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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 20 APRIL 2017

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Elected school boards

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

Governing effectively is supposed to be a collaboratively approach. Instead, what we keep on seeing from this tired Liberal government is that Islanders' opinions do not matter and only the Premier's opinion matters.

Question to the Premier: Isn't that why you broke your campaign promise to have elected school boards because only your opinion matters?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as I recall we brought a new piece of legislation to this House in the spring session of last year. That introduced a whole new approach and a commitment to a learner's centered approach to education in this province.

Indeed, that put forward the three councils without a school board. That legislation was approved by this House and we're moving forward with it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Question to the Premier: Isn't that why you sit atop the education pyramid, is because only your opinion matters?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've said this before in this House: I serve as a co-chair. It's very much a collaborative approach with Dr. Bill Whelan, who is the other co-chair and a long record of contributing to school matters and governance in this province, along with 22 others who have come forward through an Engage PEI process, who have a strong track record.

I've said from the beginning that my role in this would be as an inaugural co-chair, but it is anything but sitting atop any pyramid. It's a highly collaborative approach and it's working.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Municipalities and post-secondary institutions re: FOIPP act

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

Another question to the Premier: Isn't that why you refuse to bring Island municipalities and post-secondary institutions under the freedom of information law because only your opinion matters?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the question of the FOIPP being applied to post-secondary institutions or to municipalities was a live matter in the election and has come up on other occasions in this province. I have said to, and we have said as a government, to the municipalities and to the post-secondary institutions that we encourage them develop mechanisms and policies that will live up to the principles of FOIPP.

In fact, I'm speaking to the Federation of Municipalities on Monday, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Honouring vote on electoral reform

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

Another question to the Premier: Isn't that why you refuse to honour the vote taken by Islanders last fall on electoral reform, because only your opinion matters?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as I recall, the Leader of the Opposition voted the same way as I did when there was a motion that came to the floor of this House so I don't see how one would say that only my opinion matters.

Islanders have been consulted and those opinions will be carried forward. Our commitment, as a government, and I hope it's shared is that we will work together to determine a clear opinion of Islanders on this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: It's non-binding.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Human Rights Commission court case

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

Another question to the Premier: Isn't that why you took your own Human Rights Commission to court over discriminating against Islanders with mental illness in Disability Support Program, because only your opinion matters?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the judicial review on that matter was taken in the normal course. Really, I would say to adhere to the principles of the rule of law and to address the question of the scope or the jurisdiction or mandate of the Human Rights Commission. This is regular practice in frankly, ensuring that our entire system of administration of justice lives up to the legislation that has been passed in this legislature. That's why that went forward.

I'm pleased to say, and the Minister of Family and Human Services, has announced that the government and department are moving forward to address the issues there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Records of the securities commission e-gaming investigation

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

Question back to the Premier: Isn't that why your government refuses to unseal the records of the securities commission e-gaming investigation because only your opinion matters?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I will use the phrase 'the rule of law' once again. The securities commission, or indeed the Superintendent of Securities Office, operates under legislation and with a mandate to conduct investigations on certain terms that respect the confidentiality of the way in which they do their business.

The position that they take is entirely consistent with their legislation and with FOIPP legislation. Indeed, as the hon. members here know the superintendent of securities did, indeed, cooperate with the Auditor General in providing information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Stonewalled hearings from witnesses and whistleblowers

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

Question to the Premier: Isn't that why you ordered your MLAs on the public accounts committee to stonewall hearings from witnesses and whistleblowers because only your opinion matters?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I don't have any particular information on the matter on which the Leader of the Opposition is raising a question. I'm – certainly it's the first I've heard in any domain about whistleblowers.

In any event, let me say, that what we did on the 9^m day that I was Premier, was ask the Auditor General to look into this matter, which she did with great thoroughness; interviewing close to 60 public servants, looking at 10,000 documents, appearing before committee.

Indeed, I believe this matter has been addressed with the fullness and the thoroughness of the work of the Auditor General.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Breaking laws re: e-gaming

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

Mr. Premier, another question for you: Isn't that why no one was held accountable for

breaking laws on e-gaming because only your opinion matters?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: It was my understanding, Mr. Speaker, and I took it to be the opinion of the Auditor General that there was not a reason or a basis for proceeding – referring the matter to the police.

