pass Motion No. 80.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Electoral reform and parliamentary sovereignty

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

Indeed we do.

Since the Premier tabled Motion No. 80 some Islanders have raised concerns about certain aspects of the motion, including the point of parliamentary sovereignty, whether one Assembly can force the actions of a future one.

There's some question as to whether the Premier's binding referendum during a general election can, in fact, force the newly elected government, which could be entirely different from the one we see before us today, to enact those results.

Could the Premier please explain how his proposed referendum on electoral reform will circumvent the principle of parliamentary sovereignty and be binding on the next government?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Third Party, I expect, will be speaking on the motion and I'll have a further opportunity to speak on it as the mover.

But in saying that the referendum will be binding is that there will be a clear indication of an outcome of the referendum.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

Cell phone coverage gaps

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Economic Development and Tourism minister.

Many of my constituents have voiced their concerns over lack of cell phone coverage in at least 11 of the communities that I represent.

Can the minister please advise us if he's aware of these cell phone coverage gaps in this area of the province?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think, as I travel around the country, on Prince Edward Island there's not just gaps in the western part of the province, there are gaps right across the Island. It's an unfortunate situation and it's a very important situation for businesses and emergency response teams.

It tends to be in the less densely populated areas or geographical areas that we have to deal with. We'll do what we can as a province. It is a private enterprise. We'll do what we can to assist anybody on PEI to resolve some of their issues as far as cell phone coverage goes.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, your first supplementary question.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My constituents deserve to have cell phone coverage for businesses, for private use, and in case of an emergency, potentially.

Would the minister be open to further talks with the CRTC and also with these federal government counterparts to convey these concerns?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

But clearly it's not just one region in the province, it's other regions of the province, and I think we're here to represent all of them.

I'd be more than happy to pass the concerns along of the constituents to the federal government because the federal government is ultimately responsible for telecommunications on Prince Edward Island.

But I will say this, if anybody read the *Globe and Mail* today that there is an article in there on CRTC. It's becoming very clear – and I heard a quick comment on the Internet services – it's becoming clearer that people are becoming more educated on these systems, and very well voicing their concerns, and they're being heard. CRTC has set out, basically, in their mandate to ensure that private enterprise is very aware that the issues are relevant. I think that's a good thing. We're seeing it, as well, in the Internet services as well.

CRTC seems to be on top of it. A competitive marketplace is some of the things. They're equipping Canadians with a tool. There is a website called I think it's demand more or demand equal or something like that through CRTC, if anybody's having issues with it.

Certainly, back to the original question, that I would be more than happy to take this up with the federal minister.

Thank you.

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

Cornwall highway studies

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy. There has been a lot of discussion regarding the Cornwall Perimeter Highway Project.

Minister, you have stated that MRSB has been contacted to do an economic impact. Have there been any other studies done?

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

Mr. Aylward: Yes, there was actually, just to see (Indistinct).

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Indeed, there has been a lot of discussion in regard to the Cornwall bypass. In fact, the town of Cornwall has been requesting this for over 20 years.

The economic case is strong when you look at the difference in development between two comparable communities, that of Cornwall and Stratford.

Just to quote a few statistics, in Stratford where the main street for development and access is the Stratford Road, which the Member from Stratford-Kinlock is a great advocate for, in the most recent available census we saw 21% growth in Stratford compared with 10% in Cornwall, which the main thoroughfare is the Trans-Canada Highway. If you look at building permits for a similar period, last year Cornwall issued 61 worth \$6.7 million and Stratford issued 98 worth \$19.3 million.

The town of Cornwall's reasons, certainly, that the development potential will be unleashed with this new development. There has, indeed, been a number of reports dating back to 1979, which the – has been proposals and analyzed. During tabling of documents I certainly, with the permission of the House, will table those.

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

Cornwall highway second phase update

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, I have the occasion to travel the first phase of the Cornwall bypass as it borders on my district.

Could you give us an update on the second phase of this project?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member from West Royalty-Springvale. I know we had many discussions the last few years over the Maypoint intersection which he was a great advocate for.

The new roundabouts are complete at Poplar Island and the Maypoint intersection and traffic is flowing. There's still a little bit of work to be done on this phase 1 with painting and landscaping, but the next stage, phase 2, will begin in the spring with a roundabout at the intersection of York Point Road with the Trans-Canada Highway.

Pending environmental approval, we will begin construction of the main part of phase 2 during the summer or fall of 2017. We have begun public consultations for this second phase. We have met with the residents of Fulton Drive to talk about their feelings in regard to the project, and there will be some other meetings in the works and discussions with other property owners affected along the highway perimeter.

Speaker: The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, your second supplementary.

Cornwall highway environmental studies

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Did I hear you correctly, minister, in terms of there's an environmental study done? Is there another environmental study for the second phase or are the environmental studies complete for the total project?

Speaker: The Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With a project of this magnitude environmental protection is at the forefront of that. My department has recently issued a request for proposals to carry out an environmental assessment on the next phase, and I anticipate that we will hear from very qualified firms in that regard.

