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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2016

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

New legislation re: physician complaints process (further)

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, in response to a question taken as noted by the hon. Leader of the Third Party, I wish to provide the following.

Subsequent to the original drafting of the 2009 *Medical Act*, the approach to the regulation of health professions has evolved across the country. The department identified concerns with the 2009 *Medical Act* including an absence of oversight by or accountability to the minister by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and that neither the minister nor the Lieutenant Governor in Council had any authority with respect to the provisions contained in the regulations. Therefore, the 2009 *Medical Act* was repealed by the members of this Legislature in December 2015.

At that time, an amendment to the current *Medical Act* was passed and included the repeal of the 2009 act as well as –

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, your time is up.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

State of high-speed Internet

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

On this side of the House we talk about the importance of infrastructure to our communities and the economy we talk about the need for a vision for rural development, and we talk about ways to grow our economy. High-speed Internet access is an issue that touches on all these conversations and grows the economy.

Question to the Premier: Does the Premier recognize that the current state of high-speed

Internet access is a barrier in growing the economy?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a good question and a fair question. I think everybody in this Legislature is on tune with it in regards to wanting businesses and communities and students and tourism entities to have better access to Internet right from one end of the Island to the other, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Our caucus has heard from business who say it is. Businesses of all sizes, start-ups to exporters, and back into our key industries. We've heard that same message from local governments and communities, groups too.

Question to the Premier. Better high-speed Internet access would remove a roadblock to grow our economy and our communities. Why does your government care so little about this issue?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, most recently we met with the seven companies to bring them in and talk about their futures and their structures, business plans going ahead.

We've come to a conclusion that in some cases they want government to stay right out of Internet connections right across the Island and realize that it's a fair opportunity and it's a complex issue. They want to be a fair enterprise.

But I can tell you this, that what we're doing is we're opening up information to these companies. We're responding to some of their needs. We're putting our infrastructure in place for them. That if they require any additional infrastructure –

Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

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

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I'm glad that you've heard – I don't understand how you can say that businesses want government to stay out when you keep on extending the contract.

If the Premier cared at all about this issue we'd be having a serious discussion about how to improve access for residents, businesses, and communities. Instead, your government's twisting like a pretzel to hide information – again – about how poorly your government manages this issue.

Question to the Premier. Islanders are crying for a better high-speed Internet access and your government ignores them. Why should they believe you have an interest in making the service better?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it is important to ensure that Islanders have information about the options that are open to them.

I had a meeting with three constituents earlier this week, along with officials from the department. They left with information about two additional services that they could consider.

That's what government needs to do and for all of us to recognize, that there are new options, competitive options, and that by the end of next year we're going to have the best Internet service in Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Oh! Oh!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Internet contract

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our members have been trying to have government release its secret untendered Internet contract since it was signed back in 2008. We have tried FOIPPING it, we've asked in question period, we've asked for estimates, we've requested it in standing committee multiple times. Finally this summer we got a copy that was blacked out and redacted.

Can the minister of economic development explain why this government has repeatedly refused to release the full contract?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, our government has contracts with multiple companies and corporations and we have to respect their privacy in regards to that contract.

But I can tell you that this company, in particular, went before committee. They had an open discussion and asked several questions in relevance to this contract. If I recall, the media the next day was wondering why they even actually went to committee because the questions were somewhat irrelevant to the whole process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government's fiction on this issue goes back years. The former minister told this House in 2009 that there was no contract and no public money involved.

This summer our standing committee wrote to the minister for the contract and he responded that he refused to release it. The next meeting the committee agreed to ask him to appear and he didn't even acknowledge our request.

Minister: Why have you shown so much disrespect to an all-party committee of this House looking for answers on PEI's lacking Internet access?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, I was just recently reading the notes of the committee members when they met with the company in question. It was very interesting, some of the questions that they posed.

We're very concerned. As economic development minister, I'm very concerned about companies from one end of the Island to the other, from tourist-bought businesses from one end of the Island to the other, and we're working closely with those new companies. In fact, there was just a new announcement in Kings County two weeks ago about another company expanding into that area.

