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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF  
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 19 APRIL 2017



Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**FOIPP request (further)**

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

Premier: Why did your tired Liberal government refuse a FOIPP request and then fight the appeal to release your 2013 Mill River secret study?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I expect all hon. members are aware that there is a particular process to be followed when there are FOIPP requests. It wouldn't be in my role as Premier to play any part, or in fact, to be aware of a FOIPP request.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Value of Mill River property (further)**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Mr. Speaker, you are the Attorney General. A decision would have been made by you to fight the appeal.

Premier: Why did your tired Liberal government give away a 90-room full-service resort with an 18-hole championship golf course, an indoor pool, a 90-foot waterslide, a whirlpool, a sauna, a squash court, tennis courts, a restaurant lounge, a marine dock –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct) tractor trailer (Indistinct)

**Leader of the Opposition:** – 72-site campground, a fun park and all the land, plus \$10.9 million of Islanders' money in your Mill River sweetheart deal?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, our government entered into an arrangement with a reputable businessman, Don MacDougall and his daughter Anne McDougall-Cooper, to take over the Mill River property and the assets there and turn them into a sustainable asset and a destination and an attraction to build the tourism industry in West Prince.

When you put the numbers up there for what it has been costing the province to be there as the owner, and what the McDougalls' as people with a reputation who are going to build that resort and build the industry in West Prince, it is a bargain for Islanders, it's an investment in West Prince, and an investment in tourism in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Mr. Speaker, the government and the Premier entered into an agreement with only one person that had a chance. No other Islanders had a chance.

The sun isn't setting for 12 years and all the while \$10.9 million of Islanders' money is being trucked up to Mill River to renovate the property and to cover all the losses after this tired Liberal government gave them away for nothing.

Question to the Premier: Do you stand by the efforts of your minister to use weasel words to try and hide the truth about –

**Ms. Biggar:** Unparliamentary.

**Leader of the Opposition:** – this little sweetheart Mill River deal?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Myers:** Good question.

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I stand by the decision of our government –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct) your name (Indistinct)

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – to make this transaction, to make this investment.

Let me remind the members of this House that there was an RFP process in 2012-2013 –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct) golf course.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – to which there were many responses. Mr. McDougall and his company emerged as the top respondent to that RFP process eminently qualified businesspeople and businesspeople who understand, as the opposition don't, the concept of risk. They've taken on a lot of risk and they're going to bring benefits to the people of West Prince and to this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mill River/government transition of cash**

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the minister of innovation told the House that they didn't finance any of the \$500,000 that McDougall used to buy the property.

Question to the minister of transportation: Did the government actually receive cash from Mr. McDougall?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My particular department does not have anything to do with dealing in transition of cash in that regard. Our role in transaction of properties is to prepare the paperwork and to file the paperwork.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know, and I did see your name on the documents, so I know you're fully aware. As I know there are other people that are fully aware of it, too. We'll find out about it later on.

Let's go back to the minister of innovation then. Nobody seems to know if they actually paid any money.

Did the government receive \$500,000 cash from McDougall or did you get it in grants, or did you get in free golf, or how exactly did he pay for this golf course? What did you get?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Interestingly enough, I'll go back to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, but if I remember distinctly the day we announced this deal in Mill River the hon. member was there and actually said, stood up and said: It was a great deal for West Prince. It's interesting to see how you turn a foot really quickly.

The answer to the question on the \$500,000 is yes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Myers:** Yes. The answer is yes. It was kind of like a three-headed question.

I guess I'll ask another question because 'yes' didn't actually answer my question.

Did government ensure that the \$500,000 grant that is in last year's budget, that you spend out of last year's budget, was not

being used to fund the purchase price, which happens to be the exact same amount?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've been discussing this transaction for a number of times in the House. It gives me the opportunity to get up and confirm what a great deal it is for the taxpayers of Prince Edward Island, and West Prince.

As far as the \$500,000, that transaction was held in trust when the deal was signed. As in most business protocols, that's what usually takes place; when the deal is signed there's an amount of money that is put aside and that's what that was and it was put in trust.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You had issued a grant for \$500,000 to McDougall prior to the sale is what you're saying. You issued the cheque for \$500,000 prior to selling it.

Can you assure this House that he didn't use that \$500,000 to pay you?

