



Session:	3/65
Date:	14 December 2017
No:	18

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2017

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was asked a series of questions from the MLA from Morell-Mermaid regarding Health PEI and their board of directors. On attendance, all information related to the board meetings, including copies of agendas, minutes and presentations, as well as regulatory information is available – public, online at www.healthpei.ca/board.

The Member from Morell-Mermaid asked questions about attendance records of the board. All of those attendance records are publicly disclosed at part of the meeting's minutes, which are available also online.

On remuneration, Health PEI follows the Treasury Board policy 9.01 regarding honoraria for the board. All members receive an annual stipend prorated for the number of regular meetings attended and a per diem for each meeting day. The stipend is \$4,000 for members and \$13,875 for the board chair. The meeting per diem is \$200 for the chair and \$142 for the member.

On public meetings, as I stated in the House yesterday, the Health PEI annual general meeting is a public meeting. As for the regular board meetings, it's up to the board to determine which meetings are open to the public. Per section 3.11.12 of the Health PEI board of directors governance policy states, and I quote:

Health PEI may determine from time to time to hold meetings of the board of directors which are open to the public to attend.

I will table that policy manual a little later on under tabling of documents.

I also want to clarify and eliminate any confusion that was reported by the media yesterday. As I stated: the Health PEI annual general meeting is a public meeting where they advertise and invite the public to participate. The regular Health PEI board meetings are only open to the public at the discretion of the board and if a member of the public would like to reach out to Health PEI and request to make a presentation or attend a meeting, the board would consider

that request and decide whether to open the meeting up, or not. The board has stated that they're always open to receive requests from the public and will, when possible, accommodate the public's request.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: All you had to do was look it up on Google.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Earlier this year government named 12 intermediaries to help deliver the Provincial Nominee Program after an RFP process.

Tabling of applications re: intermediaries and PNP

Question to the Premier: Will you table the criteria used to evaluate the applications to become intermediaries?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the criteria were published online and, indeed, the RFP process was open and transparent. There was an evaluation of those submissions and there were recommendations made to Cabinet.

But let me say that we have a great success story in immigration with not more than 30% of it, indeed, in the investor stream. We've got refugees, we've got workers, we've got people who are coming in through the Atlantic Immigration Pilot. It's a very important and positive contribution to our province that these immigrants are making.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Government's own RFP stated that 10 intermediaries would be appointed.

Number of intermediaries appointed

Question to the Premier: How did you end up with 12 intermediaries, when the RFP you issued stated you were looking for 10?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we all know by the attendance the other night at the Christmas reception put on by settlement services, how important immigration is to the Province of Prince Edward Island, over 500 people attending.

As far as the open RFP, first and foremost, you'd think the opposition would be saying to us, finally, that because they have continued to tell us that we don't have transparency and accountability, and we have put everything online through Request for Proposals.

We did an evaluation. There were 10 that came in. Two more that were extremely close to those top 10 out of the 18 in total. It was a recommendation from our staff to go with 12.

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.

Again, question to the Premier: What was so strong in the application of the last two intermediaries that you had to name more than your tender called for? Was it a connection to the Liberal Party?

Mr. Myers: Or was it a (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Some sort a (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there was a recommendation made to Cabinet by the Office of Immigration.

Let me say, that these recommendations came and this RFP was undertaken in the context of a clear policy to expand immigration and, in particular, to expand it to all parts of the province and to emphasize people who would be able to bring immigrants to the rural areas of Prince Edward Island.

We consider that to be a very high priority, and one that will bring benefits to the province as a whole. It was with that understanding that we accepted the advice of the Office of Immigration.

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 Premier certainly didn't answer my last question, but he did bridge into the context of where my next question is going to.

In doing this RFP, government said the idea was to put a greater focus on rural immigration. That's something, over here on this side of the Chamber, we've been asking for, for quite some time, now.

New nominees dedicated to rural PEI

Question again to the Premier: What percentage of new nominees received annually under the business class category will be dedicated to rural communities here on PEI?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: I'll go back to the previous question, Mr. Speaker, and just add to the hon. member, who should be very, very well aware of who the intermediaries are on the Province of Prince Edward Island, including his chairperson through his election campaign and his –

An Hon. Member: Oh!

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) Premier's dog walker –

Mr. MacDonald: – (Indistinct) become leader.

Mr. Myers: – (Indistinct) the Premier's dog walker.