Indeed, I don't know why I'm being asked by the Leader of the Opposition about my opinion. That was the opinion of the Auditor General.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Need for a child advocate in the province

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

Final question to the Premier: Isn't that why you will not omit the need for a child advocate because only your opinion matters?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Biggar: Admit, not omit.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as hon. members here should know we had an extensive child protection review. That reported several months ago after consultation extensively without Prince Edward Island and with interested Islanders.

Indeed, it was their opinion that the best approach is to address the opportunities to provide services, frontline services, and well-coordinated services, to children in need and to families in Prince Edward Island, and that's exactly what we're doing, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Carbon tax revenue

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm wondering if the Minister of Finance could explain how his pending carbon tax revenue is not found in his Budget book.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's a very good question. I think it's probably not found in our books, the same as it's not found in any other provincial government's books across the country. This carbon pricing is still unfolding.

Mr. Trivers: No plan, there is no plan.

Mr. Roach: The province of New Brunswick hasn't mentioned it. The province of Nova Scotia hasn't mentioned it. The province of Newfoundland hasn't mentioned it.

I think it's only fair that if Prince Edward Island is going to work towards that, that we need to see what the federal government is going to do at the end of the day with this, and we need to ensure that whatever process is followed on Prince Edward Island, that it's going to be as fair as possible to all Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: A lot of money.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) this together. The shepherd is going to lead us home.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, there is a trend there –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct).

Ms. Compton: All tired Liberal governments. No plan, no telling constituents or their provinces what they're doing.

These Liberals are bringing in a carbon pricing no later than January 1st of this fiscal year. How can the Minister of Finance table a Budget without a single mention or figure for this carbon tax revenue?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: Especially after there was extensive (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, this is something that I think the public is having great engagement with this across all provinces, and certainly across Prince Edward Island.

I think we need to ensure that when the federal government imposes the carbon pricing on us that the way we move forward is going to be as good as it can be for every taxpayer on Prince Edward Island. We need to ensure that whenever the federal government is talking with other provinces that we have the same information.

We'll certainly be listening and speaking with other provinces as we move forward.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, the minister did pre-budget consultations, asked Islanders their opinion. Where are those opinions? We'd like to know.

We know in the 2016 capital budget there was no mention of the Cornwall bypass and no relevant figures on this federal infrastructure money.

Now, with this operating Budget, the minister deliberately leaves out accounting for his impending carbon tax.

Some Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: Minister, what are you hiding when it comes to carbon pricing?

Mr. Myers: Good question. Ask the shepherd.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: The member does indicate that there's talks about recommendations or things that we heard from the public, and I did attend a number of sessions across the province, and in each and every session Islanders did share their thoughts with respect to carbon pricing and some with their concerns and some with ideas.

I noted at least one member of the opposition, the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, did attend a pre-budget session, and I'm sure that when the time allowed from other things that were going on at that pre-budget consultation, that he did hear some of those notes as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We did engage the public.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Islanders are talking about the carbon tax. They want to know what the plan is.

Mr. Myers: I won.

Ms. Compton: But there's no sign of it in the Budget.

We know it's going to increase the price on gas, the price on electricity, and the price on home heating oil.

Mr. Myers: Yeah.

Ms. Compton: Isn't it time for you to come clean to Islanders and tell us what the plan is?

Mr. Myers: Ask the shepherd. He thinks we're all sheep.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Ask the shepherd.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I don't know how many times I've heard from the opposition across the floor here: You're moving too fast. You're making decisions too quick. You've got to get out there. You've got to make this fast.

Mr. LaVie: You don't move fast.

Mr. Roach: But Mr. Speaker, this is one of those situations where I think it's imperative that we don't get out ahead of the other provinces, that we don't make quick decisions –

Mr. Myers: Like the health accord, remember (Indistinct) shepherd?

Mr. Roach: We want to make sure that as we make decisions going forward –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) remember that?

Mr. Roach: – that whatever – this is not a tax that we're imposing. This is a tax that's being imposed by the federal government. We're going to make sure that we do as much as we possibly can to alleviate any burden on Islanders when that is being put forward.

Mr. R. Brown: Right on.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

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

Gas tax

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Islanders should know, minister, how much these extra taxes are going to be, and you're going to know. You know across the floor there how much it's going to hurt Islanders. You're the tax and spend government. We've seen it over and over again; raising fees, raising – to increase the revenues. It's tax and spend.

Mr. Myers: Tax and spend Liberals.

Mr. R. Brown: Balanced Budget.