This is your chance to prove me wrong.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, working with Mr. McDougall, an individual whose heart and soul is in West Prince doesn't need this deal; doesn't need this opportunity, but the investment that he's making with the people of West Prince, in our tourism industry; to maintain jobs; to build up an infrastructure that is at a point where other investors wouldn't even look at.

We feel that we've done a good job here with the taxpayers' money. Over the course of 12 years and less than that, the taxpayer will not be responsible for this property. We're going to have an establishment that's first class in West Prince, which is needed in our tourism industry coming upon one of the best years we'll likely ever have.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do believe that Mr. McDougall didn't need this and didn't need the property. That's why you had to pay him to take it. You were paying him boat loads of cash to take it. You kept firing cash at him and he finally said: I'll take it then. I'll take it. And you're letting Islanders get ripped off in the process.

Your timeline is even suspect. You said in January the deal wasn't done. But the so-called grant was booked in this year. I think you doled out the money before the deal was done.

Can you prove me wrong?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, I believe the transaction went through sometime in January. I don't have the exact date on the top of my head.

At that time the \$500,000 was put into a trust on behalf of the owners and government working together to come to a conclusion on a property that really there was no other exit for this establishment.

You can't continue to lose \$850,000 in taxpayers' money. Going forward, it's not hard to do the math over the 12-year period who is going to come out ahead here. It's going to be the taxpayers of Prince Edward Island. I can't understand how the opposition can stand over there day after day and say: Doom and gloom, this is a bad idea.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you.

I'll paraphrase what the minister said: On the day that they sold the golf course to McDougall for \$500,000 they put in trust \$500,000.

Interesting, and you're telling this and you want Islanders to believe that you're not crooked on this deal?

You want Islanders to believe that you didn't pay him the money to pay for the golf course?

I can't believe the audacity of you to stand in this House and treat Islanders with the disrespect that you treated them with all day yesterday and are intent on doing again today.

**Ms. Biggar:** Question.

**Mr. Myers:** I'm embarrassed for you and for all Islanders for your treatment. What conditions were attached to this \$500,000 grant, or did you just give it away to him with no strings attached at all?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at this property over the next 12 years, estimates are that \$6.6 million in losses coming out of – and that's just our own. That's the golf course, the campground, and the fun park. That's not including capital improvements.

The money that the hon. member's speaking about is part of a capital improvements grant. I'm not sure why he's trying to confuse the public. Everything we've done is above board. We've had the media sitting in my boardroom and described the whole layout to them. This is an ongoing process and we'll continue to make investments like this, just like we made investments in the timber yard in his own riding. There's over

\$30 million in a loan portfolio in his riding. I don't hear him complaining about that.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

**Role of minister re: Aboriginal Affairs**

**Mr. Aylward:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A question to the Premier: Premier, why do you not take your duty as Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs seriously?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier and Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** I indeed do and, in fact, our relationship with the First Nations in this province is our most important relationship and we, on an ongoing basis, work closely with and have shared programs and investments with the Mi'kmaq in this province and are very proud of that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

**Aboriginal people and Supreme Court application**

**Mr. Aylward:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Aboriginal peoples of our province have filed a Supreme Court application in this tired Liberal government's sweetheart Mill River deal.

Question to the Premier: Do you agree with the chiefs that your orders in council purporting to grant permission to sell Mill River are invalid?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier and Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I have a very close relationship with the chiefs. We had a day together with confederacy and other partners on Tuesday of last week on the whole question of working together in a tripartite relationship

with the federal government as we work with real diligence to respond to the actions called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. On Tuesday evening of last week, I had dinner with the chiefs and we have a very positive and constructive ongoing relationship.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

**Mr. Aylward:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Again to the Premier: Premier, would you agree with the chiefs that as the Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs, you failed in your duty to consult on your sweetheart Mill River deal?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier and Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, the province acknowledges that we have a constitutional duty to consult with the First Nations when we're dealing with land. There were discussions over a period of time and I value the relationship with the chiefs and I respect their concerns about this and this is something that we are in an ongoing relationship. Notwithstanding the best efforts of the Member for Stratford-Kinlock, I don't intend to stand in this House and say that I disagree with the chiefs. We have a very good relationship and we intend to keep it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

**Mr. Aylward:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, not once did I say whether or not he disagrees with them. I'm asking if he agrees with them because there is a document filed in court that strongly suggests the contrary.