We are working diligently to progress Internet solutions right across Prince Edward Island from one end to the other. If you look across Atlantic Canada, or Canada as a whole, we're doing very well, where we have 99% of our consumers at 1.5 megabytes, which is not enough, and I understand that, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the committee also discussed warranting a complete copy of the contract.

While he ignored the committee requests, the minister told the media he would never release the contract without a warrant from the committee. He also said he did not know why his caucus colleagues were preventing the information from being released, and insisted there is nothing in the contract government is trying to shield from the public.

Minister, have you figured out yet why your colleagues are preventing the release of this information?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, if the concern from the opposition, or the hon. member, is about Internet solutions from end of the Island to the other going forward, then that's a valid question.

But going back and going back is not going to help Tignish or East Point in regards to Internet connections and helping those businesses thrive. So there seems to be a smoke screen being set-up here.

But I can tell you we have no problem releasing the contract.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Internet contract wording

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What the minister also said to the media was as follows:

"I have my personal opinions about it..."

"Remember this was eight years ago this contract was drafted. Would it change today? I certainly think it would. Would the wording change? I certainly think it would."

Minister, which articles and what wording are you opposed to in this secret contract?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, going back to 2008 when we're coming from dial-up, when we're coming from dial-up?

Now we're into 2016 and we're talking about megabits and 1.5 to 5 and 25 and another company coming in that's going to give us 100%, and likely have one of the best percentages on per capita on average in Canada over the end of next year.

Going back I don't think is going to help those small businesses in rural PEI determine whether or not they're getting good service or not. We're a progressive government. We're looking ahead and we're doing everything we can with the companies that are in place and we're creating a competitive field –

Mr. Aylward: Unfortunately, you're not a progressive (Indistinct).

Mr. MacDonald: – for – and if you read the article in the Globe the other day –

Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Internet contract (further)

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, imagine our surprise when a redacted version of the contract was waiting for us at the next committee meeting.

It turned out the Chair had called the minister without the knowledge of the committee and somehow the contract was dug out, redacted, and sent to the minister in 20 minutes by Bell.

Minister, why are you playing such games over a multi-million dollar contract we all paid for that is failing to deliver proper high-speed Internet to all of PEI?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As minister of economic development and responsible for these items, you know what? We've reached out to communities such as Maximeville, we're working with Cavendish Resort Municipality, and we'll continue to do that. When we see a problem or we're given a problem, we'll consider funding requests from community groups interested for their economic development.

I know that the opposition doesn't really care about that, but you know what? That's important to rural PEI and we have to keep progressing forward, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Fulfillment of Internet contract

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Liberal majority also voted to make a meeting involving Bell closed to the public and media. Public pressure forced them to backtrack, and when Bell appeared they clearly said they have honoured the contract and have no plans to do anything else.

Minister, do you believe Bell fulfilled all the terms of this secret, untendered contract?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Yes.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Internet contract (further)

Mr. MacKay: Minister, why are you refusing to release a fully clean, non-redacted version of this secret untendered contract?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We'll release the contract. Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, when will you release the contract? When can we expect to have it?

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

Mr. MacDonald: I'd say by the first of the week.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm looking forward to getting a contract first of the week. I certainly hope after –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) speechless.

Mr. MacKay: I am speechless, I'll be honest. We've been chasing this since 2008 and we've hit roadblock over roadblock.

Anyway, I'm certainly looking forward to getting it.

Just what is government hiding in this contract, minister? He's going to release it. I can't wait to see it. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Enforcement of Internet contract terms

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The current national target for high-speed Internet is five megabits per second, and this government's untendered contract with Bell Aliant is to deliver only 1.5 megabits per second, as we've heard. That's over three times slower.

Bell Aliant has openly admitted at standing committee that many Islanders get Internet speeds far below this. I know that's true because of all the messages I get from Islanders with speed tests that show proof of this.