Mr. MacDonald: As far I can see there has been no patronage whatsoever –

Mr. Myers: You know (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – in these intermediaries.

Let me tell you, we've have had 13 communities interested in growing their population base and they feel that they can do that through immigration. We're going to stand alongside them and that's why we went to expression of interest, to increase the population in rural PEI.

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.

One of the reasons we've been calling for a stronger rural focus for immigration is so that rural communities can get long-term benefit from immigration.

That means families joining our communities and putting down roots, not just turnstiling in and out of rural businesses every 365 days.

Safeguards of PNP to achieve goals

Question again to the Premier: What safeguards are in place to make sure that this

latest version of the Provincial Nominee Program actually achieves the goals it's supposed to?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me start by reminding the House, again, that not more than 30% of the total 2,000 to 2,300 immigrants who will come to Prince Edward Island last year and we're expecting and we'll welcome them again, this year, are in the investor stream.

It's very important that we recognize what immigration is doing in all parts and in all aspects of our life in this province. It goes well beyond the business stream.

The piece that was incorporated into the contracts with the intermediaries is that there will be a review in the third year to ensure that these goals are being met.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. MacKay: No, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Intermediary firms or agents play the central role in bringing immigrants to PEI via the Provincial Nominee Program. Along with the escrow deposits totaling \$200,000 that are given to government, PNP participants must pay a fee to the sponsoring intermediary firm.

Amount intermediaries charge PNP client

A question to the minister responsible for PNP: What is the average amount that intermediaries charge each PNP client in the business stream?

Mr. MacEwen: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is a whole process for what intermediaries do. In the past, what has happened, is the intermediaries would submit applications to the Office of Immigration. The Office of Immigration would process those applications.

The opposition is making it sound like every time someone comes to Prince Edward Island they have to go through an intermediary. That's not the case. We have over 600 through our labour stream. Those people don't have to necessarily go through any intermediaries, or either do the business applicants.

What's happening is we're growing the population base. They're creating a falsehood. I've had people come up to me very, very concerned. I had one last night at a reception. A Vietnamese individual very concerned about the nominee program, and what's being related to it, and how it's being presented in the media and the opposition.

It's a good program. We've made (Indistinct) changes to it that the federal government is onside with and we're going to grow the population of Prince Edward Island for the economic benefit.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I asked specifically about the business stream, the minister talked about the labour stream and he didn't answer my question.

It's my understanding that the 12 intermediary firms chosen by this government stand to make millions each year from the PNP. Few, if any of, these intermediary firms are headquartered in rural PEI.

Positive impacts to rural PEI

Question for the minister: How do you expect the millions and millions of dollars

the intermediary firms bring in to provide a positive impact to rural PEI?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Let's go back to the hon. Leader of the Opposition's –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – second question and we'll talk a little bit about the intermediaries.

I have the list sitting right here and I can read them all –

Mr. Trivers: Please tell (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – off, but let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, there is the former president of the Tory party. There is the former interim president of the Tory party. There is a former treasurer of the Tory party. There is a real well connected individual. There is a real well connected lawyer, that's one of them. One of the last –

Mr. Myers: The Premier's dog walker. Say it!

Mr. MacDonald: – two we have chosen because of the –

Mr. Myers: The Premier's dog walker is there.

Mr. MacDonald: – Office of Immigration – you don't like listening to this? Because of the Office of Immigration –

Mr. Myers: The Premier's dog walker is there!

Speaker: Okay! Okay!

Mr. MacDonald: Because of the Office of Immigration decided to say you got two more, one of them is very well connected.

If the hon. member wants to talk about their personal business, he should contact his party members.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, minister, for making our point so eloquently. There are 12 intermediary firms. Originally, there were 10. It was bumped up to 12. You mentioned some. I'll tell you about some others.

One of the intermediary firm members or a member of one of the firms is the current treasurer of the Liberal Party of PEI, right? Neil Handrahan –

Mr. Myers: Interesting.

Mr. Trivers: – another, is a former leader of the Liberal Party of PEI, Wayne Carew. Yet, another is the Premier's neighbour and dog-sitter, Gerard Watts.

Mr. Myers: Oh!

Mr. Trivers: When it comes to business –

Mr. Myers: The dog days of the Liberal government.

Mr. Trivers: – this government has a track record of trying to pick winners and losers, and a poor one at that.

It seems to me that if a firm has the capabilities to be an intermediary, they've got a great track record and they've proven themselves, they should be allowed to participate in the PNP.