Again to the Premier: Do you agree with the chiefs' request to seek an injunction to prevent your sweetheart Mill River deal until you properly consult with them?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier and Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, we are committed to the duty to consult with the chiefs and we work very closely with the chiefs and the confederacy on a number of fronts including land and resources, including health, including infrastructure, justice programs, and employment programs.

We're very proud of those relationships and we acknowledge that there is a duty to consult; one that was pursued in this matter and that's a matter of continuing discussions with the chiefs and the confederacy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

**Mr. Aylward:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again to the Premier: Do you agree with the chiefs that they have suffered damage from your government's breach of fiduciary duty?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier and Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I suppose the standard response to this might be that something is before the courts and I hope that the opposition recognizes that when government has a legal action taken against it that it's not prudent to stand in the House and say that you're right or wrong. That's especially so when you're dealing with an honoured relationship that we have with the chiefs of the confederacy.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

**Mr. Aylward:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again we have a government – if they would simply follow the rules as they're set out, you wouldn't find yourself in court again, but you don't seem to grasp that concept. Follow the rules.

Again to the Premier: Do you agree with the chiefs that your government has not offered any compensation or accommodation at all?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier and Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, the duty of government is to consult. We take the view that there was consultation and we have a long relationship with the chiefs and the confederacy on a number of matters dealing with land and I can assure the House that we take that to heart and those discussions are active and in good faith.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

**Mill River deal re: cost to Island taxpayers**

**Mr. Aylward:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier talks about the long, established relationship, but unfortunately now it's not only going to be long, it's going to be very costly as well because the legal fees are only going to pile up because of this.

The chiefs were notified and then wrote back to the province outlining its objections. They say none of the agreed upon meaningful consultation happened.

Again to the Premier: How much more will your botched sweetheart deal cost Island taxpayers?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier and Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, in this province, there is not the same extent of crown land as is the case in most of the other provinces of Canada and it's one of the important elements of our stewardship as government and in our stewardship in our relations with the chiefs and with the First Nations – that we approach all of that with diligence and with honour and that we take all of our responsibilities to heart and we definitely do that. I'm proud to say that it's one of our great relationships and we intend for everybody to go ahead together in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

**Mr. Aylward:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government is using outside legal counsel while, of course, the Premier being a constitutional law expert, fights another losing and costly court battle.

Premier: Why are you and the Liberal Party putting your interests above the interests of the people of PEI?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Myers:** Good question.

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier and Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I'm in my role as Premier as the leader of a majority government in this Legislature, and we are responding and dealing with our relationships with the First Nations, with the chiefs, with due diligence, with attention, and it is very much in our minds that we achieve and continue to move forward in our relationship with the First Nations in a way that's positive and constructive and respectful of our obligations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

**Mr. Aylward:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

This is actually the first case of Aboriginal rights that would be tested by the courts here in the Province of Prince Edward Island and Chief Francis stated last month: There's really no excuse if they don't understand their obligations at this point. This is your good friend that is saying this about your government.

Premier: How did you, the constitutional law expert, fail in your constitutional duty to consult with our Aboriginal persons?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Mr. Myers:** Maybe he's not a good lawyer.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker –

**Mr. Myers:** They're not all good.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – we do indeed have a good relationship –

**An Hon. Member:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Myers:** Not talking about you, Jordan.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – with Chief Francis, with Chief Ramjattan, and with the First Nations in this province. We understand our obligations when it comes to consultation, and we endeavour to fulfill those obligations to the utmost and to view this as an ongoing relationship of honour, and that's exactly how we are living up to our responsibilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

### **Cost for Child Advocate office**

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

Last week, government introduced legislation to provide better supports for children in our legal system, and yet last December, every member of the Liberal caucus voted in lockstep to defeat Motion 39, which was in alignment with a recommendation from the Nash Campbell inquest to create the position of a child advocate.

The justification of government back then was that we should invest in frontline services instead, as if we shouldn't and could not afford both for our children.

A question to the Premier: How much will it cost for Prince Edward Island to set up an independent child advocate office?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Third Party is indeed correct, that our government's position is that we should address first where there are needs for frontline services. Since coming to government we've established a children's lawyer, which was indeed addressed through legislation last week and provided for in the 2016-2017 Budget. We put in place supervised access points. We've now provided through legislation for arbitration. We've got the bridge model to deal with high-risk cases, and that's how we're addressing the needs that the Leader of the Third Party is asking about.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party, this will be your first supplementary.

