



Session:	2/65
Date:	2 MAY 2017
No:	57

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

TUESDAY, 2 MAY 2017

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mandate letters

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

Technology gives new ways for the public to engage with government and for government to engage the public.

Question to the acting Premier: Do your mandate letters give any guidance to Cabinet ministers on proper engagement with public on social media?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

I think the idea of the mandate letters is a terrific thing. We do work with other departments in many ways. It spells out exactly what the Premier expects for us.

As regard to the issue you have right there, there is nothing specifically in my mandate letter that discusses that very issue.

We do work very closely with the general public; with the other members and their departments along the way.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Conduct of ministers on Twitter

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

This weekend your transportation minister took to Twitter to lash out over a controversy on the Cornwall bypass project has generated – this Tweet storm started on late Friday night and continued well into the weekend.

Close to a dozen Tweets, including the ones that the minister later deleted were posted on social media.

Question to the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and acting Premier: Do you consider trolling on Twitter acceptable conduct of your ministers?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. member knows there were Tweets back and forth between myself and the Member from Kensington-Malpeque, and certainly some other individuals that I was in communication with.

It was, indeed, in regard to some discussions that took place in this Legislature that were inaccurate information. As minister of transportation, I was accused of mishandling the purse money in regard to land purchases, which I felt the hon. member, who is a real estate agent, also would know the difference.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Threats made by Cabinet minister on Twitter

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

Late night tirades on social media usually are a President Trump thing. Right down to lashing out with personal attacks to try and change the channel on issues.

In fact, one of the Tweets the minister deleted, by the end of the weekend, appeared to threaten a member of this Assembly saying to the member of the public: I don't get mad, I get even.

Question to the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and acting Premier: Do you condone members of your Cabinet making late night veiled threats on Twitter?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I reported on Twitter, that was also followed by an lol which is 'laugh out loud' and it was not directed to the Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Tweeting: I don't get mad, I get even, isn't the sort of the thing many Islanders are used to seeing on social media from a Cabinet minister.

Question to the acting Premier again: Have you spoken to the minister to find out what was meant by the Tweet: I don't get mad, I get even?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, I have communications with many individuals across the media in regard to my role. In regard to myself as an MLA, and I continue to have those discussions and I also continue to have discussions with people in my department that we have to negotiate land deals with in regard to their privacy. I take that very seriously, when that is also a breach of their privacy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Consequences re: Twitter posting

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

This tired Liberal government used to talk about a lot by leading by example.

Question to the acting Premier: Will there be any consequences on this matter, or is this just another case of not wanting to pick off the scabs?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

Question Period is an absolutely great time to discuss issues like were discussed here the other day. It may be unfortunate if it goes viral or whatever that might be. I don't Tweet myself, but I think this is the area where we can have a great discussion and we can clarify any feelings we may have or misunderstandings we may have.

When you are Tweeting sometimes, the smiles don't come across. You don't get an idea of what was, perhaps, really meant. I would encourage each and every one of us, when we have a discussion with things like that, instead of following up on the line, that follow-up in the House and we can clarify all those issues.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Deletion of email accounts and release to public

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will the acting Premier explain why the email accounts for deletion forms of Chris LeClair and Melissa MacEachern have not been publicly released by government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise today to continue to talk and take questions on this. Obviously, as the minister responsible for the Provincial Archives and Records Office, we have the mandate coming into this role a year ago.

We take this work very seriously. As I have alluded – numerous occasions the work of the Auditor General we take very seriously.

I've worked very closely with the Auditor General's office on recommendations in various roles as minister and will continue to take this work very seriously on her recommendations moving forward.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I have repeatedly asked government for eight different documents relating to deleted emails, including a list of the email account removals that occurred under the Premier's office from 2009-2016; the date they were requested and the date they were carried out.

The Premier ignored all these questions on Friday.

