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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2016

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Souris walk-in clinics (further)

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, in response to a question taken as notice by the Member from Souris-Elmira yesterday, I wish to table the following answer regarding walk-in clinics in Souris.

Speaker: Shall it carry? Carried.

Questions by Members

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

Provincial risk assessment exercise

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Throughout this week we've talked about emergency response in a number of occasions regarding the power issues that have happened throughout eastern PEI.

Question to the Premier who is also the minister responsible for emergency preparedness: When was the last time that a provincial risk assessment exercise was held?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I should ask the hon. member to clarify, does she mean province-wide, or in particular areas?

Speaker: Could you clarify that?

Ms. Compton: Province.

Speaker: Province-wide, hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, our emergency measures team is in active mode and regularly in touch with communities.

There was a whole I'll call it tabletop exercise carried out last year with police forces, with communities, and with federal and provincial people as well, who came together to do that, Mr. Speaker.

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

Risk of power outage

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In a presentation to a committee we learned that 2011 was the last time a provincial risk assessment exercise was held. Not surprisingly, the highest risk identified was a long-term closure of Confederation Bridge.

Question to the Premier: Would it surprise you to learn that an extended power outage was identified as the second-largest threat?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, with the changing climate and the more extreme weather that we've experienced and that we see on a more frequent basis, no, it does not surprise me, and this is something that has been uppermost in the minds of emergency measures people at the provincial level and at communities.

Indeed, the invitation and working together with communities to put in place gathering points – which is, in effect, what we're seen with the warming centres and with the generators to back up if necessary that had been in place this week – this has been very much on the minds of emergency measures people at all levels in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Review of emergency measures legislation

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We hear across eastern PEI especially the number of warming centres and the number of volunteers that have been involved, but really, we're looking for some leadership from government about this, too.

Legislation that governs EMO is out of date. We know that. The last amendment was in 2000. A lot has changed. You've talked about climate change, 9/11 has happened, cyber threats, all concerns for the province.

Question to the Premier: Will you commit to review an update of the province's emergency measures legislation to address the new and emerging potential threats like extreme weather from climate change?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as members of the Assembly are aware, the province has for a number of months been involved in preparing a climate change strategy indeed to complement the energy strategy that has also been under development.

The question of emergency measures and, on a go-forward basis, ensuring that the legislation, as well as the resources and the collaborations are in place to address the emergencies that can be foreseen with the changing climate, is very much on the minds of the people who are working on that strategy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

FOIPP and Internet contract

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I've read the FOIPP act in detail and have yet to come across where the act prohibited government from publicly releasing information that it wants to release.

Can the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism tell us where he found his latest excuse on withholding the Internet contract inside the FOIPP act?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's third party contingences in there as far as legal binding matters and as far as the FOIPP act.

But more than that, I mean, as minister responsible for economic development, I'm looking forward, I'm looking out – part of this issue is about trying to get the best service for PEI from one end of the Island to the other. Looking forward, that's what we

have to do as a government. We have to look after the issues of the day, trying to make sure that everybody has at least five megabits per second service from one end of the Island to the other. That's what we're going to focus on. We're focusing on our future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

FOIPP and Internet contract legal opinion

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, who provided this legal opinion to you?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My staff were in contact with legal advice and I'd have to take that back to the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, will you confirm this is the same lawyer who provided your legal opinion that said the loan write-off disclosures bill couldn't be retroactive?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As minister responsible for economic development our loan portfolio is very successful. I commend the opposition MLA for allowing me to expand a little bit on the success of our loan portfolio and what it does to the communities in rural PEI when over 60% of our loans are provided in rural PEI, from farmers to fishers. We're not talking large corporations. We're talking small businesspeople that survive.

The hon. Leader of the Third Party talked about small businesses in his community, and that's what this government's all about, Mr. Speaker, is moving the province forward.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Internet contract (further)

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, another example of where this government has attempted to withhold information, but in that case public pressure forced their hand.

