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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 10 MAY 2017

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Finance minister resignation over e-gaming file

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the finance minister told the Public Accounts committee on March 1st, 2017: I will answer what I can, but my knowledge of this file is quite frankly limited to what we have all read in the Auditor General's report and to the actions, we have taken response to the Auditor General's audit and recommendations.

Yesterday's email certainly blows apart the minister's credibility and his word.

Minister: Why the delay in tabling your resignation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

From the outset of this file, I have been very forthcoming to this Legislature. In fact, I even had the opportunity to review an article that was written in *The Guardian*. I believe it was the 20th of March, 2013, in an interview where it clearly outlined in that interview that there was an MOU that I was aware of and it took place in 2012, in July.

I have been very forthcoming on this and I have looked at the emails that the member opposite from Kensington-Malpeque is referring to and there is nothing in that email that would have anything – that would leave me to believe anything he is accusing me of and I have absolutely no intention of resigning.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Finance minister aware of MOU

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the auditor testified to Public Accounts that the minister said in his interview he was not aware of the details of the MOU. The minister then told the House yesterday, on May 9th, 2017: I have always stated that I was aware of the MOU.

Minister: How come you're two statements don't match up?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it's a pleasure to rise and speak to this. Again, I have the same email that he is referring to and as I looked through that email, there is absolutely nothing in that email anywhere that refers to e-gaming. It talks about financial services and the financial platform.

Some Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Roach: There is absolutely –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: – no detail in that whatsoever that would indicate anything –

Mr. Myers: Sergeant Schultz (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: – that the opposition is bringing up in this Legislature.

Thank you.

Mr. Myers: Quite a routine there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

The minister told the Public Accounts committee on March 1st, 2017: I think the first time I heard anything in detail about that MOU, I think there was an article written in the Toronto newspaper. That was in 2015. The minister then told this House on May 2nd, 2017: Certainly, I was aware there was an MOU. I think I have clearly stated that on a number of occasions. I read the MOU that was extended.

Minister: How can your two statements that are opposite both be true?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess to clarify, the MOU that I referred to and I'll say it again: There was nothing in that MOU that I referred to that had anything to do, or a connection to e-gaming.

I'd like to point out that in the Auditor General's report, the Auditor General clearly laid out a timeline as to how things kind of unfolded.

The e-gaming file, according to the Auditor General and her investigation, was shut down in February of 2012.

Mr. Myers: And you're sending emails in October.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, this MOU was five months after that. On the 1st of March, I did attend a Public Accounts and I was asked a number of questions by the hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald and in that response, I clearly stated in response to the question about that, I said and I have it here that I can table later, I said: July 2012.

Very clearly, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, the minister told *The Guardian* on October 19th, 2016: Shortly after I got elected and became a minister the file was, for government purposes, shut down. I had no intimate knowledge. I was never involved in any meetings with respect to e-gaming at any time.

The minister then told this House yesterday: I was aware of the MOU that took place in 2012. I was aware of it because the deputy minister came in and told me that we were going to be signing an MOU with a group to

look at a financial platform, and clearly the first time I heard anything about e-gaming.

Minister: Why can't you keep your story straight?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, as I clearly outlined in one of my previous answers, I clearly outlined the timeline taking place and there's no confusion here. The only confusion is with that member.

We have since moved on –

Mr. Myers: Sergeant Schultz.

Mr. Roach: – we're not living in the past, and we know that Prince Edward Island holds the strongest fiscal position amongst any of the Atlantic Provinces. In a two-year period, this government has done that through hard work from each one of the departments and great work that's taking place by all the people that have companies and –

Mr. Myers: Wish you would table all of your emails.

Mr. Roach: – corporations and workers in Prince Edward Island. That's what this government is going to focus on and that's how we're going to get ahead by doing it that way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Intelligence of Islanders

Mr. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I have all the dates and I don't think Hansard lies.

The minister told the Public Accounts committee on March 1st, 2017, "I was actually never briefed on the e-gaming project... I think it was sometime around

2013, early in the year, that I really first became aware...”

These are the other dates the minister threw out that day: I’m going to say the latter part or sometime midway in 2012. That would have been probably sometime in 2016. My recollection, I’m thinking it was probably sometime in July, 2012.