Cap on number of intermediary firms

A question for the minister: Why do you need to cap the number of intermediary firms, at all?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Fox: Yeah.

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

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I'm somewhat confused. They want to open it up to everybody. The next minute they want to do away with the program. It's confusing.

We've redeveloped the program. We had a study done, an evaluation done on the program in 2016. We have a new program that we're doing expression of interest. We're putting more emphasis on the intermediaries to come in with good applications when they can.

Out of the less than 30% that we deal with, over 920 families come to Prince Edward Island a year through the immigration program and we're dealing with it through expression of interest. We're on side with the federal government.

Everybody saw the article in the paper how Mr. Hussen responded to the criticisms of the program. There's another 300,000 immigrants added to the amount of immigrants coming to Canada this year.

We have other provinces doing the same thing. We've seen investment in New Brunswick of \$500,000 toward UNB to do research on retention. We're going in the right direction whether the opposition likes it or not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Permanent resident statuses of immigrants

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The only thing confusing is how this government administers this program and figures out what rules are going to be used to try to achieve the goals of the PNP. We have seen many immigrants come to PEI through the PNP program over the years and successfully make a positive addition to the Island community and economy. That's not something we're trying to argue. I want to thank them for their significant contributions. There are many in my district.

Unfortunately, in the official opposition, we see that this is the exception rather than the

norm and the PNP settlement plan rules seem to have loopholes that allow immigrants to do things like live in the city while their business is in a rural area, or even just rent an apartment in the rural area that they qualified for in the settlement plan but actually live and work in the city.

Question for the minister: Does a PNP business program participant receive their permanent resident status even if they don't abide by the settlement plan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I went through in the House several times about what's required of the immigrants when they land on Prince Edward Island, what's required of the immigrants and the obligations if they say they're going to open a business and they know what the requirements are.

There's one really important point here: 96% of the immigrants in the last year that landed on Prince Edward Island, even though they didn't open a business, have retained living on Prince Edward Island. Not to mention –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – if within two to three years –

Ms. Compton: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: You're living (Indistinct) Toronto.

Mr. MacEwen: Don't mix it up, minister.

Mr. MacDonald: If living in Prince Edward Island in two to three years and they come back to us and say: You know what? Now I'm ready to open a business. We'll work with them in that regard.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

In-house evaluation of PNP

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, I'd say the minister must be quite the hockey player because he's really skating around the issue quite well.

Recently, the Leader of the Opposition asked the minister responsible for immigration to table the top-to-bottom review of the PNP program, he told the House was done six months ago. We haven't seen that yet, but then the minister was confused saying that an in-house review had been done instead. Well, perhaps the minister is referring to an evaluation of the PNP program that was completed March 18th, 2016, and that is available on the government website.

Minister: Are you familiar with the findings of this evaluation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Grant Thornton, by the way, out of Halifax, conducted an evaluation of Prince Edward Island nominee program present their final report November 2016. The report was presented to the IIDI board in January 2017 and then sent out to federal immigration department. The report was posted to the immigration website on August 3rd, 2017. The internal review was based on that evaluation.

That's how we came up with the expression of interest. That's how we came up with dealing with our rural Prince Edward Island. That's how we came up with 13 communities wanting to be on board in this. Yes, I am familiar with it. Number one; goal setting.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: Number two, evaluation and number three, survey results. Yes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Well, Mr. Speaker, that evaluation talks about concerns of the impact of escrow deposits, on keeping nominees on the Island to operate a successful business in the long-term. It talks about the fact that IIDI doesn't publish reports or compare actual results to the intended goals of the program.

It also talks about the fact that they need more information on the age and timeline of immigrant arrival that could better help IIDI with the protection of costs. There are a number of concerns in this evaluation and, really, from over here it does not look like the rules of the program are addressing them.

Complete top-to-bottom review of PNP

A question to the Premier this time; we need to get your minister in line, Mr. Premier: Will you finally launch a complete top-to-bottom review of the new PNP to make sure these structural issues are fixed once and for all?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As this whole recent line of questioning has made it totally apparent, there's been a review, an arms-length review, an expert's review. It was made public. It's been the basis for the new –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) still all kinds of problems.

Premier MacLauchlan: It's the basis for the new program. There's to be, in the third year, a review of the –

Mr. Trivers: If at first you don't succeed (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – intermediaries, and of course we keep reviewing as we go

and we keep achieving the objectives as we go.

