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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 8 DECEMBER 2017

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government announced how they plan cannabis to be distributed when it is legalized in just under seven months.

At a Premier's conference in Edmonton, this summer, the Premier of Prince Edward Island said the Atlantic Provinces were working to create a regional plan for cannabis distribution.

Regional plan for cannabis unsuccessful

Question to the Premier: Why were those efforts to create a regional plan unsuccessful?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I would have said in Edmonton is that we were looking for regional alignment in terms of how the four provinces approach cannabis distribution, legalization, moving forward with the timelines established by the federal government.

The believe it's the case that there is substantial alignment and there will be a meeting Sunday night and Monday with the four premiers in Halifax. I believe that will be confirmed there, but everything seems to be moving in the direction envisaged this summer.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

At the time the Premier said the following: There is a very strong case for there to be a harmonized approach on things such as age

and distribution and pricing for the four provinces.

Now, we see the four Atlantic Provinces have now gone in different directions on cannabis distribution. PEI and New Brunswick, through government-owned and operated retail stores, Nova Scotia, through the liquor stores, and we see that Newfoundland is going through the private sector.

Distribution models in four provinces

Question to the Premier: Four provinces are following three different distribution models. How is that a harmonized approach?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I would contend that we do, in fact, have alignment. We're all at the age of 19. The approach through distribution is through, essentially, the public sector, certainly in the case of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, our closest provinces. I remind the member opposite, and I think they'd be reminding me if there was some contention made that each of the provinces lacks the sovereignty to develop their own process with alignment with the other provinces. I believe that's what we're achieving and we'll continue to strive for.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Looking at where the four Atlantic Provinces are going, it seems that, really, the only truly harmonized approach is the minimum age of 19. Keeping our roads safe is, of course, a very important element of legalizing cannabis and a concern, a grave concern, for law enforcement.

Road safety rules for Atlantic Provinces

Question to the Premier: Will there be a harmonized approach to road safety rules among the Atlantic Provinces, or is it going to be every province for themselves?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me pursue the point about alignment. The point from Prince Edward Island's point of view having alignment with the other provinces, is not to have an approach where people from Prince Edward Island leave the province to go and engage in whatever the regime is in the neighboring province. I would contend, in what we've done to date, that is exactly what we've achieved and that we should continue to pursue and there is, indeed, a harmonized approach to road safety – or certainly a collaborative approach to road safety among the four provinces – and that we'll continue working with law enforcement partners.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The federal government has said that people will be allowed up to four plants, grown at home, for personal use, but the provinces can set their lower amount.

Number of cannabis plants for personal use

Question to the Premier: How many plants of cannabis will be allowed to be grown at home for personal use by Islanders?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we said yesterday in our announcement, this was the beginning of the framework of how we are going to approach this legislation – to approach what the federal

government have had presented to all the provinces in their decision. There's a lot of decisions that haven't been made yet and we haven't determined that yet, but certainly that'll be looked upon over the next coming months and we'll have that in place by the time our legislation is brought forward in the spring sitting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government has had years to get ready for this, actually. And, in fact, the finance minister ran an online survey for a month as part of his public consultation.

Public meetings as part of consultation

A question to the finance minister: Why were there no public meetings as part of your consultation in this process?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know we haven't been looking at this for years. We had to wait, initially, to hear from the federal government and we've got the information we needed from them – there's still more coming. We felt that the online survey was a great way to reach out to all Islanders. We've certainly had responses, verbal; we've had responses, emails; and we track all of that information, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This was a federal election promise years ago, so yes, this government has had time, and if they weren't planning, they certainly should have been planning for this. This is a

major shift in public policy and I can't begin to believe for a second that you guys hadn't been thinking about this for a couple of years.

Public policy and online survey

Why, for such a big shift in public policy, did we decide to do an online survey for a month about something like this?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can assure the Member from Morell-Mermaid that when the federal government made that announcement, that not only were we thinking about it already, but all Islanders and all Canadians have been thinking about it. There's a gap there between thinking about it and when the federal government formalizes it. It still had to go through federal legislation, bills had to be passed, and until such time as we saw what the federal legislation was going to look like, we had to wait to see that before we put our legislation into place.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct). Too bad you didn't have any friends in Ottawa.