“I guess whenever it became public. I didn’t know prior to. I had no knowledge...”

Minister: Why do you continue to insult the intelligence of Islanders?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate very much the readings from the Member from Kensington-Malpeque, but I’ll just continue on with the rest of that answer that I gave on the first of March, 2017.

Mr. MacEwen: Never briefed.

Ms. Compton: Never briefed.

Mr. Roach: “Well, it might have been – no, it wouldn’t have been 2012. It would have been 2013 because the current deputy minister, I think, would have been the one who advised me that there was an ongoing file between the minister, the then minister of finance, and MCPEI and that there had been a loan disbursed for \$950,000.”

Quite clearly, that was in 2013. That was the first time I became aware that there was even a loan. Even at that time –

Mr. MacKay: 2013 (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: – that’s when I learned that was in 2013.

That’s the rest of the answer, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let’s get to the rest of the rest of the answer. We know that what this government has done through all of their backroom deals has made the taxpayers’ of Prince Edward Island have to face a \$50 million lawsuit for the second time.

In the original defense of the original lawsuit, Chris LeClair, the defense states that: Chris LeClair denies knowing any knowledge of the MOU.

The surviving emails that we have prove that he did.

Truth and government’s defense

Question to the Premier: Why is the truth opposite to the government’s defense?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, questions are now being asked about a matter that is in litigation before the Supreme Court of Prince Edward Island.

As the members opposite have reminded us several times, there are some pretty big numbers attached to this, \$50 million – big name doesn’t amount that the litigates might hope to secure from this from the taxpayers’ of Prince Edward Island.

It’s obviously in the interest of government and of the taxpayers and of our province, that the government defends this. Further, as is the normal practice of this Legislature or legislatures anywhere, we would not be discussing matters before the courts here in this Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is the exact lawsuit that this exact same Premier talked about yesterday, he called it vexatious.

The Minister of Finance, by funnelling information to Chris LeClair, was one of the causes of this lawsuit. The lawsuit that I'm talking about was the one that was thrown out. The defense I'm talking about is the defense that you used to have that thrown out.

In the original lawsuit government's defense states that: Chris LeClair denied knowing Simplex was a party to the MOU.

The emails that we produced yesterday say quite otherwise.

Question to the Premier: Why is the truth opposite to government's lawsuit defense that was thrown out?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, it wasn't the government's defense that was thrown out. The precise language and I'm quoting from the judgment of the court in the lawsuit that was dismissed in February, 2016.

Quite simply, and this is very precise legal language, the judge in that case said: The statement of claim constitutes an abuse of the processes of the court.

That was how that was dealt with. That's what I referred to yesterday, but it's back. This is not the place and I realize the opposition may, indeed, want to help the litigants, but Mr. Speaker, this matter is before the courts.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Unlike the Premier and your bunch, I'm not trying to help anybody's friends. I'm standing up for Islanders. I'm standing up for taxpayers –

Mr. J. Brown: Seem to be there (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – unlike Lionel Hutz over here –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) anybody (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: – the great Simpsons' lawyer, who seems to have the answer for everything –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) boyfriend.

Mr. Myers: Mr. Speaker, the original lawsuit, government's defense states that Chris LeClair denied making his own proposal to government. The surviving emails prove that he did do this.

Premier: Why is the truth opposite to the defense that you had filed originally?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters refers to the emails that were sent. I'd like to point out that the emails that I have, which are the same as the ones he had, there was never an email that I sent to anyone. I never sent an email. I was copied on emails.

The email that he refers to –

Mr. Myers: Are you Chris LeClair?

Mr. Roach: – all the time is one that I was copied on from Melissa MacEachern that went to minister Sheridan at that time.

When the member refers to the previous lawsuit, the court and the judge that ruled on that took the evidence that was being supplied and simply said: There is nothing here in this that has any weight whatsoever. It was dismissed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It was dismissed because the defense was full of false information. That's what my questions are about today.

If you listen really closely, I'm going to talk a lot slower so that you understand. The original lawsuit government's defense states: Wes Sheridan denied knowledge of the MOU. You go that? Wes Sheridan denied knowledge.

The surviving emails prove that otherwise.

