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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

TUESDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2017

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Review of Provincial Nominee Program

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

Once again, this government's mismanagement of the immigration policy has made national headlines, highlighting questionable policy decisions and business practices within the Provincial Nominee Program.

This situation cannot be allowed to stand.

Question to the Premier: When will a full-scale top-to-bottom review of your government's Provincial Nominee Program begin?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, to start the total immigration programs of our province, a part of which is the Provincial Nominee Program, have been very successful and successful by comparison with those elsewhere in the region and nationally, to the point where Prince Edward Island led the country in population growth in 2016-2017, with 1.7% growth in the population, that compares with 1.2% for the country. We intend to continue building on that success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

This is twice now in the last number of years where national and even international news has been made by this government and how it runs the PNP program.

Question to the Premier: How did you let things get to this stage a second time?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there was a feature in the *Toronto Star* on the weekend that, in fact, centered on the success of Prince Edward Island's immigration programs in the Atlantic context where we are indeed leading the way. We are committed and have been committed all along and that's the nature of good public administration to constantly upping our game to improving how we're going about things, to addressing problems.

We're also committed to ensuring that when we speak about and when let people know about our immigration programs that we're using current information and I'm proud to say, that that includes a significant improvement in the retention of people who come here through our immigration streams.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Prince Edward Island has a lot to offer prospective immigrants looking to build a better life, raise their families, and start a business. The many positives that our province has to offer, risk being outweighed by this government's mismanagement of the PNP program.

Protection of reputation globally for immigration

Again, question to the Premier: What's being done to protect PEI's brand reputation, globally as a safe, attractive location for immigration?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I think that starts with all of us, acknowledging the importance in immigration, the contributions people make

economically, culturally – in terms of the voluntary sector, and civic leadership.

Indeed, the Leader of the Opposition and I attended an event on Sunday night with the consul from Lebanon to Eastern Canada where that was celebrated, the room was full, there was a great meal for everyone and we acknowledged that we've had two premiers from the Lebanese community, we have had a mayor of Charlottetown, we've had many councilors, we had leaders on our business community and in our community-based organizations and that's how we approach immigration and how we approach the growth and success in our community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The story that is actually emerging from this investigation is of a climate where government is encouraging prospective immigrants that Prince Edward Island is a fast track to citizenship – if you don't mind parting with a large chunk of money along the way.

Question to the Premier: Why is your government encouraging prospective immigrant entrepreneurs to side-step the rules?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's no side-stepping the rules. The fed-prov-territorial – the feds are very well aware of the processes that are in place. We consult with them routinely. Immigration over the past number of years has really been a success for Prince Edward Island and we hope that it continues. We'll do everything in our power to ensure that the population growth – which the opposition continues to talk about rural PEI. We've made some changes to the program in the

last three months that are going to be very effective for rural Prince Edward Island. We want this to grow. It's a good thing for Prince Edward Island, it's a good thing for the economy of PEI and we want it to continue and the population growth is so important with the aging demographic that we have on PEI.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Immigration process for PEI

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

It seems like two stories are being told here. When government talks about immigration to Islanders it talks about population growth and how much money is being taken in. When government talks about immigration to newcomers, it talks about how to get around the rules and minimum legal requirements.

Again, question to the Premier: Why is your government telling one thing to Islanders and a different thing to newcomers when it comes to immigration?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's several streams that immigration is provided through the Province of Prince Edward Island and the federal government and one of those streams is labour. Just a quick note on labourers – we've taken in over 600 people to fill labour gaps across PEI and that's from our fish processors to our farmers, to our scientists, to our doctors and we'll continue to do that because it's a very important role for PEI to fill those gaps on Prince Edward Island that are a basic need for our survival as a small Island and to grow the population.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Again, there are two stories being told by government here. The story that government is telling prospective newcomers and then the story that this government's main concern is about the money.

Long-term immigration policy for PEI

Question to the Premier: How is it that being addicted to forfeited deposits is going to build a successful, long-term immigration policy for PEI?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: I believe the stream that the hon. member is talking about is the economic stream. There is an obligation for anybody that wants to come to Prince Edward Island and one of those obligations is opening a business – opening a business on Prince Edward Island within a year of arrival. I can tell that if you look around the Charlottetown area, or across the Island, if you look even in Point Prim, for example – I just read the other day that there was a farmer working there. There's a farmer in Brookfield. There are all kinds of successful stories of immigrants and we can't paint immigrants all with the same brush. It's unfortunate that this happens and I hope the opposition realizes that the importance of immigration on Prince Edward Island is only going to be to our success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, under the current rules, a nominee is only required to operate a business for one year. Most new businesses take about three years to find out whether they are viable.