Mr. Roach: And we did. We've received responses from approximately 3,000 Islanders. And in a survey, Mr. Speaker, that's a great response.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Meetings on cannabis legalization

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The finance minister talked about emails he had – people he talked to – did he go and meet with anybody on cannabis legalization?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I did not have any formal meetings with anyone on this. We had two departments within government take the lead on this with respect to public safety through justice and health, and that was our primary focus in this and to gather that information, and we felt that the most appropriate tool out there, which is a big proponent that's pushed by the opposition constantly, was to do an online survey.

That way, our residents feel freer and there's anonymity there. They don't feel any pressure. They're not in any kind of a public setting. They can say what they wish.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: the hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I couldn't disagree more. We did see two public meetings; one from a private member that was well attended, a lot of engaged people wanting to know more, wanting to put their ideas forward. The MP for Charlottetown held a meeting; well attended; a lot of people there. But, this government decided to not have any public consultation. The minister hasn't even met with anybody about cannabis. How could you not meet with anybody and then go ahead and put this plan in place?

How is that even possible?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Apparently, it is possible. I've met with lots of people and I've talked to lawyers. I've talked to fishermen. I've talked to farmers. I've heard a lot of concerns about this and the number one concern was that this is

legislation that's put down by the federal government and we have to respond to it.

The timeline on this, yes it's tough for the provinces. All provinces would have wished to have this pushed out further, but we have to move forward on this. We have to ensure that we have a safe product for our youth to go to, to take them away from going to the criminal element and to make sure that the product that they're receiving is free from other substances.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Tabling information from meetings on cannabis legalization

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now we're getting somewhere. Originally, we didn't meet with anybody but now we met with lots of people. Originally, the minister said that two departments were meeting with all kinds of people, too.

We've got lobbyist legislation that's coming to the floor of this House this sitting. I'm curious: Will the minister please table all the people he's met with, all the people that government has met with and the subject matter of those meetings with all departments? Will the minister commit to bringing all that information back so we can see who is trying to take advantage of government in this idea?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, in response to that, the people that I met with – there's not one person who has asked me for anything other than ask me: Are you going to be able to do it safely? Are you going to have education on this?

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: Are you going to protect our children and our youth that want to buy this

substance? There has been none of what that –

Mr. Myers: You're not selling to children, are you?

Mr. Roach: – member is suggesting across the floor.

Mr. Myers: Why are you selling to youth?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Meetings on cannabis legalization (further)

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The finance minister talked about two departments that are leading the charge on this. I can only assume that that's health and justice, but interestingly enough it's the finance minister that's the point person on this. Guess what we're looking for here. It's all about the money if it's with the finance minister.

I didn't get an answer: Will the minister table all the people that he's met with, this government has met with, that have talked about cannabis and the subject matter of those meetings?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

He doesn't have to assume those departments. I said those two departments, clearly, I think about my second answer.

When we went on the online survey, that's so people can freely give us their suggestions and their suggestions were accounted for. It was a great survey. Approximately 3,000 people participated, and I'm sure that every member in this House has had conversation on both sides of the House and I'm sure they've heard from parents, they've heard from concerned citizens as to how this is going to be rolled out.

I would suggest that almost every member in this House has heard about this and been asked questions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Tabling information from meetings on cannabis legalization (further)

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the minister goes back to an online survey. That's our public consultation on this major shift in public policy. Yes, all of the members in here have been talking about it nonstop. The community has been talking about it nonstop, and the only chance they've had to talk about it is filling out an online survey. It's ridiculous; we should have public consultation on this.

Will the Premier commit today to tabling all the people that this government has met with, representatives, all the emails that the minister said, and all the subject matter of those meetings on cannabis legislation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) bringing in a lobbyist act.

Speaker: Okay, hon. members, let the minister answer.

Go ahead, hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: Tell us how you're going to sell drugs to youth again.

Speaker: Hon. members.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Go ahead, hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We also relied on our partners at the federal government level. MPs have had a public consultation here. They had a major taskforce, the federal government did, that went across all the provinces across this country when they were thinking about putting their legislation forward. They had a tremendous amount of information that they've received and we paid attention to what came out of those taskforce recommendations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Number of cannabis retail locations across PEI

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Seven months is not a long time. Cannabis will be legal here in Prince Edward Island in less than seven months, and no doubt the liquor commission has been busy. They've got to have a plan about the business plan and moving forward.