Can the minister explain why after seven years of asking, in the last seven days he promised to release the secret Internet contract, and then went back on his word and has thrown up another suspicious roadblock and he will not release it?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've discussed this several times in the House and I think everybody, even in the public, know my position on releasing the unredacted contract, and I have no issue with that personally. But there is a process that we have to follow through FOIPP.

But our path forward includes access to funding to government to consider investment in short-term initiatives, like Cavendish and Maximeville, and we're opening that to all ISPs, putting out RFPs. I think it went out two weeks ago and we have received one back already on Maximeville.

So this is our government. We're taking an initial forward step here. We're trying to accomplish full Internet service from one end of the Island to the other. We're doing it in an open and transparent manner. We're working with communities that are involved in this issue and will continue to build on it.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

FOIPP and PEI Westside Funding (further)

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, this minister's actions are certainly calling his word into question.

Last week I also asked the minister about Testori and Wiebel and that secret deal. The minister refused our FOIPP request stating it was used in prosecution of the company involved. This week, the minister did another 180 and decided the secret PEI Westside Funding deal wasn't used for prosecuting: Oops, it must have been a mistake.

Minister: Why the sudden change of heart?

Mr. Trivers: Rusty, he's rusty.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not rusty, thank you, but –

Mr. LaVie: No, but you're grey.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, it's ongoing, this situation.

We're, as a government, taking an initiative here to move this project forward as relevant with Internet connections and service providers, and there are issues out there and we're working our way through them. We've even offered access to land and/or infrastructure by the ISP companies to give them a better opportunity to provide that service. We want to do future unsolicited proposals for federal-provincial support through ACOA and ISED.

There's all kinds of things that we're doing to make high-speed Internet a real force and furthermore, as the Premier said before, within a year I think we'll be likely a leader in Canada as far as Internet connections.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That question wasn't about Internet service. A six-month FOIPP ordeal suddenly becomes an error two days after I raise questions and government actions on our request come to light. Minister, this certainly doesn't pass the smell test.

What are you trying to cover up by changing your story on the PEI Westside Funding secret deal prosecution?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, as I stated last week, we have been challenged in the courts by the company he's speaking of. It would be very unethical for me to start talking about what's being challenged in the courts to give anybody an upper hand. Legal counsel has advised us, due to the court process, we should not release any of these documents until –

Mr. Trivers: Open and transparent (Indistinct) said.

Mr. MacDonald: – we come to a conclusion on the court case. I think anybody in the general public looks at that and says: Why would they release something that's before the courts and give a company that is no longer here the upper hand against our province and our taxpayers?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, given the minister's track record, I'll believe him on the PEI Westside Funding secret deal when I have a fully unredacted copy in my hand.

FOIPP and Homburg

This government has a long documented habit of throwing up as many roadblocks as possible around FOIPP requests so Islanders cannot get all the information they are looking for, and certainly not in a timely manner.

Minister: Why have you forced us to appeal to the information commissioner to get the detailed loan financials from a \$40 million Homburg account?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's interesting. We keep going back six, seven, eight years. As a progressive government and being aggressive and we've got some good news announcements next week, and we'll have one maybe even the week after that, and we're creating economic prosperity from one end of the Island to the other.

But just in relevance, I was looking into this not too long ago, but when you talk about the Holman Grand Hotel and the 40-some employees that are there, and you talk about the investment that that company has made in the city centre, and you talk about the Confederation Court Mall and you look at all those stores there, I'd tell the opposition maybe to take a look and see who owns all those stores that are keeping that mall open.

When you talk about the Kitchen Store, the shoe store – there's all kinds of stuff in there. The new spa that's there and the hotel that's there. Only for them that mall would likely not be open at this time so if you take 120 employees or 130 employees –

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, in a battle stretching back to the spring we have fought to ensure the public interest is served by – and release the entire Homburg loan financials.

Yes or no, minister. We don't want a long-winded answer, yes or no. Minister: Will you commit today and release in full the entire Homburg loan financials?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's very interesting that the hon. member doesn't want to hear of the good news stories that are happening in Prince Edward Island. I even mentioned in my opening remarks today about the construction association. Retail sales are up, car sales are up, new builds are up.