Our total immigration program is one that we're proud of and is bringing benefits in every sense to our province and we're proud of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Failure to answer written questions

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's laughable. I'm listening to the Premier talk about how things are clear. I listened to the minister talking about – he's mixing up facts over there. The last time I heard a minister start repeating over and over again that it's a good program, it goes back to 2008 and we know what happened there, minister.

Mr. Myers: Oh.

Mr. MacEwen: Do you know what? This past spring things started really heating up in our caucus hearing about –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: – hearing about concerns with PNP and with immigration in PEI, and we didn't go right out. We started doing our research. We started meeting with people. One of the things I did was submit 64 written questions to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism over there on good things, on talking about immigration and retention numbers. Not one answer. Seven months later, not one answer.

An Hon. Member: Shame.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacEwen: Can the minister tell me why refuses to answer my questions?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) the answer written (Indistinct)

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

Mr. MacDonald: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that the opposition – we actually – I had my staff actually invite the opposition and the third party to attend a session on immigration. It's a complicated file and they did, and they said – answered any question that they obviously had, but obviously they didn't write down their questions because their memories are getting short.

But, if you look back at the immigration program, and I have done the history on it, you look back to what Jason Kenney did to this program as the federal minister and the blunders that he created –

Mr. Myers: He shut you fellows down (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: If you're going back to 2008 –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – John McCallum was the minister that had to come in and clean it up, and now we have minister Hussen – excuse me –

Ms. Compton: Straighten him out.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: This is a good program. It's a small percentage of the people that come to Prince Edward Island for the safety and quietness. I seen 500 of them the other night over here at the Confederation Centre. They come up to me each and every day and thank us for our way of life and what they're doing to Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. J. Brown: Here comes the (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's true what they say: Sometimes heroes don't wear capes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: He hurt his shoulder patting himself on the back.

Mr. MacEwen: The amazing things that this minister is talking about.

Do you know what? Over two weeks ago I asked the minister's department, three different people in his department, to provide me with the presentation that they gave the Leader of the Third Party and the Leader of the Opposition and myself. Over two weeks ago, a simple presentation; will you send it to me? Nothing; it's secretive. We don't know what's going on. They won't answer our questions.

Minister: Why will you not give me the presentation? Why will you not answer my written questions? Why is it every time your government dabbles in PNP everything is secretive and scandal comes from it?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: You know, it's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition continue to taint the immigration program in Prince Edward Island and all the immigrants. There are many immigrants and I've done acknowledgements of a seafood plant right in the hon. member's own riding where immigrants played a very significant role in that labour stream.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: It's unfortunate –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) by the way.

Mr. MacDonald: It's unfortunate that they continue to go down this path.

I agree at least he acknowledged that he was at the presentation and had the opportunity to ask questions on the immigration program, but we know the contribution of

the immigration file, portfolio, to Prince Edward Island, whether it's retail, housing starts – it doesn't matter – new businesses, employment being created, and the list goes on and we're going to continue to build on that with those 13 communities that want to invest in immigration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday I questioned the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture about efforts to develop new policies around the retention of BlackBerry Messenger and text messages and it was clear from his response there are no policies in place and no immediate plans to start logging these messages on government servers.

Policy around government records (further)

A question to the Premier: As the minister responsible for the FOIP act, are you concerned about the education minister's failure to protect government records? And if so, what do you intend to do about it?

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I felt that the minister of education gave a forthright answer yesterday and, indeed, indicated that this is an area where the law itself is evolving and that point is well supported by external bodies, as high up as the Supreme Court of Canada. I thought that was an adequate answer. And, as minister responsible for the FOIP act, we will indeed be having a review of the FOIP legislation and the regime in its administration and we welcome input on that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier, it has been over a year since the Auditor General tabled her special report on e-gaming, in which she brought to light the issues of ministers and staff using texts, instant messaging, and BlackBerry PINs for government business. In effect, senior officials are using the lack of policy as an excuse to evade their obligations under the *Archives and Records Act* and to avoid public scrutiny under the FOIP act.

Destroying government records (further)

A question to the Premier: Why have you not yet acted to stop this willful obstruction of government records?

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, that's pretty strong language for day two, so I guess we've got a lot to look forward to.

To accuse senior officials of evading their obligations or destroying records when the question is being asked about an area of the law and a technology that is still in evolution and, indeed, it's being taken to heart, as were the other recommendations by the Auditor General and the provisions and the personnel that were put in place to ensure that government records are safeguarded, that the regime is in place, that the personnel is in place, and that the rules are in place to do our job.