This is a question for the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: Minister, why are you not doing your job to represent Islanders and enforce the terms of the Bell Aliant contract?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the contract we're talking about, they're fulfilling that contract. It was a 2008 contract at 1.5 megabits per second, and as far as we're concerned they're fulfilling their contract. But if they're not fulfilling their contract we will take them to task on that.

We are seeing a good competition right across PEI with seven new entities doing Internet work right across PEI, and they're telling government, most of them, to stay out of the way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, Bell Aliant also confirmed at standing committee that regardless of the speed customers are actually receiving, all DSL customers pay the same rate.

Minister, why are you allowing Bell Aliant to charge high-speed Internet rates for what are really dialup speeds?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'm going to repeat this and I've repeated it before: this is fair enterprise. There are companies out there. If people think they're being treated unfairly in price they should be contacting CRTC who regulates this. They should also be making it public because I can assure you that there's going to be one company that picks up another company's business just as ongoing and quickly as someone turning off their computer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Internet contract due diligence

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, not only did this government single-source high-speed Internet services in 2008, as we've heard, they extended the contract twice since then.

First they extended it till 2017, which is even past this date, and then until 2020, and completely failed to negotiate in Islanders best interests. Now rural Islanders are locked into a single provider who has no intention of improving service until government issues a new RFP. That's right. That's what we heard at standing committee.

Minister, why didn't this government perform the due diligence that Islanders deserve and negotiate a high-speed Internet contract that would actually meet Islanders' needs?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, the last amendment to the contract was 2014.

I believe, reading from CRTC and how they're dealing with some of the complaints coming in from different companies – not just specific companies, but different companies across Canada – there are avenues there for people to contact CRTC and supply them with the information.

If they feel they're being wrongly treated, then I think they have an avenue to access some information that may provide them with additional information on their contract.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Now, Mr. Speaker, the minister says he understands that reliable high-speed Internet is essential to rural economic development, and as the minister of tourism he should know that slow or no Internet access is the number one issue Island tourists complain about.

In my district I hear it from tourism businesses, home-based entrepreneurs, farmers, businesses of all kinds, who describe lack of reliable high-speed Internet as their biggest challenge to doing business in rural PEI.

Now we've heard from the Premier today that by next year, I believe –

Speaker: Hon. member, do you have a question?

Mr. Trivers: Yes, I do.

Confirmation of best Canadian Internet access

We heard the best Internet access in Canada by next year.

My question is to the Premier. I want to confirm this. By what date will you commit to providing the best Internet access in Canada, at the very least access to reliable high-speed Internet at five megabits per second or higher to these rural businesses –

Some Hon. Members: Time, time.

Mr. Trivers: – that are so important to Island economy, Mr. Premier?

Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just to clarify that 77% of PEI currently has five megabytes or more. There's a percentage there, 33%, that are dealing with the 1.5. Technology has changed since 2008. Now we have videos that people are sharing online, there's games, there's all kinds of things that are eating up Internet service.

This is adapting very quickly. We have to, as a government, adapt. We have to make sure that the companies have – if there's infrastructure available to them that they can utilize to create better Internet service from one end of the Island to the other, that's what the government should be doing.

The government should be informing the people, and that's what we're doing, of saying there's more than one company out there. There are several companies out there.

Let's not confuse DSL with FibreOP or MiFi. We know where it's going. It's going to MiFi, and it may be a better solution here in the next year or so.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier today in this House promised the best Internet access in Canada for Prince Edward Island. I believe it was by next year.

Mr. Premier, by what date will you commit to providing the best Internet access in Canada on PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, when I said "best" what I mean is most complete, that (Indistinct) the cradle.