We continuously drive this economy, but the opposition doom and gloom to go back eight years, to go back six years, to go back five years. We touched on three files today that – you talk about \$93 million was in wages for one of those companies they're talking about. We extended that company by two years by selling their shares to a third-party for \$5 million. We extended those wages of those people for two years.

That, Mr. Speaker, is how this government operates.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Written questions

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can easily understand why this government does not want to look back over the last seven or eight years. It's not hard to see why at all.

Unfortunately, I also have to talk about a number of roadblocks that the opposition is finding. Our opposition tries to hold this government to account as effectively as we can. One of these ways is through written questions. We use them to help us prepare for the Legislature and to help answer our constituents' questions.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) or what?

Mr. MacEwen: Sorry, what was that?

Mr. J. Brown: Is there a written question coming here or what?

Mr. LaVie: It's Question Period.

Mr. MacEwen: We'll soon find out.

Mr. Speaker, a question to the Premier: Why are all the departments in your government delaying our written question requests?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe it's the case that we're as slow in getting back as the hon. member's question implies.

There are departments that are responding and responding diligently. There are many written questions that had been submitted. We're committed to getting response to those, and public servants in our departments are working very hard to provide those responses on a timely basis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Do you know what? We have over 1,000 written questions in just from this spring alone. We've got, actually, questions dating back to August of 2015 that aren't answered.

Our former premier, Robert Ghiz, there's a lot of people that didn't like some of the things that he did, but do you know one thing he did? He respected the opposition. He was in opposition. He respected us.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)!

Mr. MacEwen: Why are the departments delaying our requests? Over 1,000 just from the spring.

Speaker: I believe, hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid, you better repeat the question because I couldn't hear a thing.

Mr. MacEwen: It's frustrating. I understand that, Mr. Speaker, we're very frustrated.

Premier: Why are the departments delaying the requests, some that go back as far as August 2015?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member indicated, there are more than 1,000 written questions.

I think we'll find that there have been many responses provided. There are public servants in departments throughout government that are working, in addition to their other work, to provide answers to these questions. It's also my understanding that this question has been raised with the rules committee and that the rules committee will also address that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier is correct. I did refer this to the rules committee because we have great concerns. I'm going to give you a real good example.

There's a good constituent of mine that contacted me. He moved here from Ontario. He said: Member, would you put this idea forward? He said: In Ontario, if your taxes are up to date you get a free water test every year. He thought that was a good thing for himself here. He thought his water was okay, but he didn't really like paying it.

What I did, I submitted a number of questions to find out what the water tests cost, the total number of water tests in a year to see what that might cost government. He asked me this back in May or June. I submitted those right away. Guess when I got the answer? This guy came back (Indistinct). Guess when I got the answer? Middle of November. Simple questions so that we could try to find a good idea for government.

Premier: Do you think that's an acceptable timeline?

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Appreciate questions from all members of the opposition and deal with them in a timely fashion.

All Islanders are usually up to date with their taxation and are concerned with their water quality. On a daily basis people contact our department in regards to their water qualities. We certainly are open to have those discussions.

I would urge any member of the opposition that has those questions, just direct them to phone our staff and we will deal happily with them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to highlight another example. Last spring we had a good debate here during Budget estimates. You guys all know that, good, honest debate. In good faith, the opposition agreed to pass certain sections of the budget given that our request for further information would be provided.

In fact, I even looked straight at the Premier on one of the last days of the House session and he nodded, yeah, they would follow through that, that they would bring back all those requests.

Guess what? Nothing.

Premier: Why don't we have those things that you guys guaranteed you'd bring us back in Budget estimates from last spring?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you.

The member's talking about questions asked. There were 67 questions submitted to the department of transportation, infrastructure. All of those questions have been answered except for questions no. 409-476, and those are being worked upon now as those are information they want leading back to 2007. But every other question that was submitted, 67 of them have been returned from my department.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm referring to Budget estimate requests. Do you know what? Here, this is Hansard from last spring. Myself:

"I know I have the ear of the Premier and some of the other ministers, there's been a number of requests to bring back information from a number of the ministers. I'm just wondering if we could have a commitment to bring that stuff back even if the Legislature happens to be closed in the near future."