Question to the finance minister: How many locations will there be for retail cannabis sales and when will the tenders go out on those businesses?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Trivers: Get some facts here.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to that, I don't think there's a firm number of the exact number of stores, but we will be having locations across the province and I would hope that –

Mr. Trivers: No plan.

Mr. Roach: – considering that we want to get this moving and have everything in place

by, I would say by the first of July, the end of June, I expect that requests for proposals, tenders, will be going out on the construction of the stores and the locations we have identified when that takes place.

Mr. Trivers: No plan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Start-up costs for cannabis retail locations

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Launching a retail cannabis distribution network won't come for free.

Question to the finance minister: What are the projected start-up costs for the liquor commission to establish a retail cannabis network?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our people over at the liquor control commission have been working on that as we speak. We have identified a general set of plans of what the location will look like and we will be going out looking for the cost, obviously, for square footage on those locations, and then we'll determine where those locations are going to go.

That's ongoing as progression and again, what we announced yesterday was just the initial framework of what this is going to look like. Islanders have been asking so we wanted to get to the people in Prince Edward Island about the key points about the safety –

Mr. Trivers: Going in the wrong direction.

Mr. Roach: – of this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

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

Length of time to recover costs on cannabis retail locations

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We understand it's the beginning of a framework, but not a lot of time. We talk about start-up costs. There doesn't seem to be an answer there. In the cannabis business plan by the liquor control commission, what do they anticipate it's going to cost, not only to start up, but how long is it going to take to recover the cost that they put out?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: Do you have a plan? (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know we've looked at some of those initial – I mean it's early yet. We have to determine what the user capacity is going to be and I expect it will be sometime before we'll see a recovery of the costs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Revenue generated from cannabis retail locations

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, when you have a business plan you forecast how much you're going to make at this. Can you tell me what the legalization of cannabis is going to generate for this province annually?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: Give us an estimate.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member from Belfast-Murray River seems quite concerned about the cost. The framework that we laid out yesterday, it's not about the cost. It's about the people who are going to consume.

Mr. Trivers: Did you do a business plan?

Mr. Roach: It's about having a place for those individuals to go safely rather than going to the criminal element –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) told them to go home is what he said.

Mr. LaVie: Age 19?

Speaker: Are we okay to continue, hon. members?

An Hon. Member: Okay.

Speaker: Go ahead, hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We don't anticipate, with this model, any amount of product that we expect may come forward. We don't – this is not going to be a profit-making venture. I would see some years down the road before –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: – we can even get to the level playing field.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We understand, the province has been forced into this by the federal government, but there must have been a study and analysis done by government on the model that you chose.

Liquor commission's cannabis business plan

Will you table the liquor commission's cannabis business plan and any cost-benefit

done on having a government-owned retail model versus a private sector retail model?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let's be clear. When the task force that the federal government used, the recommendation that came from that task force was not to use private sector model; the federal government task force, that went across the country recommended that it be government-operated facilities.

We have made the choice that we're going to listen to that task force. The information that they received we'll utilize that. Certainly, the work that we're going to have to do over the next several months will continue.

I expect that things will move a lot quicker as soon as we get into the new year; get our RFPs out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In a media interview this morning the finance minister noted that the short timeline to get ready before cannabis will be legal. At the cannabis town hall, the government declined to attend this fall, Charlottetown MP Sean Casey didn't think much of the argument saying: It should have been surprise to nobody.

It was the subject of an election campaign two years ago. It's something that's been in the forum of legislation now for several months. I honestly don't have a lot of sympathy for the premiers who have indicated that we don't have enough time.

MP Sean Casey assessment

Question to the finance minister: Do you agree with MP Sean Casey's assessments?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) there it is.

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) now.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will say that everyone is entitled to their opinion.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

The 2015 Liberal campaign platform promised revisions to the *Conflict of Interest Act*. The party promised to clarify the term personal benefit and to enforce and enhance post-employment restrictions on Cabinet ministers and senior officials.