By the end of next year Prince Edward Island will be the province that is the closest to having complete Internet access from tip-to-tip.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Internet contract renegotiation

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a question for the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: Minister, when will you commit to renegotiating the Bell Aliant contract so that Islanders have the high-speed Internet access they deserve?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we move forward and have additional companies coming to Prince Edward Island wanting to do business and open fair market, I'm not sure that we'll ever have to negotiate a contract. Because I think everybody knows that these companies are independent of one another and they're working towards having a good business case here on PEI. As a government I think what we've got to do is ensure the people from one of the Island to the other have the best possible service and the cheapest price, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Annual value of government portion of Bell Aliant contract

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A question for the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism. Minister, what is the value of the portion of the government contract with Bell Aliant that provides telephone service? What is the annual value of that portion?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll have to bring that figure back to be exact.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Motion 80 and parliamentary sovereignty

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

In remarks reported this morning in the media the Premier finally admitted that his motion entitled A Clear Question and a Binding Vote cannot, in fact, be binding. As a constitutional law expert, I find it hard to imagine that in drafting this motion the Premier was unaware of the concept of parliamentary sovereignty and that this motion clearly violates that principle. It was either an oversight or it was a clear effort at deception.

A question to the Premier: Can you finally admit to this House that Motion 80 is non-binding in every legislative sense and is therefore no different from the plebiscite that we just had?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, in the language of plebiscites and referenda it's well-known that plebiscites are non-binding and that referenda are considered to be binding.

It's in that sense that we speak about it in this motion. To have a clear question, to have a clear response, and to have a question that is posed on the ballot along with the referendum is indeed going to be binding in every sense in terms of the obligation of the people who get elected as a result of that election.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I beg to differ. In my research, referendum and plebiscite appear synonymously in legislation.

The other erroneous claim in this title as referenced by the Premier was that the motion is a clear question. There's no definition in this motion of what that clear question actually means. There are all sorts of other imprecise statements. We still do not know what the second option that the Premier prefers in this second non-bonding plebiscite that we're going to hold will be.

A question to the Premier: How can such an unclear and imprecise motion lead to a clear question for this second non-binding plebiscite?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, that will be the work of a sovereign Legislature, the 27 of us who are here, and I'm sure we're quite capable of coming up with a clear question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Motion 80 removal

Dr. Bevan-Baker: A few days ago I privately invited the Premier to discuss how we can work together to craft a solution to this impasse, to collaborate in finding a new way forward that respects the dignity of all parties. That offer still stands and I am available to talk any time.

Having established that this Motion 80 is misleading in its title and possibly even unconstitutional in its intent, I ask you to withdraw Motion 80 from the floor in order that you and I can begin our work together.

Mr. Premier, will you do that?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, Motion 80 remains on the Table, many members of this House have spoken to it, and it is open for further debate and deliberation, and I expect that that will take place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Interconnection update

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy. The PEI and New Brunswick cable interconnection upgrade project is the most significant strategic investment in the province's history since the building of the Confederation Bridge.

Could the minister please advise this House on the project progress to date?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased with the work that's been happening in regard to the cable interconnection in the Northumberland Strait which started in May. To date we have had one cable installed across the Strait and actually now two. As of November 20th the second cable has been laid across the Strait and we will begin the process of digging them under the Strait.

The *Isaac Newton* is in the Strait doing that work for us, and we're very pleased with how things are progressing and the work that has taken place to move that forward.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Madam Minister, once the cable is placed could you give us any idea when you think it'll be operational and hooked up?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, things are progressing very well. Of course, in these kinds of circumstances we're dealing with weather situations that may arise, but we are looking to target towards the end of 2016, barring any unforeseen weather events that may take place.

A lot of our government has worked very hard on this particular funding piece of this project with the federal government, and we're very pleased that the federal government has added an additional \$19 million to bring their contribution up to \$69 million because this is a project for PEI.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Update on PCH ambulatory care centre

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier this fall the government announced an expansion of ambulatory care centre at Prince County Hospital.

To the Minister of Health and Wellness: Can you provide the House with a status update on the expansion plans for the ambulatory care centre at PCH?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The expansion of the ambulatory care section is part of a bigger project including a women's wellness centre there at Prince County Hospital. We've seen rapid growth of services that have been required there at that particular location. In our announcement we stated that the planning is underway at the moment and construction should be started in the spring and completed by January 2019.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Does this expansion mean that existing services, nursing care suite, oncology and surgical clinic, will be expanded or that new ambulatory care services will be introduced?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, the concept of this is really to actually not to add more services other than the women's wellness centre services to ambulatory care.