### **Transparency and accountability of government**

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

I've recently seen a troubling trend in government's approach to meeting the needs as the Premier just described, whether it's the issue of the executive division conflict of interest rules, the creation of a lobbyist registry, whistleblower policy, or calls for a child advocate or an ombudsperson.

This government seems to be extremely uncomfortable with independent oversight of its work.

A question to the Premier: Should not the values of transparency and accountability also include independent oversight?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Myers:** Good question.

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**An Hon. Member:** Next leader. That's your next leader.

**An Hon. Member:** New leader.

**Mr. Myers:** Need an ethics commissioner to tell them how to be ethical.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, our government has been committed from the outset to openness and transparency, and we've demonstrated that from day one and continue to do so. We look forward to the opportunity to speak to the motion that was introduced by the opposition last night.

And our view, and it was a view that was backed up by the child protection review, is that it's more important to address the opportunities to provide frontline support and a wraparound coordinated service that speaks to the needs of children in need in this province, and that's where we're putting our priority, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

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

Some may suggest the government is just being stubborn in refusing to act on repeated calls for a child advocate –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Cost for Child Advocate office (further)**

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** But I believe that, actually, every member of this Legislature is sincerely committed to the wellbeing of every single Island child.

Therefore, I ask the Premier to table all of the research and analysis, including costs that informed his decision to reject calls for a child advocate.

Premier, will you table these documents before debate begins on your justice amendments so that we can have a full and well-informed discussion?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I think there's a motion in the book on a child

advocate, probably for about the third time since the election, so I expect there have been opportunities to consider that –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct) sunset clause (Indistinct)

**Premier MacLauchlan:** But let me say that I think there is a basic difference here. The government, as government, we believe in a professional public service that will give service and work together with the proper resources and the proper team to protect children in this province. I believe the opposition is more concerned about themselves because they want to – because they don't really expect to be in government and they just want somebody who's going to serve the opposition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Myers:** Nobody's polling my name.

**An Hon. Member:** Someone should carry it.

**Mr. Myers:** Nobody's polling to try and find out how much they don't like us.

**Speaker:** Question from the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

**Financial burden of post-secondary students**

**Mr. Perry:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've heard concerns in the media and from student unions of students who may have some financial struggles, especially those from low-income families.

Last fall in the House, I had asked a question to the Department of Workforce and Advanced Learning about helping to ease the burden of postsecondary students by offering the ability to collect EI while studying, and I was wondering if the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning could give me an update on the progress.

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

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to inform the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road that his suggestions were taken very seriously last fall, and within the next couple of weeks my department will announce more details about people that are eligible for EI when they go to postsecondary institutions, and I'd like to also state –

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, hon. members.

This builds on over \$30 million worth of assistance that we give the students on an annual basis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, your first supplementary question.

### **EI program and university students**

**Mr. Perry:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, minister, and that's great news. I know previously postsecondary students in college were able to get on this program and have access to this program.

So what you're saying now, does that mean that university students who are EI-eligible will be able to access this program?

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

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, hon. member. Through this program, both college and university students will be eligible.

**An Hon. Member:** Oh great, great news.

**Mr. Gallant:** The college students, they'll have to just be out of the public school system for 12 months and have an active claim open.

**Ms. Biggar:** Great.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, your second supplementary.

**Mr. Perry:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's great news. That's going to help many Islanders, especially Islanders up in my end who have to come down here and have the additional costs of board.

My question to the same minister: I'm sure many students will have an interest in this program. Can the minister tell us how they can apply for this program?

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

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, hon. Speaker.

Hon. member, these students can apply and – there'll be more details coming in the weeks ahead, but they can – there'll be application forms available through Skills PEI that students can apply.

**Mr. Myers:** Still need a pretty penny.

**Mr. Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

### **Supports for grandparents**

**Ms. Casey:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is to the Minister of Family and Human Services.

Minister, everyone in this House knows that you are a champion for grandparents who are primary caregivers for their grandchildren. We heard last night during debate on Motion 62, that there are many reasons why parents are unable to care for their children and for a grandparent it can be quite challenging to raise their grandchild.

Minister, can you explain what supports are available today for grandparents who are in this situation?