But on a project of this magnitude – it's tagged at \$65 million. Up to 50% of that is refundable from the federal government, and if we don't use the money on this particular project it goes back into a federal pot and goes to another community, so why shouldn't PEI use it on a project that's needed in the town of Cornwall?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Myers: We don't have any money, we're broke. Spend it on my children's credit card.

Speaker: Let's have some order.

I think the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River would like to ask a question.

Riverview and Tyne Valley manors

Ms. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I would.

This morning I, along with the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, toured the Riverview Manor. I must say the staff there is doing an exceptional job of caring for the residents in a tired and worn-out building.

Will the minister of health explain why Islanders should believe this government when they promise in the coming days that, honestly, this time they will replace Riverview and Tyne Valley Manors?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously the Montague Riverview Manor replacement is commenced as far as the blueprints and plans. We will be commencing in the spring. The tender and constructions will start and the completion date will be as scheduled, and as announced in the past, in late 2018.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The residents of Montague and Tyne Valley and the surrounding areas have heard empty promises before. This government in the 2011 election platform said: Moving forward, new construction will also take place in Montague to replace Riverview Manor.

Will the Minister of Finance clarify how he intends to explain to his constituents why this promise from 2011 is being recycled again and again?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is well aware, we've commenced in our government here to do a long-term strategy in replacing our long-term care facilities in this province.

We are at a point in time where the last two facilities that require significant upgrades are the Tyne Valley Stewart Memorial Manor as well as the Riverview Manor.

The Premier has written a letter, as well as signed by myself and the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy, to the staff at those facilities to inform them that construction will take place in the 2017 construction season, and the completion date will be as announced and as scheduled in late 2018.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During the 2011 election platform – a month following the 2011 election platform, Wes Sheridan admitted in capital estimates that the Riverview Manor would be pushed out one extra year. In the 2013 capital budget address Wes Sheridan promised Riverview and Tyne Valley once again. In 2014 capital budget address Wes Sheridan again promised.

Eight promises, eight times we promised this, and I think the key word here is promised.

Can the present Minister of Finance explain how he is getting so much mileage from this tired promise Wes Sheridan left behind in his desk?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River that when we make commitments on this side of the House we will fulfill those commitments.

In this particular case it's not only a verbal commitment or an announcement, it's an actual letter in writing from the Premier and the two members at play here.

Mr. Myers: That he can now delete.

Mr. Henderson: We will be constructing – those two manors will be replaced in the 2017 construction year with completion in the late 2018 season, and I can assure the hon. member that will take place this side of the House. We'll see to that.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The great thing about this worn-out hollow promise is that it gets broken out before every election, polished up, and taken on the road.

In the spring of 2015 the Premier of this government held a press conference in Montague right before the election started promising these two manors. He said construction will begin in early 2016.

Will the Minister of Finance explain why this government would recycle this promise on the eve of an election when they had no plans of keeping it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, our long-term care facility replacement has been in the capital budget for some time, and now we're coming to the end of that construction phase which we will be completing both the Riverview Manor and the Stewart Memorial Manor in Tyne Valley during the 2017-2018 construction year.

I can assure this House that we try to do whatever we can to make sure that our long-term care facilities are up to standard. We're one of the few provinces in this county that has a real modern upgraded long-term care facility strategy in this province, and we have great facilities.

Those two will be replaced to be brought up to those standards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You're right. The finance minister did mention it in the capital budget, and I quote: "In the next year significant progress is expected in the construction of the new Riverview Manor in Montague as well as the new long-term care facility in Tyne Valley."

Can the minister explain how a project that has been promised eight times under this government still has yet to actually happen?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River that construction will commence in 2017, the fiscal year.

But the reality is that the blueprints and the plans are all completed. The property's all purchased. It's just really now a matter of getting the tenders out and getting them completed and have construction start.

I will be making that commitment with the hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy that construction will commence at the spring construction

season as it commences in 2017, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the spring, during her departmental estimates, the minister of transportation was quick to say these facilities were both out to tender.

Minister, what happened to this priority in your department?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, obviously when a project of this nature is done for our health care facilities, it is actually the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy that deals with the tendering process and deals with the construction.

Once the keys are turned over to our department, then it's our responsibility to deal with the management and operational components of those types of facilities.

Once again, I have every commitment, both from the Premier and the minister of transportation, that, once again, construction will commence in the 2017 spring construction season. We're now in a good place where we can take our time, get good tenders, get good prices, and get good value for the taxpayers when it comes to upgrading these facilities, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the minister of health's own words in response to a question, as I'm sure the hon. member knows – he probably reads his paper now and then – and the tenders have already been called for on Riverview Manor, and construction will begin shortly.

I hear you say you're going to have better tenders. I'm not sure what that means, but minister: How can Islanders believe what you're saying here in the House today?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, yes, there was an advertisement that was in the paper last year for the commencement of that.

But once again, circumstances have changed, and we will be renegotiating those tenders and looking at the best possible value for constructing those facilities, and construction will commence in the fiscal year of 2017. I can assure this House that these facilities are requiring the upgrades and the improvements, and new facilities will be constructed accordingly in the next construction season.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]