It's to really provide more issues around patient safety, privacy of patients, and also to deal with infection control at that location. We have seen the rapid growth of many of those services that has just outgrown the space. We just need to provide better patient confidentiality and patient safety at that location, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will Islanders in Prince County need to travel to another hospital for these services while construction and renovations to the centre are underway?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, during those renovations and the expansion of ambulatory care we're going to try to make sure that we provide the minimum disruption to our patients that require services there, but during the whole process we are quite confident that we can accommodate everybody, that they will not have to go to other facilities for those particular services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Archives and Records Act and former premier

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday the Premier stated:

“I’ll be happy to clarify that section 1(2)” of Bill 20 makes “... it clear that the office of the political party leader or caucus is not a public body for purposes of the records legislation.”

Question to the Premier: Will you confirm that based on your explanation that former-Premier Robert Ghiz was not subject to the *Archives and Records Act*?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as I explained yesterday, when this law was first introduced by the Binns government in 2001 it included a language in 1(2), that said: public body does not include the Legislative Assembly, the Office of the Speaker, etc., caucus offices, and the offices of the party leaders.

That was the law that was in place until the amendment of November of last year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Records management during premiership transition

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There seems to be a lot of important questions that have gone unanswered by this Premier on this issue so I’m going to ask him some of them again.

Question to the Premier: Who was responsible for records management during the transition between your Premier’s office and Premier Ghiz?

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 am responsible for records information management. I will take that question under advisement and bring it back to the House as soon as I get the information.

Thank you.

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

Deleted government email accounts (further)

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Another question that’s been asked a number of times and I’m going to ask it again today to the Premier.

Premier, what two email accounts were deleted by your government?

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

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

I really appreciate your new 40-second rule. As a head coach, I always asked my players to not go over the 40-second rule, so I won’t.

I will take that question under advisement and also bring that information back to the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We all know that the Premier is elbows deep into this cover up. Like we said yesterday, with the rule change or wherever there’s wiggle room he’ll take it. He took it today from Question Period. He made a promise at the start and by the end of it he had already reneged on it.

Robert Ghiz emails

Question to the Premier: What happened to the emails of Robert Ghiz?

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

Mr. Currie: Once again, I will make sure that I go back to my department and gather the information.

I wasn't the minister – I was the minister of health during that time – but as the minister now responsible for records information management, I will bring that information back to the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was at the coffee shop this morning and somebody said to me the Premier is actually elbows deep into this cover up, which it's becoming more and more common knowledge out there because he won't stand up and answer questions. I'm asking him pointed questions and he won't tell Islanders. Islanders deserve answers and they don't know why he's taking on the role of the cover-up man for the previous government.

Chris LeClair emails

Question to the Premier: What happened to the emails of Chris LeClair?

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

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

I, too, will take that question under advisement and also bring that information back to the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Low-income housing waitlist

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the minister of seniors and social services: Can you tell me how many Island families are waiting for low-income housing?

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

Ms. Mundy: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to providing Islanders with the tools and supports to help them attain greater security for themselves and their families, and housing is one of those options.

Currently we do have a waitlist and it is going to be reviewed under our new housing strategy. We've been waiting for information from the national housing strategy because the federal government is initiating a federal national housing strategy.

We do have plans to take a look at our housing situation. Currently, to answer that question, we do have approximately 1,300 Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Low-income housing in District 1

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have 10 families in my district alone waiting for housing. Lots of phone calls. Single mothers looking for housing.

Minister of social services and seniors: Do you know if there will be any housing built in District 1?

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

Ms. Mundy: Mr. Speaker, affordable appropriate housing is one of the most important social infrastructures in communities.

I'm not sure what you asked. You said: Do we have any plans to build?