Program rules for nominees

Question to the Premier: When will the program rules change to require nominees to operate a business for a minimum of two or more years?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's other avenues as well that the hon. Member is not mentioning. If you talk about – they have to present themselves to the immigration office within 30 days, they have to invest a minimum of \$150,000 in their business, they have to incur \$75,000 worth of expenses, submit financial statements that are audited by a certified professional accountant. There's checks and balances in here and we work with the immigrants as much as we can, but it's not only us –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – that works with the immigrants and the businesses, it's the chamber of commerce, it's Island Advance, it's PEI Connectors, it's settlement services, there's a whole gamut of individuals and associations that are working with the success of these businesses.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

There are some checks and balances put in place, but upwards of 80% of these newcomers that are coming through this stream, are actually forfeiting their deposits because they're simply coming through to buy their citizenship.

Over the past two years, this province has taken in \$27 million in forfeited deposits from the Provincial Nominee Program. A growing number of Canadian provinces are moving away from using this deposit system for their immigration programs. New

Brunswick and Saskatchewan are two examples.

Long-term immigration policy for PEI (further)

Question again to the Premier: When will your government move away from the current deposit system to a system that actually focuses on retention of immigrants on Prince Edward Island, versus just having them come through to fast-track and get the permanent residency and leave?

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

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, we've heard several times about rural development across Prince Edward Island and how we establish a foundation to make those communities viable and sustainable going forward. We've just changed our expression of interest model, as far as the intermediaries. We signed up 12 intermediaries and we're changing the rules and regulations. We want quality over quantity. We're not going forward with the old program. We've made changes already in answer the hon. Member's question and we'll continue to make changes and review the program on an annual basis. Whatever we feel best suits Prince Edward Island, that's what we'll do.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We need action on immigration that encourages people to not only move here, but to live here, raise their families, create new jobs, and stay here.

Number of people in PNP program residing on PEI

Question to the minister responsible for immigration: How many people who came to PEI under the PNP program since 2015 are still here?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just mentioned the expression of interest and what we've gone through with the new intermediaries which was a transparent RFP which was online – the scores, the whole nine yards and we can't do it any clearer. We've taken the opposition and invited them to sit before our employees that run this program on Prince Edward Island to ensure that everything is above-board and upfront.

We are making changes to the program. We want to build on this. We know how important this program is to Prince Edward Island, and we're not going to stop to continue to that because we know that the issues relevant to immigration are extremely important to the people of PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Number of PNP businesses still open

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister didn't even make an attempt to answer my question. He didn't say he'd bring back information. I'm not even sure if he knows. We think there's a problem retaining immigrants through the PNP program here on Prince Edward Island. The point of the business ownership stream of the PNP is to create more viable, long-term businesses that help grow our province.

A question to the minister: Since 2015, how many new businesses opened by nominees are still in operation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Based on the Stats Can relevancy of 2015, from 2014 because it's always a lag time as the opposition is well aware of, we're at

63% of those in retention rate right now on Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Mr. MacDonald: But, it goes beyond that.

If you have to look at one end of the Island to the other and see the businesses that are opening up, and they're not just businesses of immigrants. They're creating families. They're creating sustainability in those communities.

We just went through a school process. We're trying to build the population. We're reaching out to intermediaries areas in rural PEI; that was part of their criteria. We're very focused on immigration, and we're going to continue to focus on immigration because it is important.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

PNP deposits going to government coffers

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Despite what the minister says, I know over here in the official opposition we're not getting any warm and fuzzies. In fact, it gets worse. In fact, more than half of nominees that were supposed to open a business never even attempted to meet this requirement. Obviously this doesn't meet the goals of the program. Of course, when nominees don't meet these goals, they forfeit \$150,000 deposit straight in the government coffers.

A question to the minister: Is the PNP set up this way simply so it can be a cash-grab for your government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's extremely important, and to answer the honourable's questions: No. I'd be the first one to say that we do not like keeping any of those allocations through those immigrants when they come here. But, I can say this: They do come here. 96% in the last year, we refunded their residency portion of their immigration fees to them.