Ms. Compton: It's going to especially hurt rural PEI.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. LaVie: You fried the books.

Ms. Compton: This carbon pricing is a tax grab for your wallets. It's not a good deal for anyone.

Mr. LaVie: You burnt the books.

Ms. Compton: Mr. Speaker, this tired Liberal government charges over 13 cents a litre on provincial gas tax.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Mr. Myers: Ask one to the shepherd.

Ms. Compton: Tax after tax.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Ms. Compton: Minister: How do you expect Islanders to live and work given you're taxing gasoline to such an extent?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an interesting question, and I look at the cost of gasoline across the country, and I note right now that, for example, the cheapest gas prices in Atlantic Canada is right here on Prince Edward Island.

The reason why we don't want to rush forward with this is that we want to ensure that whatever we do is going to have the least amount of impact on the Island as possible.

An Hon. Member: I've got an idea. Don't do it.

Mr. Roach: That's why this year there was no taxes on the Budget that we put forward.

Mr. Myers: No taxes at all.

Mr. Roach: We did put forward a balanced Budget – you know what, I will say with a slight surplus in it.

An Hon. Member: Tax relief.

Mr. Roach: And we did provide some tax relief, so –

An Hon. Member: Yes, 85,000.

Mr. Roach: The member opposite should make sure that when she makes a statement like that, try to get the facts straight.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Remember the shepherd in the health accord? He had us saved. The shepherd has us saved, remember?

Energy strategy

Ms. Compton: Mr. Speaker –

Speaker: Okay –

Ms. Compton: – the fact is this is going to hurt Islanders. It doesn't matter how you spin it, it's going to hurt Islanders, and especially rural Prince Edward Island; people who need to drive to work, drive to get their groceries, drive to medical appointments, drive to child care – it's going to hurt rural Islanders, but all Islanders.

Minister, why is your government's energy strategy recommending a new tax that targets Islanders with older cars more than Islanders with new vehicles?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm kind of disheartened that the Member from Belfast-Murray River –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: – is being so pessimistic in her questions. It's like: You're going to do this, you're going to do that.

The reason why we're being very careful about moving forward with this tax –

Mr. Myers: Was because of the mistake (Indistinct) shepherd (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: We want to ensure that when this tax comes forward that we're going to be in alignment with the energy strategy that's coming forward –

Ms. Biggar: Climate change.

Mr. Roach: We're going to be in line with the climate change strategy that's coming forward. To come out and start making recommendations or making decisions until those strategies are in front of us in the fall just would not be proper at all.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Renewable energy

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're always accused of being negative when we hold government to account. That's our job.

Mr. Myers: They don't like to be questioned.

Ms. Compton: So let's spin it around a little bit here. Are you fighting to get PEI a better deal because of the investments we've already made in renewable energy? Have you thought about that?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The only spinning that's going on in here today is across the floor.

Some Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Roach: Of course we're trying – of course we're talking about the energy that we have in Prince Edward Island. It's part of our energy strategy. There's no question that that will be a huge topic that we're going to go forward with, and that's why we don't want to make our move too quickly. We want to see what deals the other provinces are going to cut, and we're going to be right there with our own when we're talking about producing our own green energy. We're one of the best in the country, Mr. Speaker –

Mr. R. Brown: Yes.

Mr. Roach: – and we tell Ottawa that every chance we get.

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: No, we're the best.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) had a (Indistinct) me.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

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

Carbon tax revenue (further)

Ms. Compton: Do I have two? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know. We hear you have all the answers. Have you started calculating the cost to every Island family and how that's going to affect them with this carbon tax that your government is going to impose?

Mr. Myers: Good question. Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Myers: Are we getting a good deal? (Indistinct).

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have some tremendous public servants within government that work very hard and they certainly do the due diligence on this. We're going to look at every aspect of that carbon pricing and how it's going to affect low-income earners, medium-income earners, across the Province and we're going to make sure that we do our absolute best to look after Islanders.

Mr. R. Brown: That's right.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know this government is going down in history. We know that.

Mr. Myers: Yeah.

Mr. R. Brown: Yeah. It's one of the best.

Ms. Compton: Yeah.

Mr. Myers: The shepherd's going to lead them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear! Hear!

Mr. Myers: The shepherd's going to lead them. The shepherd's going to lead them.

Ms. Compton: They're all applauding –

Mr. Myers: The worst premier since Catherine Callbeck.