Although, there are, indeed, new restrictions on senior officials, for which I commend you, you have not yet enhanced restrictions on Cabinet ministers. This is another instance of government approaching reform half-heartedly, and protecting their own insiders.

Campaign platform re: *Conflict of Interest Act*

A question to the Premier: It's been two-and-a-half years since you were elected Premier. When do you intend to keep this promise?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Third Party indicated, we moved within weeks of the 2015 election to extend conflict of interest regime to senior officials and to deputy ministers and appointed a commissioner of ethics and integrity. Those, indeed, were steps that were taken right away to act on that promise and to continue to study and learn about any further measures that are needed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

We can study and learn from the 2015 annual report given by the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. He made a number of recommendations to improve the act by clarifying the language around personal benefit and enhancing the post-employment restrictions on Cabinet ministers, which is still not being done.

Implementing of Conflict of Interest Commissioner's recommendations

A question to the Premier: These are the same promises that you made in the Liberal Party platform, so when do you intend to implement all of the commissioner's recommendations?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. members on all sides of the House will recognize, we are moving forward with a number of measures on openness and transparency and better government. We were on the floor last night with a whistleblower initiative, which is a big step for this province. As some have suggested there is a lobbyist registration law, bill, that will be introduced soon.

If you look at the measures that have been taken, we are moving very actively, in all of these areas. Whether there's room for enhancement on the conflict, we may get to that because we have been very busy and we were here last night; spent the whole of two hours on the measures that are directed to openness and transparency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Indeed, we did spend two hours last night debating a very important bill. But this government has had over two years to implement the Conflict of Interest Commissioner's recommendations.

He made many additional recommendations to allow members of the public, for example, to seek the opinion of the commissioner; clarifying private interest and requiring the act to be reviewed every five years.

These will all improve something that this government loves to talk about: transparency and accountability. But sometimes does not actually implement things practically.

A question to the Premier: You've had over two years to review these recommendations, will you be introducing legislation to implement all of the commissioner's recommendations in the spring, 2018, legislative sitting, or will I have to?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LaVie: Oh!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Third Party, I'm sure, is well aware; that he has the ability to introduce a private member's bill and has indeed.

This is something that we are well aware of; the commissioner's recommendations. We are acting on, I would say, it's on the order of eight to 10 fronts that we have acted on in greater openness and transparency. The commissioner's recommendations are in under active consideration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture. New school enrollments show that more students than ever are learning French language in

our schools. The French immersion population has reached over 5,000 students for the first time in the history of our province and the student population in *La commission scolaire de langue française* has grown by almost 10% to 944 students.

My boys, Ryan and Dean, who are now 27 and 24 respectively, were success graduates of the impressive and early immersion program at Spring Park School.

During the school, public school review, a new French immersion program was established at West Kent and we all know the hard work that is required to set-up a program successfully like teachers and proper supports.

Update of immersion program at West Kent School

Minister: Can you give us an update on the progress so far on the immersion program at West Kent?

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

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

Thank you, hon. member, for the question.

This program has progressed quite nicely, and it's something that I'm proud to say came out of the school review process and a lot of hard work by constituents of mine.

There are currently, 153 students that are attending French immersion at West Kent. Seventy-four students are signed up for French immersion in the combination of Spring Park and West Kent, which is up over previous years.

I'm proud to say that French immersion is offered to 383 students now between those three schools, which is an increase over past years, as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, your first supplementary.

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When our children were ready to enter the school system, as parents, we made the choice and felt that it was important that both our boys were able to communicate in Canada's two official languages.

Quality of French language education program

Minister: What are we doing to ensure the high quality of our growing French language education programs, so that all Island children can converse in two official languages?

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

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

Thank you, again, hon. member for the question.

I was a late French immersion student myself, and I do have some understanding of the value that one can receive out of a French immersion education. I'm proud to say that we're working with our partners in providing French language education across all 62 schools that we have here on Prince Edward Island –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) no consistency in the immersion program (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – and we have –

Mr. Trivers: No consistency.

Mr. J. Brown: – new school opening up in Eastern Kings, along with a community centre. We've just –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – committed in our Capital Budget to a high school program out at *École-sur-Mer*. We have a crowd in Montague that is actively considering French language education there, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, your second supplementary.