What's that saying? It's saying that they're living here on Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: They're utilizing our services, and we're providing a service to them and we'll continue to develop this program and work with this program –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – with fed, prov and territorial program that has been very successful and will be very successful.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: It's all fake and you know it.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Number of PNP businesses still open (further)

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's funny that the minister comes up with these numbers because officials from the minister's department have told the national media that only 92 out of 296 nominees open businesses, and that only two-thirds of those businesses stayed open past the first year. So out of nearly 300 nominees, only about 20% still have businesses operating after one year.

Question to the immigration minister: If only one out of five provincial nominees immigrating under a business stream are running businesses locally after one year, do you consider that a problem?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think if you look at the overall picture of immigration and what it's done to Prince Edward Island – if you look at retail sales. We just had a home building supply store reach \$30 million in sales for the first time ever in the history of Prince Edward Island.

Cars sales; housing starts – there's all kinds of things; manufacturing, which a lot of these immigrants may work in this field until they're successful in their business. In fact, there's one that purchased a business in the Cavendish area that actually work in the manufacturing plant in Charlottetown in the off-season. That's what builds a community. That's what we're doing, and it's unfortunate that the opposition wants to focus on the doom and gloom, but you know what? On this side of the House, we're focused on growing the economy because when we grow the economy, we get to reinvest into health care, into schools and into social programs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Follow-up with PNP immigrant businesses

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is another question for the minister of immigration. Minister: If a PNP nominee chooses not to open a business it means that, indeed, they have no financial statements to audit, is it true that there's absolutely zero follow-up done with them to try and get them to open a business and you just take the money and put it right in your account?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: I'm glad to provide the information to the hon. member because, no, if they come back in two or three years and

decide to open a business then we're standing right beside them and we'll refund the escrow amount, Mr. Speaker, in that amount.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Supports for immigration in rural PEI

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For some time now, we have suggested over here in the official opposition that focused immigration holds promise for rural development on Prince Edward Island. Recently, it's good to see the government has indicated an eagerness to explore this opportunity.

A question to the Minister of Rural and Regional Development: What new programs or supports are being brought forward to make sure that immigration can be a boost for rural Prince Edward Island?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker

Finally, I got a question. We work closely with the –

Mr. Trivers: Hopefully, there will be an answer.

Mr. Murphy: – economic and tourism and advanced learning and the interesting thing is that the new agents that were recently announced are going to have a great impact on rural Prince Edward Island because instead of being located in the City of Charlottetown, they actually are out in rural PEI. They're in Alberton, Tignish, O'Leary, Souris –

Mr. Myers: One's the Premier's neighbour (Indistinct)

Mr. Murphy: – Montague and they work – they'll be working closely with the

communities to make sure that we do get our fair share of immigration in rural Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Problems with PNP program in rural areas

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The feedback that we're receiving from Islanders and, indeed, that the national media is receiving shows that there are some problems with the Provincial Nominee Program.

This is a question to the Minister of Rural and Regional Development: What are you doing to make sure that the problems being faced with the Provincial Nominee Program won't be repeated in rural Prince Edward Island?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Very interesting enough, we've had 13 communities, and one in the hon. member's own riding, with the mayor of Rustico. They want the business labour and express entries coming through there because they know what it does to their communities.

We're going to stay on top of this with the new expression of interest, whereas before we had first-in-first-out, we're done of that. We told the intermediaries we're going to be very choosy in regards the applicants that they put forward. We want to work with quality over quantity and that's what we intend to do. Some of the intermediaries may not be happy with this process. We're not making allocations. We are going to be decisive on the individuals that come, and if it's someone in Summerside that needs someone or someone in Rustico, or someone in Point Prim then, Mr. Speaker, that's what we're going to focus on.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Long-term success and improvements to PNP

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Here in the official opposition we like to look long-term. We want to make sure that our immigration policy and the results that it brings will benefit Prince Edward Island in all of the years to come, not just be a bubble that brings in some money now, and then it's gone.

A question to the minister of immigration: What are you doing to fix the PNP program to ensure that it brings long-term success and improvements to our economy?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: We started with 12 new intermediaries. We contacted 13 communities. We're dealing with them and they're very interested in working with us. We're doing everything possible as far as Island connectors, Island advance, working with chambers in commerce. We set-up an office in Summerside. We're setting up an office in Montague. We're doing Island tours of businesses that immigrants may be interested in.