Ms. Compton: They're all applauding the sinking ship.

An Hon. Member: Bring back Ghiz.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Ms. Compton: They're going down in history.

An Hon. Member: Pretty nervous.

Billion dollar budget

Ms. Compton: The billion dollar budget. Minister, why is a billion dollars alone in

provincial tax and fee revenue not enough for this tired Liberal government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Good question. Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's obvious that the member from Belfast-Murray River has just boarded the HMCS doom and gloom.

Mr. R. Brown: Yes. (Indistinct).

Mr. Roach: This government – doom and gloom is all we've heard for almost six years now from across the floor, Mr. Speaker. We're over here, we've balanced the budget, we've got a surplus.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Go ahead, hon. minister.

Mr. Roach: We're going to go forward with that carbon pricing.

Ms. Biggar: We're making investments.

Speaker: Go ahead, hon. minister.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, we're moving ahead very cautiously with carbon pricing. We know what great assets we have here in PEI. We know we have to marry that up with the two plans that are coming and strategies that are coming in the fall and for us to move forward now without having the full knowledge of both of those would simply be inappropriate and it wouldn't be a fair deal to Islanders to go ahead and do that at all.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Research and projected costs for Child Advocated office

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday I asked the Minister of Justice and Public Safety to table the research and analysis that led him to dismiss repeated calls to create a child advocate on Prince Edward Island. As government has rejected that option, against the recommendations of the Campbell Hennessey inquest jury, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, both opposition parties, and the collective wisdom of every other province in Canada – I thought that was a reasonable request.

So, I ask once again: Will the minister provide this house with the research, including projected costs that informed his decision not to create an independent office of the child advocate?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LaVie: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as has been said in this House, our approach as government is to address the priority needs where the resources are available and we have done that consistently since coming to government. We've created, now, a child lawyer, whose functions will be to advocate and to be a voice for children. We've created and have brought legislation this session to create a parent coordinating program. We've created and supported financially the Triple P - Positive Parenting Program. We've created the supervised access centres and the Bridges Program. All of those together with community organizations, is what we are doing and doing together with the community to serve children and families in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Apology and retract comments

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

I have to say I was especially disappointed by the minister's suggestion that my insistence on an independent oversight is a partisan maneuver. That, in my mind, is cynical and self-serving assessment of how government should work. I imagine that the

minister realizes that democratic institutions need to be subject to independent oversight. That is, actually, at its very essence the difference between –

Ms. Biggar: Question?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – democracy and tyranny. Will the minister retract his comments and apologize to every democratically elected member of this House?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I don't think I used the word 'partisan'. But what I did point out is that there are two perspectives here 1) the one that we're advancing, which is to serve on a priority basis with the resources that are available and we've done it in my own department now, almost to the tune of \$500,000 in various commitments and initiatives. Other departments have done likewise. There are committee organizations working on this.

So, that is our perspective and the perspective of finding gaps or pointing out shortcomings is one that is actually actively undertaken here in this House – which is happening and I encourage that. And it's happening through the work of the deputy minister's committee on social policy which is a very effective group as is the Bridge Program.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Child Advocate

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

Independent oversight serves the public and the government by examining concerns and suggesting solutions to address them. It only serves the opposition if government refuses to act on those recommendations.

A question to the minister: Every other province has the independent oversight of a child advocate.

Mr. LaVie: Yeah.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Does he think they were all created to serve opposition purposes rather than the children in the rest of Canada?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier and Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we've said this on many topics in this government and that is: Prince Edward Island has an opportunity to do better than other provinces and to work together with the community and across government and, indeed, in this House which we're doing.

The fact that questions are being asked is all part of the process and we encourage that. I don't think I questioned that whatsoever. We had a conference not long ago in the first of March on troubled youth. There were organizations there, there were various parts of government represented and it was a very effective exercise to build the capacity and to work together to look after the children of this province.

Mr. Trivers: Less talk, more action.

Premier MacLauchlan: The question that was raised again on the first point –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct).

Premier MacLauchlan: – I will table the background work we've done on this and I will table documents to show that we are addressing the needs and doing a very good job of that.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

Allocation of funds re: culture and heritage

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture: With the Budget that was just released, there is \$3.5 million allotted specifically to culture and heritage. Could the minister explain to the House how these funds are being allocated?

Mr. Myers: I wish we could play a laugh track in here.