To the acting Premier: Why does your government continue to refuse to release these documents that will show the truth around your government's deleted email disgrace?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

Unfortunately, the Premier is not here today. He's in a meeting in Ottawa, but I can take those requests back to him upon his return.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Criminal offence and RCMP officer

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, on Friday, I asked the finance minister why he was fielding calls from the RCMP over deleted emails, rather than the justice department.

Will the finance minister explain today

exactly what criminal offence the RCMP officer was looking for?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When you say fielding calls, I took one phone call and I referred the RCMP officer. He wanted the phone number and who was the contact in ITSS. And there was no mention of any criminal matter at that time, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Referral of RCMP to Secretary of Treasury Board

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the finance minister admitted that he referred the RCMP to the Secretary to the Treasury Board.

Minister, why did you choose him for the RCMP to speak to?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The ITSS department, up through the chain, report to him, and he knows exactly where to send those phone calls. And that's all it was; a very simple phone call.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the minister told us the RCMP wanted to talk to an IT expert.

Minister, why send the RCMP to Secretary to Treasury Board, and not to the Chief Operating Officer for IT Shared Services?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) didn't have that number. (Indistinct) only remember one number.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was simple for me to refer him to that member of my staff.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

RCMP and senior official re: Auditor General

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the Premier admitted to this House last week that the justice department had no contact with the RCMP concerning gaming.

Can the finance minister explain why the senior official he referred the RCMP to was not one of these three senior IT officials interviewed by the Auditor during her audit?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was actually quite simple. I simply referred him to that person who could then tell him who he should speak to, who would be able to provide whatever information it was that the RCMP officer was looking for. I did not engage in any conversation with the officer, other than he said he wanted to speak to someone in ITSS. I referred him to that person of my staff so that he would send the officer to the correct individual.

It's that simple, Mr. Speaker. Nothing complicated.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Senior official and Public Accounts Committee

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the Premier admitted to this House last week that the justice department had no contact with the RCMP concerning gaming.

Can the finance minister explain why the senior official he referred the RCMP (Indistinct) was not the IT manager he allowed to testify at the Public Accounts Committee?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And it was as simple as handing the phone call off to somebody who I felt could best direct the officer. It's that simple, Mr. Speaker. Nothing difficult; I know it's hard.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Investigative inquiries/PAC and deleted emails

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I will also point out for Islanders that the minister refused to take any of the three IT senior officials who were interviewed by the AG to committee, and took a manager instead.

Minister, why are you personally steering the investigative inquiries by the RCMP and the Public Accounts Committee into this deleted emails disgrace.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the Member from Kensington-Malpeque trying to make something more out of what is simply directing a phone call to someone else so they can get the correct answers of the correct service that they were looking for.

It was as simple as that. There's no conspiracy here. I just redirected a phone call.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, we're not sure why the minister was taking these calls in the first place and deciding where to direct the RCMP. In fact, the minister himself said multiple times when questioned on Friday: I think it would be simply inappropriate for anyone in this government – certainly as an elected member – to have contact with the RCMP in any way, shape, or form.

Minister, why then did you do it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The phone rang, I answered it – I didn't know who it was on the other end of the line. The individual said I am so and so from the RCMP –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Roach: – and I redirected the phone call. It's as simple as that.

An Hon. Member: You could get a receptionist to take the call.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

RCMP National Anti-corruption Unit (further)

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the Premier admitted to this House last week that the justice department had no contact with the RCMP concerning egaming. The finance minister took the call, even though it appears he knows it was inappropriate to do so.

This question was asked of the Premier on Friday, and he refused to show leadership and answer.

Will the acting Attorney General and Premier explain why government has not referred the entire egaming scandal and deleted emails disgrace to the RCMP's national governmental anti-corruption unit?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, no one from government approached the RCMP in any way, shape, or form. We all know how the report got delivered to the RCMP on University Avenue – by the leader of the NDP. Shortly after it was released, it was some time later that I was sitting in my office and there was a phone call directed to me. I answered the phone. The individual identified himself, and I referred him to someone else so he could find out who it was in ITSS.