There's all kinds of stuff. We're bucking the trend at the university with foreign national students – of the rest of the universities in population base, and we're increasing. We're working with them, as well as –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – our post-secondary. We're doing everything possible to make this a sustainable future for immigration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Witnesses to testify about PNP at committee

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Islanders have many questions about the PNP program, and some of these potential problems; how it works, who is benefits, whether it's going to work long-term.

This is a question to the Premier: Premier, will you ask the Liberal members to put a motion forward to bring witnesses to testify about the PNP program at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal members on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I'm sure, can have their own view on this –

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier MacLauchlan: – that's the whole purpose of standing committees of the Legislature and I'm sure that's well known to the hon. members opposite and that's the experience.

Let me come back to what we said all the way through here: immigration is working. We're working on retention and changing that track record. That improvement is evident. You can go to your district, to the district of the Member from Rustico-Emerald and see what's going on in business succession in Cavendish, for example. You can see it. It's moving further west. That's what we're doing and we're going to keep doing it through this intermediary program. We're proud of it, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Municipalities that cannot comply with new Municipal Government Act

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

I know government is making significant efforts to help communities transition to the new *Municipal Government Act*. But many small municipalities will still not be able to meet the requirements of the MGA.

They are therefore left with two choices; either dissolution or amalgamation. Some of them are refusing to even consider amalgamation.

A question to the Minister of Rural and Regional Development, it doesn't rain but it pours, minister: Will rural municipalities be dissolved if they cannot comply with the act?

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) going to answer this one? He's looking over.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The –

Mr. Murphy: I'll do my best to answer that one. I would say: No. That would be the community's choice if they wanted to dissolve or not.

I think our minister responsible for communities has been very clear that there's going to be no forced amalgamation in the province. He already made a few concessions on the MGA, and I think one of the concessions that was made is that the smaller communities, when it comes to the 20 hours that they can work with neighbouring communities to provide those 20 hours of community administration work.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Loss of municipalities affecting rural communities

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

Rural governance has been on the backburner for many governments since the urban municipal reforms back in the 1990s. It seems that changes finally are coming.

The Minister of Communities, Land and Environment has, indeed, said that he will not force amalgamation, which means, that of the two choices, then dissolution will likely be the future of many small rural municipalities. As a former mayor, rural mayor, minister, the Minister of Rural and Regional Development knows the value of local governance in rural Prince Edward Island.

A question to the minister, again: How will the loss of municipalities negatively affect rural communities on Prince Edward Island?

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

It's certainly – thank you for the question hon. member.

As you and I have had many discussions on this particular issue in the past. Obviously, I have spoken, as minister handling this file that I will work with municipalities to identify other municipalities that they can work with for shared service.

This has been established in other meetings that I have been having with municipal leaders all across Prince Edward Island. I do understand that there are challenges and we will help those municipalities to overcome them and work with other areas in their neighbourhoods.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Municipal reform agenda of CLE and RRD

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

The Minister of Rural and Regional Development belatedly published mandate letter is strongly focused on collaboration with other departments.

Municipal restructuring, whether one is for or against it, is seen by many as a critical factor in the future of rural communities.

Question to the Minister of Rural and Regional Development: What is your department doing to contribute to the municipal reform agenda of communities, land and environment?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

Mr. Murphy: Well, we work closely with the minister, as I do with all my colleagues here on this side of the House. I might also stress that, as you're well aware of, I do sit on the communities, land and environment committee, and we're currently entertaining presentations from municipal leaders on that particular subject.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Family and Human Services: The Summerset Manor in Summerside, has been sitting idle since residents moved to the new manor. This vacant building was a significant issue for the residents in the area during the last election in Summerside.

Plans for vacant Summerset Manor

Can the minister inform the House what the plans are for the old manor building?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This indeed is a property that has caused, I guess, issues for both the member opposite and myself as we are both MLAs for the city of Summerside. It goes even back further to my days on city council where it was an issue and it was something that our phones would be ringing off the hook: What is the province going to do with the old manor?