I will contend that that is a very fulsome response to the Auditor General's recommendations and, indeed, there's an opportunity as we look at the FOIP act to look at that. But I would hope that the hon. member, if she has submissions to make about that, we'll make it in more measured language than we just heard.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier, you were elected on a platform of increased transparency and accountability and yet you stand here today offering excuses to justify your lack of action on these very issues. The solution to this problem is simple: it is literally a matter of activating software that is already embedded on your government servers and has been for many years.

Premier: Will you show Islanders that your talk of transparency and accountability isn't just rhetoric and immediately end the needless destruction of valuable government records?

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

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

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

As I indicated yesterday, we've made a significant investment in this area and it was to outline a three-year plan. Last spring, as all members of this House – at least that were here at that time, would be aware, we made amendments to the public *Archives and Records Act*, which are very relevant to this particular area. Since then, we've set out to and have hired nine new staff in that department who are expert in that area and who will be preparing retention schedules for each department and who will be providing training to each individual in the departments that will outline policies as to what, in fact, a government record is.

I should add that the document that was tabled yesterday indicated that the federal government, which we would look to, has indicated that they are not activating the easy fix that the hon. member has indicated to start to track BBM messages, or text messages, or whatever. This is evolving technology. Every day we get messages from constituents, or whomever, and the same is true for government employees. The technology is constantly evolving; the law is constantly evolving and we are employing

the proper people to look at this and to go to work to get the policies in place to make sure that we're doing what we need to be doing.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism. Summerside is a welcoming community with limitless opportunities. With a little support, our community could really thrive and become an economic force in Atlantic Canada. While I agree the Summerside Regional Development Corporation needed a new approach, I do not support the idea that the province is abandoning the function of economic development in Summerside. Last year, the province announced that SRDC would be wound down.

New approach to SRDC

Can the minister please inform the House where they are in this process?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we've all discussed the process of recreating economic development across Prince Edward Island, not just in any specific area. We've created economic development councils that are on the ground – their feet on the ground. We've looked at all kinds of different opportunities by purchasing great assets that could be beneficial to communities in the surrounding areas, such as Slemmon Park; such as the timber yard in Georgetown. These are the types of things that this government wants to do to ensure that prosperity is from one end of the Island to the other.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, as I've said in this House many times: If you don't measure it, you can't manage it.

Minister: How is the function of economic development being measured in Summerside to determine its effectiveness?

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's no boundaries in economic development across the province. There's several ways to measure economic value on everything we do. Some people put it on jobs; some people put it on GDPs; some people put it on the way people live in those communities. Has there been advancement in retail? Has there been advancement in housing? Has there been advancement in car sales? Those are the types of things I think you really have to look at. The investments that this government has made in places like New Leaf Essentials in Slemon Park, in Slemon Park – a new runway, all kinds of things that are happening.

Mr. Trivers: You're not (Indistinct).

Mr. MacDonald: You have to look at the overall picture to evaluate the success of any program, but our economy is diverse enough right now that we're seeing success in pretty near everything.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

As we move closer to the federal government's deadline for legalizing cannabis, there's been a lot of concerns brought to my attention by my constituents in my area. My question today is about advertising and how cannabis is going to be

allowed to be advertised, or if it's not going to be allowed to advertise.

I want to make it clear, Mr. Speaker, that I've never supported advertising when it comes to gambling, alcohol, or cigarettes. I just think it's wrong. There's been a lot of concern about the advertising and the Canadian Public Health Association wants a complete ban on advertising for cannabis.

Advertising of cannabis

Can the minister tell us what is going on in the federal government in terms of advertising for cannabis?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Province of Prince Edward Island has no plans to advertise cannabis products. In fact, we stand very strong on that. This is regulated by the federal government. In fact, early in January, we're going to be engaging in a comprehensive public awareness campaign to ensure that Islanders are aware of all that's taking place with that and they are able to make informed choices on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to a point here. The minister keeps trying to talk about that opposition is focusing on the negative and stuff like that and that's simply not true.

The minister talked about my hometown and I want to use that as an example. He's 100% right. We have a wonderful community of new Islanders that are coming through here. The temporary foreign workers that are going through the system, through an immigration system that the minister's staff members did brief us on and told us about.

They're coming. They're working. They're living in our community. They're going to

our schools. They're registering for sports. That's building our community.