The Minister of Finance responded: "Yes. We note each one that comes through and we note it for response."

I'll give you a couple of examples here. I know I have to hurry. Details and specifics on controls and locks in place for WiFi; programs for boat and marine shops; wharf dredging; consult for PEI input and output models; breakdowns of reports for senior housing; the grant cut to the Alzheimer Society.

These are questions that our members asked the ministers in good faith that we would get answers to. Do you know what? No answers.

Premier: When can we start expecting to be respected over here and get answers?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do appreciate the question and I recall the Hansard.

But when I look over the last six months and I look at the regular work that our public servants do on a daily basis, year after year, during that same time frame, within that six months since last spring when we were sitting here, they submitted over 1,000 questions.

Our public servants are extremely busy. During that time the Auditor General also did a review and our public servants also had to respond to that. Over tens of thousands of documents and interviews.

Mr. Trivers: Release all the documents. Open and transparent.

Mr. Roach: Our public servants are doing everything they can to try and keep up, but this has been a particularly busy year, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Mental health strategy and Native Council

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

Mental health and addiction issues are seen in all corners of our society. The new Mental Health and Addictions Strategy addresses some of the needs of many Islanders and it certainly identifies gaps within our current system. It fails, however, to address the needs and concerns of Indigenous people living off-reserve.

The Native Council of Prince Edward Island represents status, non-status, Inuit, and Métis people living off-reserve.

A question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Did government consult the Native Council specifically for input on the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, obviously, we take mental health very seriously in this province and we have implemented or are in the process of implementing this recent strategy on mental health and addiction in this province.

We have consulted many different organizations and organizations out there, including the Canadian Mental Health Association. I do believe we did speak with some of the Aboriginal organizations, but I can clarify that with the minister and get back to him on that.

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

Indigenous Islanders living off-reserve

Dr. Bevan-Baker: I look forward to that prompt reply, minister.

As far as I am aware you did not consult with the Native Council for this strategy, and to me that's an unacceptable oversight.

A question to the minister: What does government plan to do to address the needs and concerns of Indigenous Islanders living off-reserve?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge, once again, Aboriginals, on-reserve or off-reserve, are welcome to attend any of our particular facilities in this province, whether it's our emergency rooms, whether it's accessing Canadian Mental Health services, of which we provide significant funding to that organization to provide and deliver mental health services to Islanders.

We will continue to have all of the services that are out there accessible by anybody that's an Islander on Prince Edward Island.

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

Indigenous Islanders alcohol and drug abuse program

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

Two years ago federal funding cuts caused the native alcohol and drug abuse program to be cancelled. Since that time the Native Council has met with government, our provincial government, on several occasions inquiring what will be done to address this issue. The Premier assured them that funding would indeed be available, but their recent application for funding was denied.

Would this government be prepared to fund a specific program for off-reserve indigenous people even without a federal partner so that Indigenous Islanders can get the help that they need and deserve?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I have met on four occasions, and our officials have met on additional occasions, with the leadership representatives of the Native Council, and on this very question of the program for mental health and addictions or drug abuse.

We encouraged the Native Council to put in a submission to the program where the previous funding had, in fact, been discontinued. That was not successful.

I met a week ago Thursday with the leadership of the Native Council, and followed up with a letter on Monday to indicate and to offer that the senior public servants responsible for mental health and addictions would work with them and offer to help in the preparation of a submission to that program.

In August of this year we provided a modest amount of funding for work in this area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

National Housing Strategy

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

My question is for the Minister of Family and Human Services. Minister, housing is one of the most prominent issues facing my constituents. Last week the federal Minister of Families, Children and Social Development released a report entitled: What We Heard: Shaping Canada's National Housing Strategy.