There was no talk whatsoever about what the phone call was for, why he wanted to speak to them. I stayed out of that completely and just referred them on to staff.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Informal/formal interviews with RCMP

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, how many more conversations, either informally or formal interviews, have you had with the RCMP.

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker

Including the phone call, there was no conversation, and there have been no other conversations; formal, or informal.

None. Zero.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In October 2016, the AG sent a letter to the Premier based on her evidence in outside legal advice stating that she had observed Billy Dow's conflict of interest and provided legal advice on the egaming scheme.

Concerns raised by AG and criminal investigation

Question to the acting Premier: Why does this tired Liberal government fail to act on the concerns raised by the Auditor and refer this matter to a criminal investigation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. McIsaac: Again, Mr. Speaker, on this issue, I'll take it up with the Premier when he returns.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Auditor General is the financial watchdog. She's not actually a police officer or a prosecutor. She raised legitimate concerns that require an actual criminal investigation, and this government has not acted, and actually, what you have done, you spend all your time covering up.

Tabling of letter from Auditor General

Question again to the acting Premier: Will you table this letter from the Auditor General so that Islanders can see it?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we've all had the opportunity to review the Auditor General's Report. The Auditor General, in fact, said that she had sought the advice of Legal Counsel with respect to some of her findings, and I believe it was at her press conference that she said very clearly, that as a result of that conversation and as a result of her review of the file, that there was nothing of a criminal nature to refer to anyone. She made that very clear.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's not at all what happened; not only did the Auditor send a specific letter, she also took the unprecedented step of verbally telling government while her audit was in progress of her concerns about Billy Dow's double-dealing.

This tired Liberal government protected their party bagman and refused to act on these concerns.

The cover-up continues.

Question again to the acting Premier: What facts are contained in the Auditor's letter that you and your Liberal regime want to keep from Islanders?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the conclusion of the Auditor General's review of this – and we all know that the Auditor General spent considerable time; she made a number of recommendations, many of which have been met and a couple are still being finalized – but at the conclusion, she clearly stated – very clearly – that she had sought advice of Legal Counsel to review some of her findings with her, and she very clearly stated they found nothing of a criminal nature to hand over to any police department, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Deputy minister and Billy Dow conflict

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So in the middle of her audit, she stopped her audit and she called government and said something's up here; you can't deny that.

But if you want to answer the questions, let's go back to you.

Billy Dow invested in this scheme after talking to Shane MacEachern who, at the time, was married to Melissa MacEachern, who was your deputy.

Question to the minister: When did you find out that your own deputy was in conflict with Billy Dow?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not aware of any of those individual things that took place.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, it's my recollection at the time that the former deputy was, in fact, not married at that time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Islanders are getting sick of this Sergeant Salts routine. Sometimes he knows, sometimes he doesn't, sometimes he read the report, sometimes he wasn't briefed. Listen, time for answers is now. This is your opportunity.

The auditor's report revealed that Billy Dow was sent a copy of an exclusive MOU in June, 2012 as the lawyer for Innovation PEI to take to the deputy minister for approval by the same lawyer he used to invest in the scheme.

Question to the minister: Are some of these facts the facts that this tired Liberal government are hiding from Islanders that are in that letter that you don't want them to know about?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: I'm not sure that I got the first part of the member's question and who he was quite referring to, so if we could somehow get that repeated exactly, I'd appreciate it, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll go back over it. Billy Dow had a copy of the MOU and he was the lawyer for Innovation PEI. He was asked to take it to your deputy minister for approval. Are these the facts that you're trying to hide?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, I was aware that there was an MOU. I think I've clearly stated that on a number of occasions. I read the MOU that was extended and other than that, the MOU was something that there was no business plan in there. I think he had up to 60 days to look at this MOU and it's my recollection from that that there was never a business plan ever put forward and it kind of died on the floor. That's my recollection of it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Billy Dow was sent an exclusive MOU by the same lawyer that he sent his investment scheme to, but somehow it took him 14 months, a securities investigation, and an audit for him to figure out he was in conflict. We also find out that the minister's deputy approved this exclusive scheme while her husband was acting as the broker for the same scheme.