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct).

Ms. Mundy: Okay, sorry, I didn't quite hear the end of it.

Actually, as I explained in the latter answer, we are currently taking a look at housing on Prince Edward Island. The federal government hasn't been at the table in probably over 30 years. It's pretty hard for a province the size of Prince Edward Island to be building without the leadership of the federal government.

We're very happy that the federal government is now back at the table and they are undergoing a national housing strategy, and we're hoping that we can align ours with theirs as well, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Low-income housing and three counties

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't imagine my district is the only district that is looking for family housing. Right across Prince Edward Island we're looking for family housing.

When you speak to the federal government, minister, will you be dividing this up between the three counties on Prince Edward Island?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government does care about the well-being of all Islanders, rural and urban. Affordable, accessible housing is a basic need for all Islanders.

Actually, when I was in Ottawa just last month and we were trying to come up with wording around the framework, there was some wording that actually I changed to make sure that rural was included in the discussion, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Low-income housing waitlist crisis

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the minister of seniors and social services. There's 1,300 families waiting on a waiting list. Minister, how did you let this crisis happen to 1,300 families on a waiting list?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, we are well aware, this government is well aware, that housing is a basic need of all Islanders. Unfortunately, we have been on our own for probably the last 30 years. We've been doing what we can to help low-to-moderate income families stay in their home if they want to stay in their home. We've invested millions of dollars into home repair programs, Seniors Safe @ Home Repair Program, as well as Seniors' Home Repair Program.

We also have rent supplements and we do have low-income housing. We have been trying our very best on our own with help through CMHC, however. But not having a federal partner at the table has really tied our hands, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

FHS funds

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thirteen hundred families without a home, and the former minister held back \$5 million. Actually, it's probably the reason she lost her seat.

Minister, what happened that \$5 million that the minister prior to you left on the table?

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

Ms. Mundy: Mr. Speaker, actually, I'm sorry, I didn't hear the latter part of your question, if you could just repeat the latter part.

Speaker: Hon. member, repeat the latter part of the question.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What happened to the \$5 million that the prior minister of seniors and social services left on the table? Did the minister of finance put it in his account?

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

Ms. Mundy: Mr. Speaker, all I can speak to is what I have been privy to since I've been minister.

What I've seen is commitment on behalf of our government to making sure that we do provide Islanders with the supports and programs that they need to help them gain greater security for themselves and their families, Mr. Speaker.
That's all I can speak to today.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Government action on low-income housing

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Words don't put anybody in a home. Words don't put a roof over anybody's home. Words don't feed hungry children.

Question to the minister of seniors and social services: What has your government done, since being elected, on this issue?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, I don't think I could name it all within the 40 seconds that we're allotted today, but we do realize that more can be done.

However, we've invested millions into, as I said, home repair programs. We have invested millions into drug programs that help Islanders. We've completed – just my department alone – six of our 11 platform commitments.

We have increased the food allowance for persons on social assistance. We have increased the comfort allowance for persons on social assistance. We have increased the foster care payments to the foster parents. We have done – sorry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Low-income housing waitlist (further)

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This minister seems to have done a lot. How did you let 1,300 families slide through the cracks? These families are out there hungry. I've got single families down there with no home with kids sleeping from people's houses, from couch to couch.

Minister, when are you going to look after these 1,300 families that you said that have no home here on Prince Edward Island?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I mentioned earlier, these families are not homeless, okay, Mr. Speaker?

They are on a waitlist for low- to moderate-income housing. That waitlist will be adjusted with our provincial housing strategy which we are currently underway. We're hoping to have some information back to the House in early 2017.

Currently, we have over 34 programs across seven departments that help families that are low- to moderate-income. We have social assistance, disability support, child care subsidy, senior housing, family housing, rent supplements, seniors' home repair, PEI home repair programs, Seniors Safe @ Home Program, Seniors' Drug Cost Assistance Program, generic drug program.

And I have to sit down again. As I said, I can't through it all in 40 seconds.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]