Could you update the House on your department's discussions in relation to the National Housing Strategy with the federal government?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The provinces and territories are key to the federal government's delivery of housing across Canada.

My department has been very engaged and very vocal with our federal, provincial, and territorial colleagues in the discussion around the National Housing Strategy ever since the consultations began back in June 2016.

Some of the work to date has been the development of broad strategy outcomes, a vision, and key themes. All of those were publicly promoted during the consultation phase so that all Canadians could have input.

The summary of that report is the report you were talking about that was released on National Housing Day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton.

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

Minister, housing, as I indicated, is a pressing need in our province just as it is across Canada. Has the federal government given any indication as to when its housing strategy will be finalized?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The National Housing Strategy, we're hoping that it'll be made public sometime later 2017. However, part of the discussions that we have been having is the flexibility that each jurisdiction should have and would have. For example, Islanders' needs are much different from somebody in Ontario, for example.

So the work to date, as I said, is developing the framework, and we're hoping to have some results out to the public in the latter part of 2017.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Brighton, your second supplementary question.

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

It's good to hear, minister, that there will be some flexibility within the different provinces.

Has the federal government given any indication as to when housing program dollars will start to flow into this province?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a great question, and that is a question that each and every provincial and territorial colleague had at the table when we met in Ottawa in October. Unfortunately, we don't have a timeline as of yet because there's still the development of the framework that needs to take place.

We're still giving our input into the consultation as well, and there's a lot of highlighting that we're still doing. But one of the things that we have highlighted is that much of our long-term funding with the federal government will be running out, so we will, in addition to new funding and stable funding, we are going to need to be needing to renew those long-term commitments as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Job growth measurement

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Research and statistics can provide clarity on where we stand at the present time and where we are planning to go in the future in the area of job creation and job opportunity.

Can the minister inform the House of any work that government is doing to measure job growth in different parts of the province?

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

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

That's a great question from the member. My department works very closely with EDT and the department of agriculture, consulting various companies across the province, and working with the federal government to get statistics.

The department's goal is to work with education facilities and to make people available for work and to make them skilled ready. That's one of the reasons for the Summerside area – we moved the Holland College centre from Slemmon Park to downtown to a bigger space, and a more open space, in order to encourage as many students as possible looking for skills upgrades to acquire those skills upgrades, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Job growth measurement in Summerside

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, will your department be able to provide a breakdown of job growth specifically in the Summerside area?

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

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

The federal government does a number of surveys across this country, including Prince Edward Island. It's called the Labour Force Survey. They interview 1,400 people across Prince Edward Island and they come out with a statistical review each month.

Matter of fact, one was released this morning and our unemployment rate is down, I'm proud to announce.

We've asked the federal government if we could get a full data set of that survey in order to break it down into particular areas, excluding the names and other privacy information. The federal government is open to that discussion and we will move forward with that, I think.

But I'd like to say that the minister of EDT or economic development has a great

announcement for Summerside coming up Tuesday that will be creating many jobs in the area, so by working together the departments are working together to make sure that Islanders have as many opportunities as possible to find work.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. R. Brown: And if we didn't rusty questions from the other side, Mr. Speaker, I think we'd get a lot better.

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

Billing of government

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Islanders are wondering why this government and this Premier keep wiggling and dodging over the egaming email scandals, and people are wondering what is in these emails that would cause this government to want to keep them a secret. A running theme through this whole egaming scandal is the cover-up and the great lengths that this government is taking.

Question to the Premier: If companies were billing government for work done by someone else, would the Premier be concerned about that?

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

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

As the minister responsible for the oversight and the legislation of the provincial *Archives and Records Act* I take these questions and this conversation we're having over the past few days very seriously.

I would like to challenge the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters that if he has any evidence, proof of any illegal activity, I would be very supportive for him to take it outside the rail and take it to the appropriate authorities.

I know that every member of this Assembly would support that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The 2012 Auditor General's report did just that and you guys did nothing about it and you sat right through it, so I challenge you the same thing because you've known about it since 2012. You know a lot more than I do and you're hiding it.