Do you know what it's not doing? It's not coming, buying a business, and flipping it a year later and then filing their taxes here after a year and then high-tailing it to Toronto. That is not what they're doing. That is the kind of immigration that we need.

We have wonderful things that are going on with immigration here. The association of newcomers is doing things. Yes, he's right; 20% of these people are doing awesome things on PEI. What we're trying to focus on is why is mediocrity this government's mantra? Why can't we focus on the other 80% and make it even better for PEI? Why can't the minister focus on that?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, this whole process and what we're doing here. This whole process of expression of interest, building our – building rural PEI up, involving the 13 communities across Prince Edward Island. That is the process to make improvements to the immigration program. That's what we're doing.

I don't see how you can take a program that we just did an evaluation on. We did an internal evaluation on. We went to expression of interest. We recreated – it went to an RFP, transparent, accountable. To intermediaries. These are the things that are adding up to making a positive assessment of our immigration program and going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Services lacking in rural PEI

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The erosion of our rural communities under the 10 years of this government continues:

attempted school closures and reduction of government services, the loss of local business pillars like restaurants and stores, and no access to local health services. This week, the announcement of the closure of the bank in Murray River.

Can the Minister of Rural and Regional Development explain why lip service is the only service rural communities get from this government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we're giving this a lot more than lip service. It's unfortunate that the bank is closing, but I would say that's a business decision that they're making. What we're doing is growing the population, especially in rural Prince Edward Island. We've proven that with our – the agents, the intermediary agents that we've spoken about earlier today. We have made sure that they have offices in O'Leary, Tignish, Souris, Montague, right across the rural parts of the province.

It's our intention that these agents will work with the communities and try and make a better fit for the immigrants that are coming in those communities so they will stay. They will be part of the community going forward.

We've named our regional economic councils. I mean, they're right across the province. The fact that we have a complete department dedicated to rural Prince Edward Island. I think that says quite a bit about we're giving it a lot more than lip service on this side of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Underspent grants in rural PEI

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last year the minister's department vastly under spent their grants, which are the only specific grants targeting rural PEI. The minister invested less than \$600,000 for rural PEI, which is 0.03% of government's total program spend.

Minister: Why is this the case?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LaVie: Here we go.

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

Mr. Murphy: Our entire budget is not – is \$7 million. To be exact: \$6,936,100. That's delivered right across rural Prince Edward Island with the Rural Jobs Initiative program; with the Jobs for Youth Program, with the Community Development Program. I just have a paper here where there's \$17 million spent in the hon. member's riding last year –

Mr. R. Brown: Oh! (Indistinct)

Mr. Murphy: – I don't know where these facts are coming from, but they don't appear to be accurate to me, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEwen: Must be new ferries.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) facts.

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

Mr. LaVie: You know what I'm looking for.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Not only does this minister shortchange rural PEI through its grants, this government eliminated the Island community fund, the sole funding vehicle for local services like volunteer fire companies and local rinks –

Mr. LaVie: Shame!

Ms. Compton: – now our province is awash with Chase –

Mr. LaVie: It's a shame.

Ms. Compton: – the Ace –

Mr. LaVie: Shame!

Ms. Compton: – the Deuce is Loose. Jig for the joker; community fundraising to cover-off the shortcomings of this government.

Adding insult –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) wouldn't touch them.

Ms. Compton: – this government charging 2% of that pot –

Mr. Myers: Shame.

Mr. LaVie: Shame. Oh!

Ms. Compton: – minister: Why is there such a gaping hole in real dollars and supports for local regional development under you government?

Mr. LaVie: Oh!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Mr. Murphy: I guess the member didn't hear me about the \$17 million that was spent in her riding last year.

We have the Community Development Program. It leverages money from ACOA and other programs that are out there and it's all community-based. Last year the Souris group home received funding, the town of North Rustico received funding –

Mr. LaVie: Great MLA.

Mr. Murphy: – the Royal Canadian Legion in Souris –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: Hear! Hear!

Mr. Murphy: There's a member, he does quite well.

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) work, you just send it to him.

Mr. Murphy: – the Royal Canadian Legion, the town of Souris, the Kings Playhouse in Georgetown, the Argyle Shore Women's Institute, the Malpeque Women's Institute, Morell and Area Development Corporation, the community of Morell.

Mr. MacEwen: Don't start with Morell.