French teachers for growing demand

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, many jurisdictions are struggling to recruit and retain French teachers, who are in high-demand across the country. With the increased enrollment in French language education on Prince Edward Island, what are you doing to ensure that we have enough French teachers to keep up with the growing demand?

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

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

Teachers are one of the most important facets of our education, and that includes our French language education and we're very fortunate here on Prince Edward Island to have a great program at UPEI in French language education. That has provided for a great partnership that has enabled us to recruit the numbers that we need to make our programs run. Unfortunately, we do not have any vacancies at the current time, but we are working on a program to recruit and retain new, young teachers that are coming out, whether it be from UPEI or other schools and we work to ensure that our substitute teachers that are coming out have as much work as we can possibly give them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Cash not accepted at fixed link over night

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

It has come to our attention that the fixed link is no longer accepting cash between the hours of 10:00 p.m. at night and 6:00 a.m. in the morning. This greatly disturbs me because we have a currency act here in Canada that says: Legal tender is the dollar and it should be accepted by every business.

What is the minister going to do about this to make sure that this policy is reversed and legal tender, meaning the dollar, will be accepted at the fixed link?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly access to the bridge is very important. We were advised that there is a temporary –

Some Hon. Members: Pilot.

Ms. Biggar: A pilot, sorry. I couldn't think of the word – a pilot program going on right now with Strait Crossing in regard to those hours, but we have been told that there are no plans at this time to make it a permanent model.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Speaker: – your first supplementary –

Mr. R. Brown: Oh, sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. R. Brown: So excited about this. I want to get it (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: Oh no. It really disturbs me, Mr. Speaker.

This bridge is, in essence, owned by the people of Canada. Now, I know that Strait Crossing runs it for 35 years and then it's passed over to the people of Canada. This is a federal government asset. This is an asset of the people of Canada and we have a constitutional right to get off this Island and to get on this Island. We have a constitutional right to this.

I believe this is a wrong policy because I'm thinking of somebody that has to go to

medical services in Saint John or Halifax and they can't afford to stay overnight in a hotel in Halifax or in Saint John, and maybe they can't afford a credit card and their only means of getting to that side – to their appointment – is to use the fixed link and to pay cash because they have no credit cards.

How does somebody show up at 5:00 a.m. in the morning, have to go to a medical appointment, and they have no credit card. How do they get across the fixed link, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I absolutely agree with the hon. member. There is a contract between Strait Crossing and the federal government, but that does not supersede the right to any Islander to be able to have accessible access to leaving the Island, and that includes using all forms of payment mode. I want to ensure all the members here and Islanders that I will be following up to ensure that the federal government and Strait Crossing association are aware that we expect that all Islanders will have financial accessibility for access to the bridge.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I want to thank the minister for her efforts on this part, but I think that every member of this Legislature should be writing their MPs or writing the federal minister to ensure to protect their constituents because after all, this bridge is owned by the people of Canada and it is the federal government's responsibility to allow access to that bridge. The more I think about it, Percy Downe may be right: It's time to make it free.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, again, I want to assure everyone that as minister of transportation, I will be writing a letter –

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Ms. Biggar: – to the federal minister of transportation and Strait Crossing to ensure that they are aware that we expect full financial accessibility for all Islanders using that bridge.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Due diligence prior to acquiring land parcels

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the minister of transportation: What is the due diligence done by government prior to acquiring any parcel of land on PEI?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

From time to time we do have to acquire land for construction purposes. Depending on that piece of land, we first set out to negotiate with the individual if it's private land to negotiate price, to come to an agreement on the purchase of that property.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Upkeep on government land

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad to see the government has some kind of outlook on that.
Back to the minister of transportation: What is the government's policy for maintaining

and upkeeping any land that the province owns?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, I believe the percentage of land owned by the province or by the Crown is approximately 5% of all land on Prince Edward Island. The rest of the land is owned by Islanders, as it should be. We are striving to protect land and any land that we own, most of it is purchased for construction purposes, so if the member has something specific he'd like to ask, I'd be happy to try and answer that question.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Maintaining environment on government lands

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister: How often do government monitor parcels they are preserving and maintaining the quality of the environment?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, there is a *Natural Areas Protection Act* which falls, actually, under the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment. Anytime there is sensitive land that needs to be preserved, there is a process through the communities, land and environment to ensure that that land is protected. I know that that's a whole process that takes place through that department and eventually it comes into my department to sign off on that.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Adverse effects of shoreline erosion and tidal surges on SCI yard

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've now learned that part of this might fall under the lands protection act under the minister of environment. The SCI yard in Borden-Carleton owned by IIDI is suffering from adverse effects of shoreline erosion and tidal surges.