Criminal Code/RCMP and insider trading

A question to the minister again. Minister: Do you remember from your time with the RCMP which section of the Criminal Code covers insider trading?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, I've just listened to the question and he wants me to float back into my previous career, but the Auditor General had all these facts – the facts that he's talking about. She did a thorough review. She called in a lawyer to review everything that she had found and she clearly stated that she found nothing.

With the support and advice from the lawyer, she found nothing of a criminal nature to go anywhere with. Whatever my personal thoughts might have been on that, is insignificant – doesn't matter, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General found there was nothing of a criminal nature and she brought nothing forward to the RCMP.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Land purchases and growth of corporate and foreign control

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

The *Lands Protection Act* limits how much land companies and non-residents can own, but pretty well every week Executive Council grants exceptions for land purchases that exceeds these limits. On April the 18th,

for example, Cabinet approved the acquisition of 939 acres by Island Holdings Ltd. of Saint John, New Brunswick – a subsidiary of the Irving empire.

A question to the hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: Is government concerned about these land purchases and the growth of corporate and foreign control of our Island farmland?

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

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The transaction that the hon. member speaks of was actually a lease and it's land leased in and leased out from part of the land holdings of companies and that's a typical renewal of a lease on the spring season.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Advisory group re: *Lands Protection Act*

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

Maybe we would have known that if this next organization had been put together in 2013. The Carver Report recommended that the provincial government establish an advisory group made up of farmers and non-farmers that would consult with Islanders on matters related to the *Lands Protection Act* and report back to the Legislative Assembly every three years.

A question to the minister: Has this advisory group been established, and if not, are there plans to do so?

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

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

The Carver Report was a report led by Horace Carver – former member of the Legislative Assembly, who went out across Prince Edward Island and talked to Islanders – landowners, farmers, all sectors of business, and people who have a very strong interest in land on Prince Edward Island.

He heard a lot of comments from Islanders and one of the comments that he heard was in holdings regarding arable and non-arable land and provided recommendations that the government has enacted and are very pleased that now what he has brought forward is actually reflected so that landowners can deem their arable land or non-arable land for their business.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Publicly owned land bank trust

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

Thank you, Minister. I mean, that's one of 30 recommendations that Horace Carver made and many, many of them have not been implemented. In submissions to Horace Carver, both the Federation of Agriculture and the National Farmers' Union stated that a new land banking system is a priority for their agricultural sector. Recommendation number 21 in his report stated that the provincial government establish the Island Farmland Trust as a Crown corporation using public funds for the purposes of buying farmland and leasing or selling it to bonafide (Indistinct) farmers.

Can the minister tell this House that such a publicly owned land bank trust is still being considered?

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

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

All recommendations of the Carver Report are being looked at and some are finished, but some are still being discussed and looked at. There is a land bank financing plan that is in place, but yes – there is land banking that is being looked at as well as other recommendations. The department is looking at all areas of land-use planning and this is just another piece of that.

A lot of work will continue. A lot of great recommendations were brought forward and I think a lot of good outcomes will be had.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Programs for Island students for post-secondary education

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning. Minister, this is the time of the year where many universities are holding their graduations. We all know post-secondary education is expensive. Government recently announced some addition help to help mitigate the cost of postsecondary education to students.

Would you please update the House what programs exist for Island students who have already graduated but are struggling to pay off their student loans?

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to the \$30 million our department lends to students to get their education, we also help them after they graduate with their student loans. There's a \$2,000 debt-reduction grant that students are eligible for to help reduce some of their payments and they can get that for each year they attended university. There's also a loan rehabilitation program that they can apply for to get their finances back in order.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, could you explain to us how the loan rehabilitation program works?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the borrower would contact student financial programs and services and they would set up a six-month monthly payment schedule and once they have completed that, they would have their loan back in good standing and their credit rating back.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Loans in arrears to good standing

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, could you let us know how many loans you have moved from arrears to good standing?