Mr. Murphy: I don't think we're neglecting rural Prince Edward Island, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. R. Brown: Twice (Indistinct) Charlottetown (Indistinct)

Ferry services in eastern PEI

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate that list. None of those are in my district. Wood Islands is a main gateway to our province. Yet, this government ignored our ferry crisis last summer. They took the permanent weigh station out. There is a general apathy towards the region by the government.

Initial steps are concluding tomorrow on a new operating model for the ferry. The federal government repeatedly states in the RFI around eastern Canadian ferries that they are only considering a long-term contract. No firm commitment. No money committed, and no indication of an actual RFP for services.

We haven't heard a lot from you minister about our ferry: What are your plans moving forward to ensure the ferry service remains and thrives in eastern PEI?

Mr. R. Brown: Keep Lawrence elected.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Murphy: I think the Member from Charlottetown-Victoria Park hit the nail on

the head there; make sure we have a good Liberal member representing that part of the province.

An Hon. Member: Oh!

Mr. Murphy: There was –

Mr. MacEwen: Where's the ferry?

Ms. Compton: Yeah, where's the ferry?

Mr. Murphy: Mr. Speaker, yes, the car ferry. There was an agreement signed for a long-term agreement for 20 years. I don't know what more we could do than that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: Get the facts.

Mr. Myers: Who signed it? Get us a copy of that?

Mr. R. Brown: (Indistinct) elected for 20 years.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My – your interpretations of what happened and mine are slightly different. Yes, there is an RFI that is, basically, the conclusion is happening tomorrow. There is no talk, yet, of an RFP. There is no indication. We need to have a company that is willing to operate under the stipulations that are placed by the federal government.

Ten-year contract, or 20 year contract or not, we need to have a company that is willing to do it. And we need the support from Ottawa to make sure that happens. I am looking to this government to be a voice for eastern PEI on the ferry and not leave it up to the Honourable Lawrence MacAulay.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Compton: Mr. Speaker, these are all symptoms – I'm coming to my question.

These are all symptoms of failure by this government. In Murray River, there is a vacant clinic that this government promised back in 2011.

Mr. LaVie: Oh!

Ms. Compton: This government still pays the rent on it and it's still empty.

Mr. LaVie: Oh!

Mr. Myers: Oh!

Ms. Compton: We have area residents that are former patients of Dr. Hambly, who are still left without a doctor. When they call the patient registry, they're told: Don't call us, we'll call you. That's the answer they're getting about where they are on the list.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Rural Islanders treated differently

Ms. Compton: Minister: Why are rural Islanders being treated like second-class citizens by this government?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LaVie: Oh!

Mr. Myers: Oh!

Ms. Compton: Oh!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: – when it comes to issues around the delivery of primary care in this province we have –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: – numerous physicians that are out there. They're delivering

primary care at various locations across this province.

I'll remind the hon. member, we did go down and meet with the wonderful Gillis Lodge there, and we did add some more long-term care beds to that particular location just recently.

An Hon. Member: Oh!

Mr. Henderson: – in fact, I talked to the owner of the property this morning and he was quite excited and quite eloquent about the great work that this particular minister did in making sure there are beds there, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: Okay, Ronnie

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, this will be your final question.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, great place the Dr. John Gillis Memorial Lodge; wonderful. There is no explanation there about the patients or the people in our district who are without a doctor, and call their MLA and saying: Where is the promise for a doctor for every Islander?

Eliminating services –

Mr. LaVie: Six years now.

Ms. Compton: – failing to staff primary health care professionals –

Mr. LaVie: Six years.

Ms. Compton: –disrespecting community hospitals in their regions from dialysis, to emergency rooms, lab services to mental supports – this is the track record of this government.

Success of economic development in rural PEI

Minister: How can regional economic development in rural PEI be successful and how can we attract new immigrants or anyone else while this government continues

to strip away services and erode the trust of the people?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, recruiting and retention in our department is working very diligent at trying to recruit the vacancies in Prince Edward Island, but as the hon. member may be aware that we've had a number of announcements just recently. I think we announced 13 new doctors just recently in the Charlottetown region. We announced six new doctors in the Prince County region just recently, and we have actually more doctors practicing in Prince Edward Island than in many years.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: But yes, we do have vacancies and it's my responsibility to make sure –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: – that we're doing our very best to recruit those and we've implemented a number of programs to make sure –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: No.

Mr. Henderson: – that we can retain services and physicians and we'll continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) closed the ER in Montague.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]