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

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

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

We, as a government, have tremendous respect for our cultured community – a community that generates over \$125 million in economic spinoffs in all areas of the province. I'm very pleased that we did launch the culture strategy to continue to raise the awareness, but also to continue to profile culture.

Our government has committed – includes \$2.3 million for cultural affairs, \$1.2 million to support heritage initiatives in our province. This includes more than \$2 million in grants to cultural organizations, performance venues, museum, events and Island artists. We'll continue to build the sector and work closely with Island artists in this province.

Mr. R. Brown: Great. Great job.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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

Support for College of Piping

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The College of Piping in Summerside, in my district, is a world-class training centre – in fact, one of only two such locations in the world. As the minister responsible for

culture, what is your department doing to support this cultural institution?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Currie: I am well aware and the MLA from Summerside – our MLAs from the area are huge supporters of the College of Piping and we recognize their presence, not only on the provincial, the regional, the national, and the international stage. We are certainly very committed to work closely with the college to continue to build on what, currently, they're doing and continue to profile them globally.

We currently are supporting the College of Piping with a grant of \$115,000, but we are also supporting the Harbourfront Theatre with a grant of \$161,000. Summerside continues to be a cultural leader in this province. We are going to continue to work with them and work hard with them.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Funding to promote College of Piping

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The mandate of the college is to preserve and promote the Celtic heritage.

Is your department offering any type of funding that could assist the college in promotion of the school?

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

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

The \$115,000 does support the College of Piping's marketing plan. The college is free to allocate that, and those resources, but I'd also encourage all hon. members of the

Legislative Assembly to pay attention to the conversation that we will be having in communities across Prince Edward Island that are tied into our cultural strategy.

I believe, as the minister responsible for culture that we have an exciting opportunity on Prince Edward Island to continue to elevate and build on the great things that are going on with Island artists in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale.

TransCanada Extension

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Could the minister update the Legislature on the status of the TransCanada Extension?

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

Mr. Myers: Just topping up the Island Coastal fund.

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The investments we are making in infrastructure right across Prince Edward Island are going to help grow our economy, create jobs, and make it safer to travel on roads.

The TransCanada Highway is a major corridor for exports and imports on Prince Edward Island. We have over 500 trucks that leave this province –

An Hon. Member: Drive around the other (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – with Island products and that many that come, as well, on a daily basis.

The Trans Canada Highway extension within the town of Cornwall is also an important addition to our infrastructure project this year, but we're going to be

doing projects in Bloomfield. We're going to be doing a major project in Mount Herbert –

Mr. LaVie: Souris-Elmira.

Ms. Biggar: – we're going to be doing on in Rollo Bay –

Mr. LaVie: Souris-Elmira.

Ms. Biggar: – so we're doing projects through our investments in infrastructure –

An Hon. Member: Rollo Bay (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – right across PEI.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) get my share.

Speaker: The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale.

Mr. LaVie: Get my share.

Mr. Dumville: As the work is done in stages, could the minister update: What is the next stage in this project?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've had a very busy winter, meeting with community in that area as to what stage the projects are going to take part in. Within the next few weeks, we will be starting Phase 2A, which will be the roundabout at the North River area. By the fall we expect to start the Phase 2B of that particular project.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale your second supplementary.

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

According to your projections: When would the project be completed?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we made a commitment to start this project last year we'll be doing it, as I said in phases. We did Phase 1 and now 2A and 2B. We are anticipating that that will be finished in 2019 for operational. We will have some final pieces to finish up in 2020.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Land transfer for Mill River

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Documents filed Tuesday in court show that the Premier is going to fight our First Nations over his botched sweetheart Mill River deal.

Ironically, the Order in Council for Mill River was issued the exact same date Cabinet met with the chiefs and promised an open and respectful relationship.

Question to the Premier: Premier, why did you tell the chiefs when meeting with them that you had just transferred the land against their objectives?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as I said in the House yesterday, we have a long respectful and honourable –

Mr. Trivers: Great relationship.

Premier MacLauchlan: – relationship with the chiefs and with the confederacy and with the First Nations in this province. It's one that I'm honoured to participate in as Minister Responsible for Aboriginal Affairs and as Premier. I have great respect for the chiefs and that is exactly the spirit in which we conduct that relationship.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, this is, in fact, what the chiefs wrote back to the Premier, and I quote: Adding insult to injury with our full band councils present in a meeting with you and your Cabinet on January 10th of this year. We sat and listened to you speak about the importance of the relationship between the province and the Mi'kmaq. However, in reality what you hid from us was that you were simultaneously planning to convey the very property against our strenuous rights-based objections.