One of the first things I did when I took on this ministry, was start to look in to: what are we going to do with the old manor. We

reached out to all of the departments within government to see if there was any interest in the building, in the property and if so, what would we do with it. They have since come back and they say they have no interest, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member for Summerside-Wilmot.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, is the department going to deem this building surplus and have it used for another use?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The next step in the process would be to reach out to community groups to see if there was an interest in purchasing the building and redeveloping it. Actually, in the fall of 2016, government did put out request for proposals to see if there were interested parties interested in coming in and doing a redevelopment. There was lots of interest; there was lots of touring of the building and the property but nobody actually did the call for the request for proposal. We are now going internal and seeing what else we can do, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, since no one has submitted a proposal on this building, will the department be able to decommission the building and possibly move to the next steps?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, in the next couple of weeks we will be issuing a request for proposal again; this time, tying the Summerset Manor and the property to the request for proposal looking for developers to show their expression of interest in developing 20 new seniors units on that property. We're looking forward to partnering with municipalities, developers, to create new affordable housing options and taking advantage of this great location. We also, as early as yesterday, I had a very positive meeting with the city of Summerside moving forward and looking at collaborating around affordable housing issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park.

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

Housing strategy for Charlottetown

I was extremely impressed by the National Housing Strategy announced last week by the federal government and Justin Trudeau's commitment that housing is a basic human right, which I believe in, and we all should all work for housing for everyone.

According to the new strategy there could be up to 500 new units built on Prince Edward Island. I'm just wondering what the department of human services is doing to identify properties in order that we could move these properties to the housing corporation to build housing on these properties?

We did that when I was on city council and you will see a number of duplexes around the city built because of us giving properties over to the housing corporation and they built affordable housing for people here in Charlottetown. It was a good idea then; I think it's even a better idea now.

I'm just wondering what the department is doing to identify such properties provincially that could be used in housing?

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. member is absolutely right. In the past we have identified provincial pieces of land and we've partnered with communities such as Cornwall and Charlottetown in building affordable units for persons with disabilities and persons with intellectual disabilities. We are currently in the process of discussing with our colleagues in the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy about identifying other parcels of land within the province and formalizing a process on a go-forward basis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park, your first supplementary question.

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

Also in the housing strategy, the federal government has identified that they're willing to turn over federal properties for housing, which is a great idea. They have allocated over \$200 million to this effect. I'm just wondering, again; we don't want to house low income all in one place. Distribute them throughout the city. It was a great project and there's a lot of good housing throughout the City of Charlottetown.

I'm just wondering what her department is doing in order to identify federal land, also, that could be used for housing; 500 units would go a long way for helping a lot of families here on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, again, another great idea and one that we have acted on in the past. We have partnered with our federal partners, and

NGOs, in the past to allocate federal surplus lands for affordable housing projects across Prince Edward Island.

On a provincial level, housing services is always, again, looking for ways that we can collaborate with municipalities, with communities, with developers for long-term solutions including surplus lands to address the growing housing needs on Prince Edward Island, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Concerning experience of PNP immigrants

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our PC team has been contacted directly by immigrants whose experience are both concerning and alarming.

Minister: Why is money, and not people, what this government values most in immigration?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We value immigration and we have different streams of immigration, and we'll continue to grow the immigration program and I know that there's Adel El-Mowafi, is an Egyptian actually from Point Prim that's operating a farm. Those are the type of immigrants that this province wants and needs in our rural communities, and we'll continue to build on that going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Abuses and fraudulent activity in PNP

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We realize there are some great immigrant stories, and that's not what we're questioning here. According to immigrants and the national media, the word is out on PEI: The rules apparently do not apply.

Minister: Why is this government allowing abuses and fraudulent activity to occur with immigration programs that you are administering?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I read the articles and the first thing I did was called my staff and the second thing I did was set up meetings with post-secondary institutions, the Chinese association, Island connectors, and settlement services.

We wanted to know, because we were surprised by some of those accusations –

Mr. Myers: How could you be surprised? They're calling us. They're not calling you?

Mr. MacDonald: – too, and secondary – but there are. We need these individuals to come forward. We have a web portal now that we have set up where they can anonymously go on there and claim what issues that they do have.

We will stand behind these individuals and I'm standing here before this House today and if there's anybody breaking the law as far as immigration, we will stand behind the individuals that bring it to us and if there's something that we need to do further, then we're willing to do it as a government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Immigrants leaving PEI for Toronto

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We want to see people go through the program and follow the rules. Overseas recruiters are telling perspective immigrants what province is the fastest and which is the cheapest, and many times it's Prince Edward Island. One phrase that I have heard personally: Money on paper, and then collect EI in Toronto.