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Since 2015, there have been about 100 borrowers that have gotten back on track and we have been able to collect about half a million dollars over that time period. At present, there are about 500 borrowers that are working on restructuring their loan payments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Senior specific mental health programs

Mr. Dumville: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Seniors are a growing percent of our population and mental health and neurological issues are a reality for many.

Seniors require services and supports that are relative to their situation.

Minister: Does your department provide senior specific mental health programs?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes indeed, we do actually have a specific mental health strategy around seniors' mental health and we have developed a seniors' mental resource team that's actually now in all counties and that team offers various different services around psychiatry, social work, psychiatric nursing and consulting around neuropsychology services.

These are services that are very clinical-based and they're for all individuals that are over age 65 that have ruled out a sudden behavioral issue that's pertaining to a healthcare issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, your first supplementary question.

Services helping seniors maintain mental health

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Prevention is a key factor in sustaining good health. Can the minister inform the House as to how your department is providing services that are helping seniors to maintain good mental health?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Not only do they have those supports, the senior and mental health team, but we also have a provincial geriatric program which provides various assessments to seniors and that deals with more issues around difficulties around medications, mobility, depression, memory loss, some of those types of things. We also have a number of adult day programs for seniors that are held

all across the province in Alberton, Charlottetown, Montague and Souris. We have other services too, around our goPEI! initiatives and we also have some services in our long-term care facilities that help people with their cognitive issues, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, what services does your department offer for those seniors who are suffering from neurological issues such as dementia and Alzheimer's?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, it's a great opportunity here to talk about some of these types of services of some of our patients that we're dealing with Alzheimer's, dementia and some of those types of things.

We have developed and have been working with the Alzheimer's society to come up with a program called the First Link program and that helps individuals and their families deal with issues pertaining to Alzheimer's and dementia, because some times, these diseases have impacts on the family as well.

Also, within our long-term care facilities, we have now designated beds that are dementia beds that are very specific to that and they help. The staff are trained to deal specifically with patients with dementia, and we also have some day programs that some of our acute care facilities can access for some of their patients.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Chief coroner and CBC story

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A question to the minister of health. Minister, the chief coroner of our province was quoted in a CBC story back on June the 22nd, 2016, that suicide isn't a major issue here on Prince Edward Island.

To the minister: Will you explain why the chief coroner would say such a thing?
Minister: Do you agree with that statement?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, we're in a discussion and talking about issues around suicide and suicide prevention. These are very serious issues and they are issues that can affect families.

I'm well aware of those types of issues and we are working in our mental health system with some of our Canadian Mental Health Association. We've got suicide prevention models and techniques. We have an Island help line, and yes we are dealing with people in today's society that are having struggles with life challenges and we're doing our very best to provide them the services that they require.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Number of suicides per year on PEI

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again to the minister of health. Minister, according to our chief coroner there are roughly 15 suicides per year on Prince Edward Island. Minister: Do you have the actual number for the past year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is probably aware, the coroner's office is not under my department but we do

know – we hear it in the news. We hear of individuals that have taken their lives and it's truly unfortunate and we understand the toll that that can have on many Island families. That's why we are trying to do what we can to make sure that Islanders who require mental health services and supports are there to get the help they need.

But, I encourage all Islanders to participate in programs. Like, we had the Let's Talk program that Bell has put on to make sure that we can lessen the stigma on these types of issues and then if an individual that is having issues around their mental health when it pertains to taking their lives, they can reach out and get the help they need and we'll do our very best to provide that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Protocol at emergency rooms

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The chief coroner suggests that it is middle-aged and older men who are most at risk. Again to the minister: Minister, what is the protocol at our emergency rooms for individuals who are seeking help because they feel they are suicidal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, obviously these are serious issues and I think it's honourable that the hon. member is mentioning that if an individual does go to an emergency room, that means they are trying to seek help and prevent themselves from doing some drastic issue that might impact their lives.