Again to the Premier: Why is this how you treat our First Nations people?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I'll say again that our relationship is one that we value; that we honour, that we conduct on honourable terms.

That does involve, by the nature of things, does involve the province and the confederacy, the chiefs having issues or having consultation and a continuing relationship around land and resources. Indeed, we have a constitutional obligation on that front. It's one that is met through many transactions in the course of every year.

That's a commitment that we've had and we continue to have. On this issue –

An Hon. Member: Except for Mill River.

Premier MacLauchlan: – our conversations continue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Mr. Speaker, the Premier told us yesterday he is committed to his duty to consult with the chiefs.

Again, this is what the chiefs wrote: Yet, against our objectives the provincial crown advised that it was moving ahead only 24 hours after you talked about the importance

of things like respect, good faith and meaningful negotiations. Clearly, these are not concepts that you embrace.

Again to the Premier: Why is this how you treat our First Nations people?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we have a positive respectful relationship. That covers many points; land and resources; health; justice; economic development; workforce; education and we actively engage in that relationship. We have a very robust agenda –

Mr. Myers: You have a duty to consult.

Premier MacLauchlan: – we currently have a very active discussion going.

I am very confident –

Mr. Myers: Constitutional.

Premier MacLauchlan: – that that relationship will continue to be a positive one for the First –

Mr. Myers: Unless that's over your head.

Premier MacLauchlan: – Nations and for our entire province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier told us yesterday he has an honoured relationship with the chiefs. Again, he had repeated that today.

Again, I quote, and the chiefs wrote: Premier, it is difficult to find the words to properly describe the level of betrayal that we feel.

Premier: Why is this how you treat the people of our First Nations?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as I informed the House yesterday, on Tuesday of last week we had a very positive all-day meeting, a tripartite meeting. Many parts of the provincial government represented; public servants, people from all parts of the First Nations communities, federal government around the actions that would follow on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Indeed –

Mr. Myers: Nothing to do with the duty to consult Mill River.

Premier MacLauchlan: – on Tuesday evening –

Mr. Myers: It's constitutional.

Premier MacLauchlan: – I had dinner with the chiefs and with representatives of the confederacy. I'm very positive and committed, as I've said, and that is exactly how we conduct that relationship and will continue to do so.

It's with the upmost respect for the chiefs in their leadership and in our relationship.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier told us yesterday the relationship with the chiefs is a great relationship. Again, he talks about it here again today.

Again, I go back to what the chiefs wrote, and I quote: You breached our trust, Premier, and demonstrated a good faith relationship with the Indigenous Mi'kmaq is not something that is important to you.

Again to the Premier: Why is this how you treat the First Nations people of Prince Edward Island?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, we have a very advanced and filled-out relationship with the chiefs and with the confederacy and with the First Nations communities in this province, and we're proud of that, and I stick to what I said, that we honour that.

Of course, in any relationship, you work at it and you move forward and you continue to do your best and do your best together to achieve everything that we possibly can, and we're currently engaged and work toward what would be a framework agreement that would be a confirmation of those relationships and a basis on which we move forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock, your final question.

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

Yesterday, the Premier said despite my best efforts, he would not stand in the House and say that he disagrees with the chiefs and their comments with regards to this court injunction that's been filed against the province.

Again, the chiefs wrote, and I quote: Good faith, respect, partnership, openness – those are not just words to us, Premier. They mean something to us. We thought they did to you as well.

Again to the Premier: Why is this how you treat our First Nations people?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, this is an honoured relationship. It's a very important relationship to me, as Premier and minister, to our government, and to all Prince Edward Islanders, and it's very important as we stand in this House that we

not find opportunities to injure that relationship or to cast aspersions on it, and it's exactly in that spirit –

Mr. Myers: Your letter.

Premier MacLauchlan: It's exactly in that spirit –

Mr. Myers: You don't understand the constitution.

Premier MacLauchlan: - that I've said and that I have confirmed that we work with the chiefs –

Mr. Myers: You've obviously never practiced the law, constitutional law.

Premier MacLauchlan: – we respect them, we have a good faith relationship, and we're very optimistic about what we're achieving together, between our government and our people and our province and the First Nations leadership and community in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]