Minister: Why does this government approve of immigrants parking mandatory money in PEI and then hopping the next flight to Toronto?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Obviously, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member wasn't listening to me in the first set of questions that I had that we've changed many of the issues of the program and brought in expression of interest. We went out to an RFP, which we've done broadly right across the province. We have 12 more intermediaries. We are doing expression of interest. We are basing it on quality over quantity. We've changed up how we're reviewing applications.

But, let me say, if there's evidence of wrongdoing, there are a number of things that we can do as a government and that's revocation of a nomination of an individual responsible for the impropriety, passing the information to other authorities including Employment and Social Development Canada, Canada Revenue Agency or the RCMP. So, I challenge the opposition to bring those people forward and we'll deal with them because we want it done right because immigration is important to PEI.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Mr. Speaker, as recently as last week we're hearing these stories; immigrants telling us that the people are coming here; they don't care about the deposits. The only reason they open their

businesses is because they're afraid that they will be deported.

Minister: Is this a solid basis to operate a positive and helpful immigration program?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I won't repeat what I just said, but I will tell you this: that we provide newcomers with information, and that's provided through several avenues. We have regular information sessions. We are having one session again this week.

We meet with cultural organizations including, I mentioned, the Chinese association. We have employment standards officers that make presentations to the newcomers association. We have ongoing staff visiting businesses and we're ramping that up, again.

Vulnerable populations of workers that are employed, we are going to look out for them as a government because we need immigration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unethical practices in program

One dark side of the program is that some entrepreneurs are looking for various methods of reducing or retaining their required expenses, such as telling young people in need of work to hand back some of their wages.

Minister: Why is your department allowing these unethical practices to take place?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: I can honestly say, Mr. Speaker, that we have had no individuals come forward to the immigration office on Prince Edward Island in regard to the comments that the opposition is making. I read the article and if you read the full article you can hear that in the article.

Let me tell you: we will do everything possible to protect those individuals if they come forward. The only time that they would have to be recognized would be in a court of law to defend what they're actually saying, so that's it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of those brave individuals, he came forward and spoke to the Canadian Press. He told the national media that coming forward wasn't an option until he had managed to obtain enough work to gain his permanent residency and that he feels he's in a safer place to avoid retribution.

Minister: Why is your department allowing these unethical practices to take place?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, you know, the accusations that the opposition is making in relevance to the article in the newspaper, that's fine, but we're here and this is real, right now. We need to investigate those possibilities of those accusations and I want those people to come forward to the immigration office of Prince Edward Island. I will be the first one to enforce whatever we need to enforce and take the message, whatever that message is, to the appropriate authorities because if they're breaking the law they're not doing us any good. They're not doing the province of PEI any good.

I'm satisfied with the direction immigration is going. The changes that we've made over the past six or eight months, has been really

good and it's looking good for the future of the immigration program on PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our provincial immigration system needs to enrich new immigrants and our community, not this government's bank account. It is currently being used as a cash cow to cover poor fiscal management by this government.

Fiscal management by government of program

Minister, I ask you, again: Why is money and not people what this government values most in immigration?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I think anybody that lives on Prince Edward Island would concur that immigration is being an immigration and migration and repatriation is playing a major role in how our economy is developing and why we're leading the country. Why our population growth is at 1.7% and leading the country in; manufacturing sales, housing starts, the list goes on; export development.

But the success stories out there; if you look at Alex and Martha O'Heara moved here from the United Kingdom. You got Youling Wei from China you have Stepan Makarov from Russia. I mean we've trucking companies that require drivers. We got fish plants that are working 24-7 because of that. There's all kinds of success stories.

If there is a bad apple in the basket let's find the bad apple; let's deal with it and let's move on with a good immigration program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Review of Provincial Nominee Program (further)

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, I'm going to take you at your word and I want you to commit today. Minister: Will you commit to a full-scale top-to-bottom review of your government's PNP program?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Compton: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I've already stated that approximately five or six months ago we did a full review of this program. We brought in expression of interest; we did an RFP for 12 intermediaries –

An Hon. Member: Fast track (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – we're trying to develop –

Mr. Myers: Premier's neighbour.

Mr. MacDonald: – we're trying to develop rural PEI. We know the importance of the immigration. We know the obvious migration to Toronto, Vancouver, Montréal. We have to do something different, Mr. Speaker, and that's exactly what we're intending to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]