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

**Ms. Mundy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any chance I get to talk about supports for grandparents and to talk about this issue that is so near and dear to my heart, it does give me great pleasure to rise.

There are many programs that are out there that grandparents are not aware of that they can access, and I think that each and every one of us – again, and I know I say this quite often – but each and every one of us in the Legislature, we come into contact day in and day out with our constituents. Sometimes we're the first people (Indistinct) call, so I think we all owe it to every constituent, especially those grandparents in our districts, to know what the programs are, because grandparents can access family and social housing. They can access social assistance benefits. They can access a children's dental benefit. They can access optical for children that are kindergarten age. They can access the Canada Child Benefit. As well, they can also access childcare subsidy, so there are a wealth of programs that are out there right now that they can access. Any one of you that wants to know about them, please call me. I'd be more than happy to sit down with you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

### **Public education campaign for grandparent caregivers**

**Ms. Casey:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016, the health and wellness committee recommended to this House that your department undertake a public education campaign regarding supports available for grandparents acting as primary caregivers.

Minister: Has your department taken any action on this recommendation?

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

**Ms. Mundy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, a lot of this is about education and about awareness, and after we did receive the response and the recommendations from the standing committee, the department did go out and they sourced a lot of the information that's available, not only from our department, but to many of our community partners and our NGO partners that are out there.

We did put together a document called, *Raising A Second Generation*, and it is a resource guide for grandparents that are parenting their grandchildren. It has much information in there on some of the programs that I already mentioned previously, as well as the Triple P program, the Positive Parenting Program, but it is a wealth of information.

Also, we did commit last night because we did hear through the *Child Protection Act* review many times and it was also something that was recommended from the standing committee to look at supports for grandparents that are raising their grandchildren. We will commit to a pilot project before the end of this mandate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

### **Internet speed test and results**

**Mr. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government is spending taxpayer dollars on a speed test that Internet service providers at standing committee have said is pretty much useless. Islanders have started taking the speed test and I understand that it will extend through the summer for tourists and seasonal residents.

Question to the minister of economic development: When will this speed test exercise be completed?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was an initiative of this government realizing the importance of economic development in rural PEI and we are looking at ways to capitalize on –

**Mr. Trivers:** When?

**Mr. MacDonald:** – ideas and suggestions to move this issue forward. I think it's been an issue of mine. I've stated in the House and I have stated publicly –

**Mr. Trivers:** When?

**Mr. MacDonald:** – and we will be finalizing the first test, which I think has over 5,000 participants in it right now, I think it's April 27<sup>th</sup>, and then we will be reopening it up for the seasonal sectors, cottage owners and summer businesses, sometime in June.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

**Mr. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No high-speed Internet access for the summer tourist season for (Indistinct) businesses out there?

Officials from this minister's department told the standing committee that there wasn't any privacy review or screen conducted prior to the Internet speed test being rolled out to the public. The speed test page collects personal information, does not contain explanation information required by the FOIPP act, and is not even encrypted. Personal information is totally unprotected.

Question to the minister of economic development: Why was the launch of your Internet speed test so rushed that proper online security and protections are so slack?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The first part of the question from the hon. member was why it was taking so long and how long was it going to take if we're not going to have service for the summer, and the second part of his question he is telling me I'm going too fast. I'm not quite sure what he wants.

We're conducting a speed test survey to develop comprehensive map –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Trivers:** (Indistinct) useless (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacDonald:** – to develop comprehensive mapping across the Island. That's going to be useful for ISPs. It's going to be useful for people to see if they are being appropriately served by those ISPs that they are actually utilizing, and it will open up doors to other ISPs to say: You know what? There's a grey area, maybe we should be doing more business in that area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

**Mr. Trivers:** Mr. Speaker, this minister has told the standing committee and the House that the speed test results will be used to create an Internet strategy.

Question for the minister: 10 years in, when can Islanders expect to see this new Internet strategy? Before the end of your mandate?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. Aylward:** (Indistinct) spring of 2018.

**Mr. MacDonald:** I'm glad the hon. member actually agrees that this is part of that process. That's good.

We're trying to identify information that we can utilize in a strategy going forward. We realize the importance of this. It's the same issue in every province in Canada. We feel we have an objective to the people of PEI to ensure that they know exactly what the

complications are of Internet services across Prince Edward Island and we're doing our best, and we're doing it as fast as possible. I can't believe sometimes that the hon. member gets up, because I think when the first time I mentioned this to him he said: That's interesting, that should help.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

**Mr. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't think the minister should put words in my mouth and if he does, he should table whether they're in the Hansard or the standing committee.