That's part of why we've got a mental health and addiction strategy that is trying to focus on targeting where our resources can be best provided and we are really trying to make sure that mental health is something that has an impact on suicide.

I think we want to note that Islanders in general here – Islanders that are happy – we

have a number of different reports that say Islanders are reporting good mental health in this province, but it's to make sure that we have the services required for people who do require those services.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

You can look at all these reports and stats that you want, the individuals that are out there that are hurting in our communities aren't probably filling out those questionnaires because they are hurting and they are looking for help; but unfortunately, quite often their pleas for help fall on deaf ears.

Tracking of suicide rates in province

Minister, tracking of suicide rates in this province has been poor to non-existent. Can you tell this House today how many attempted suicides there have been in our province so far this year alone?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't have those specific stats in front of me right now, but we do know that we know it's an issue in coming to our emergency rooms. We do know it's an issue around the delivery of mental health, and we've tried to make sure that suicide screening is embedded in all our components of our intake system when somebody does show up to the emergency room, that staff have an understanding of some of the preventative measures and to make sure that these individuals are getting the help that they require.

We have tried to develop issues around coping and support training and we are also trying to work on young individuals where the Canadian Mental Health Association has put together a Signals of Suicide and they are providing that to some of our students in the grade 9 classrooms.

We do take this issue very seriously. We understand the toll this can have on families and we'll do our level best to make sure that we're preventing these issues, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe it is extremely imperative that we have up-to-date tracking of attempted suicides to ensure that we understand why suicides are occurring in our province. Over 15 suicide deaths a year is simply too many. One is too many.

Addressing of gaps in healthcare system

To the minister: Who is in charge of the follow-up and investigation of suicides and attempted suicides to ensure that whatever gaps in our healthcare system are being addressed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I, too, would agree with the hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock that one suicide is too many in this province.

Suicide is a derivative of mental health issues that some individuals suffer on this Island, and sometimes the coping skills of Islanders is required and we have to make sure that we're providing these people with the tools that are necessary so that they can cope effectively in a very changing world that we have here.

I just don't want it to be acknowledged that it's an epidemic. It's more than we'd like to see it here, but Islanders do know that they have good mental health in this province. I think that the services that we provide those people we have to do our level best to provide them as effectively as we can, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Red flag system for suicide attempts

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

Again to the minister: What kind of red flag system is in place to ensure that individuals, who have been treated previously for suicide attempts, are identified to mental health professionals at our hospitals and walk-in clinics?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, we have many tools to acknowledge patients that have been repeat situations. Obviously, we have a computerized system that takes intakes into our health care system. We can track those.

Our facilities, we don't have a wide variety of different facilities across the province. We only have a couple of emergency rooms. We're usually quite aware that some individuals have been coming in a second time.

I think the key is that we make sure that we try to work with the Canadian Mental health Association and the staff that they have. We have a contract with that organization and they're doing whatever they can to try to make sure we promote good health and well-being in this province.

I, as minister, will do my level best to make sure that the resources are there and that the strategies are in place to provide that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses in emergency rooms

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

Again to the minister of health: Minister, do we currently have psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses at our hospital emergency rooms and at all health care facilities to address these serious mental health issues?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, we do have a 15, I think, psychiatrists performing in this province. They are there to, on-call in some cases. In fact, at the QEH we have a psychiatrist that is on-call for situations that arise there.

Also, all of our staff and our physicians that are in our emergency rooms are trained to identify signs of suicide and also to make sure that there are protocols in place to make sure that those individuals are safe and placed in the most appropriate location for their illness, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Tabling of Mill River contract (further)

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a question for the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: When will you table the contract for the sweetheart Mill River deal?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think this is the fourth time this question has been asked. I'll give you the exact same answer –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) tabled yet.

Mr. MacDonald: – that I gave before.

When you're dealing with a third party there are legalities that are involved in this. If we

can release the contract we will, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]