Question to the minister of development: Are you aware of this delicate situation?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No. I haven't been briefed in any circumstances such as the hon. Member is talking about, but I can assure you that we're in contact on a regular basis with the mayor and council of Borden-Carleton.

With everything that's happening in Borden-Carleton as of late in regards to the step program that they just finished and their ongoing development research that they're doing now for the town, it hasn't come up, but we'd be more than willing to have a conversation about it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, this is following a patten with this government. They have no plan and they don't look at what they're purchasing or what they're going to do with it. There is a significant loss of top-cover which has exposed industrial waste –

materials such as rebar, concrete that were buried through the bridge construction project. These materials are now surfacing and protruding from the banks onto the shores of PEI.

Minister: When can the local residents expect government to properly clean up this property?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: It's very ironic, Mr. Speaker, not too long ago the hon. member wanted me to open the gates and let everybody into the SCI yard and do as they require with no liability or safety concerns whatsoever. Coming from a former peace officer that would have been the first one to say: put the padlock on there and monitor that gate.

If we get a formal request from the town of Borden, or Borden-Carleton, we would certainly go out and take a look at it, in compliance with the other departments that would be involved in this process, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't think the minister should try to blame the residents of Borden-Carleton in the area; they like to go down there and enjoy the scenery and the beaches the fish.

All this gravel and industrial waste material is now dropping down the banks onto the beaches and the shoreline below.

Question to the minister: When will you properly clean up the SCI yard and rehabilitate this land?

Mr. LaVie: One day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've had a great relationship with the town of Borden-Carenton, an open communication. In fact, I'm meeting with them next week. We've had all kinds of interest in the SCI yard. I'll be first and foremost to say that the opposition when we started, all they wanted to do is clean the yard up. Now, that they've seen some proposals and people coming forward with some real opportunistic initiatives in that area, whether it be campgrounds, and we saw one in the paper the other day, through the STEP program, through the federal government. Now, we're starting to see they changed their tune and say: Oh, gee, maybe this –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – SCI yard could be beneficial to our town.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) seeing the light.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) jump on board now.

Mr. J. Brown: Good MLA.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let's not change gears here and get into some other area –

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. Fox: – we're talking about the environment here. We're talking about –

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: – protecting the environment. Local residents have serious concerns about

this gravel and other waste materials that are damaging and suffocating the local clam beds.

Mr. LaVie: Oh!

Mr. Trivers: Shame.

Mr. Fox: There is proof that this is also causing early winter kill.

Will the minister of fisheries, question to the minister of fisheries: Will your department investigate this matter and report back to the House?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The key word in the hon. member's mention was proof. If the hon. member would like to table something that alleges proof –

Mr. LaVie: Oh!

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – through a scientific manner, then, so be it. I mean, we're over here. We're environmentally cautious of everything that we do and everything that happened on PEI. We'll be first and foremost to act on our responsibility as such with all the department that are invested in this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, your final question.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're getting the minister of fisheries here won't answer a question, and we got no commitment from the minister of IIDI.

Question right to the Premier: This government needs to take immediate action and protect our beaches and our shorelines and address these matters. Will you order, today, Mr. Premier, a site cleanup and have

fisheries staff on the shore today to look this environmental problem?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

I'm very glad to answer any or all questions, especially with regards to the fisheries and agriculture. And, the industries are of so much importance to our province –

Mr. Trivers: Make sure you answer the question.

Mr. McIsaac: – we see the dollars that are brought in by those industries, helping us to balance our budgets as such. We have a terrific staff that look after all the shorelines, the beds, mussel beds, oysters, whatever it might be, our staff is on top of this issue and all issues such as this because we want our industry to continue to be strong and go forward and help the economy of this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]