The time for test reports and strategies has passed. We all know what is needed; it's reliable high-speed Internet access for all Islanders. We even have local PEI companies – they're ready to provide it if this government would get out of the way.

Question to the minister: Is your speed test exercise and the resulting Internet strategy just a stalling tactic in the hopes that a federally-subsidized off-Island ISP bails you out?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, I take exception with some of the things that the hon. member is saying.

Unfortunately, I've had calls from the hon. member, or emails that stated that he had some company trying to access a school in Rustico, so we're working with those companies to say that we can. We're working with TIE and –

**Mr. Trivers:** (Indistinct) yet.

**Mr. MacDonald:** – we're working with the department of education. We're going to policy board on April 27<sup>th</sup>, hon. member. April 27<sup>th</sup>, we're going to policy board and we should have some results in that regard

for that individual. Further to that, I have been just speaking to the campground in Darnley, hon. member, and we're working with that group out there too, to try to get an ISP up and going to 600 campsites.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

### **Federal funding to underserviced Internet areas**

**Mr. Trivers:** Mr. Speaker, this tired Liberal government likes to brag that Prince Edward Island will have the best high-speed Internet in Canada by the end of 2017. Yet, at a standing committee we heard that this federally-funded ISP they seem to be hanging their hat on will not offer unlimited data, and up to 20% of Islanders will still not have access to CRTC high-speed standards by the end of this year. Some have suggested that this tired Liberal government's boasting may even have closed the door to more federal funding to fix our Internet problem.

Question to the minister: Minister, will Prince Edward Island still be able to access federal funding for underserviced areas when your government boasts that we aren't underserviced?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** I'll boast any opportunity I get about Prince Edward Island, and I'll continue with – I don't think –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacDonald:** – we'll have any obstacles. With four Liberal MPs in Prince Edward Island fighting for us in Ottawa every day and what we're seeing in collaboration and cooperation between us and them on Prince Edward Island, I think we're moving in the right direction.

Our economy is at an all-time high. We can talk about it, talk about the housing market

today on CBC, retail sales, car sales, and the list goes on and on. There's no doom and gloom on PEI. We're looking forward to our most –

**Mr. Trivers:** There's no high-speed Internet either.

**Mr. MacDonald:** – to our best tourism season –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacDonald:** – ever and we're doing everything in our power to move this process along.  
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

**Mr. Trivers:** Mr. Speaker, federal dollars are funding a national company to compete against local, home-grown Island service providers. If these local ISPs are squeezed out and then this national company leaves, Islanders will be left in the lurch.

Minister: What are you doing to ensure that it's a fair, level playing field that doesn't pit Island companies against a subsidized competitor?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Myers:** Good question.

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It wasn't too long ago I was being reprimanded for a contract that was signed in 2008 with a company. I'm trying to create a level playing field for the taxpayers of PEI, to make it market competitive with all ISPs, whether it's local or not. We're looking after the taxpayers of Prince Edward Island. That's the bottom line –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacDonald:** – in economic development and growing our export markets and I know that the Internet solution

is really important in that regard and we're going to continue to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, your final question.

**Mr. Trivers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At standing committee this winter we asked what options there were to get out of your tired Liberal government's \$23 million Internet failure. Almost every rural MLA has constituents who cannot get quality, reliable high-speed Internet service.

They're calling Bell Aliant who has this contract and Bell says: Sorry, we can't connect you until someone else disconnects or we can't connect you at all.

Question to the minister of economic development: What are you doing to fight for Islanders, hold Bell to account, and get out of this lousy contract?

**An Hon. Member:** Hear! Hear!

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Obviously, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing a competitive market already being developed with new ISPs coming to Prince Edward Island and new ISPs expanding each and every day.

We have reviewed the contract and it's before legal, but one thing I will say about this contract. If it is a detriment to the taxpayers' of Prince Edward Island to break this contract then this government will stand up and say that. If it's not, then we'll look at it, but we'll wait for a legal opinion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Myers:** Don't care about rural Islanders. High-speed Internet out there is worth nothing to you.

[End of Question Period]