Mr. Currie: Take it outside the rail.

Mr. Myers: You're hiding it. Every single day you're hiding it.

Mr. Currie: Take it outside.

Mr. Myers: She said that there was \$50,000 handed out in contracts to an IT company and no terms and conditions were ever made for the work, and that the contract wasn't even signed until the work was completed.

Question to the Premier: Does that sound underhanded to you, paying somebody \$50,000 for work done by somebody else?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we have the Auditor General's report and her review of that matter.

It's something that we invited the Auditor General to do within less than two weeks of assuming government. That report has been with us and has been considered by Public Accounts, and the Auditor General made 15 recommendations. Over and above our specific responses and implementation to those 15 recommendations, we have committed to, across government, be acting in the best interests of taxpayers and Prince Edward Islanders and giving the best possible government we can on a go-forward basis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have copies of the actual invoices and I will table them here later. These invoices are two invoices for \$50,000. Each invoice was for \$25,000, and the description of the work says: PEI VIP Loyalty Project, 50% of the fee agreed with Melissa MacEachern. The invoices are to InternetWorks from Simplex.

Question to the Premier: Why would the then-deputy of innovation be directing contract payment methods with another government department?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I was not Premier at the time, I don't have the particulars of that situation, but I look forward to those documents being tabled and we'll take a look at it.

But let me be very clear about one thing. What the hon. member is referring to now is what he's often confusing with, perhaps deliberately, the review of the egaming initiative that was carried forward by the Mi'kmaq Confederacy and the –

Mr. Trivers: The loyalty program's all part of that report. Read the report.

Premier MacLauchlan: If you read the Auditor General's report, you'll find there are four different matters into which she ultimately inquired and gave her views and gave recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, after having the work of the Auditor General, I'd invite the opposition to read her report and stop the confusion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This Premier doesn't want to talk about deleted emails. The education minister doesn't want to talk about deleted emails. I want to talk about deleted emails and Islanders want to talk about deleted emails. I'm going to start tabling deleted emails today for you on this topic.

Some of these emails talk about a government official wanting this contract to be funneled through a third party.

Question to the Premier: When you went on CBC and you said to Bruce Rainnie being ethical to you isn't pulling off all the scabs, is this what you were talking about?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: I'd like to see the transcript of that interview, Mr. Speaker.

I don't believe I said that. I said that we have a way of doing business going forward and we are following directly the advice and the insights offered by the Auditor General and we are working to implement them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There was a senior director of the tourism department that described how they wanted the government billed to a third party and then they'd be paid through the third party. We know that the Premier from his time at the university had some dodgy contracts over there, too. One, actually, from the tourism research centre that ended in charges.

Question to the Premier and Attorney General: Are these activities not getting dangerously close to fraud?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me first say that it sounds like a lot of the information that's being offered from across the floor is coming – sifting through the entrails of a lawsuit that was tossed for being vexatious and of no merit, so I think the opposition has to consider the source.

As for anything that the hon. member thinks might constitute fraud, as the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture said, maybe it's time for him to take it outside the rail.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, final question.

Billing of government and RCMP

Mr. Myers: Thank you.

I'll meet you outside the rail as soon as this is over and we can talk about it and we'll see who's scared to say what outside the rail. You're not going to threaten me with that, you're not going to threaten Islanders with that, and you're not going to silence me with your threats of outside this rail. These are emails, I have them, they say what they say.

Question to the Premier: Yes or no, will you refer this matter to the RCMP?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, my point about taking it outside the rail is that the hon. member himself is quite welcome to lay a complaint with the RCMP, or to approach the RCMP if he's got the evidence, or if he thinks it should go elsewhere he can go elsewhere.

But this matter has been considered by the Auditor General and there was nothing in the Auditor General's report where she was recommending that this go to a prosecution or that there be any pursuit along those lines.

We have been looking into this matter and we are acting on the considered advice of the Auditor General. If the opposition wants to go back and reargue that lawsuit that was tossed out as being frivolous, then they're welcome to do it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]