Premier: Why is the truth opposite to the defense you filed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, what took place in that lawsuit and I say, again, that it's back before the courts so this is not the place to be arguing the merits.

Let me say, what took place in that matter was that the plaintiff's position was thrown out. Indeed, the judge, in that case in throwing it out, said: It's not for the defendants or the court to pick through what is left of the statement of claim to proceed.

Neither, when I say that it is for this Legislature to pick through this – the other positions or any positions in a matter that has now been dismissed. The only thing that the opposition could be hoping to achieve by bringing this up here is to assist the litigants in the matter that is now back before the courts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I'm insisting is, Islanders getting the long deserved truth from your government, which you seem, quite frankly, quite content with hiding because you're a hider.

The Premier also knows that I'm a politician; I'm not a lawyer, as is he. He's a politician. He's a lawyer. Neither one of us has spent a day in a courtroom.

The original lawsuit government's defense states: Wes Sheridan denied knowing Simplex was a party to the MOU. The emails that we produced yesterday prove otherwise.

Question to the Premier: Why is the truth the opposite of the defense that you filed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'll refer back to the Auditor General just for a moment here and her timelines. The Auditor General, as I recall, when I reviewed her report, said: E-gaming was shut down in February.

So e-gaming shut down in February completely. Five months later an MOU is signed with a company to talk about a financial platform –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) that's not what she said.

Mr. Roach: – we have e-gaming over here shut off. Five months later there is an MOU.

The opposition would like everybody to believe that somehow those dates were right together and there is no difference.

Mr. Speaker, there is a big difference.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) evidence.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now, it's funny that the Minister of Finance didn't know anything about this file yesterday – couldn't recall a thing with his Sergeant Schultz routine, didn't know anything. He couldn't put any of it together. He called the questions conjecture. He said: Conjecture. He had no knowledge and he termed it as conjecture over here, that it was an assumption, or a guess that he had

funnelled information to this other MOU that was set-up by Chris LeClair. You know it's true. I can tell by the way you're squirming in your chair. The surviving emails prove what you did.

Question to the Premier: Why is the truth opposite to the statement that this finance minister told this House yesterday?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Mr. Speaker, as I just replied a few moments ago, I referred to the Auditor General's report and that was the Auditor General's timeline, so I'm basing my answer partly on what the Auditor General gave me.

But when that MOU was signed in July of 2012, I had heard nothing about e-gaming and there was nothing about that MOU that, as a result of what I learned from reading the Auditor General's report, that was connected. That's in the report; it's five months later.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By the way, I think it's important that the correct timelines and the correct information is provided here in the Legislature so that the public knows exactly what took place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: That's exactly what we're doing. We're quoting (Indistinct)

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's really hard forever to have a clear timeline when this minister over here one day knows everything, the day before knows nothing, the next day he knows nothing again, then he knows everything. He's got to decide whether he knows this file or he doesn't know this file, and he knows the timeline or he doesn't know this timeline. It's him that's trying to confuse Islanders, not me. I'm trying to get the truth, because Islanders are getting tired of scandal after

scandal from this tired Liberal government who is content to close ranks, suppress information, delete emails, and hide the truth from Islanders.

Yesterday it was uncovered that the finance minister passed details of a confidential exclusive MOU to Wes Sheridan and Chris LeClair. This is a fact. The surviving emails prove that he did.

Inside information and resignation of minister

Question to the Premier: Why is passing on inside information not serious enough to warrant the resignation of this minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the member refers to the emails that were out, and he's made the statement a number of times that it was detailed information, and I provided this to this person and I provided to that person.

In all the emails that are here, I did not send; not even one email. I was the recipient of an email that was sent by the deputy minister at the time; a very short email that talked about a company meeting to talk about a finance platform, and there's no indication in that email whatsoever about egaming.

I'll go back, that yes I have learned a lot about the file, as everyone has in this House, because we've all had the opportunity to read the Auditor General's report.

I stand by every statement that I made in this House, and I have no intention at the bequest of the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters to resign.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you.

You should resign. You should resign, and I'm quite serious, you should resign. You're putting words in the Auditor General's mouth. Two days in a row now you've done it.

The finance minister testified at his interview with the Auditor that he did not know any of the details around the MOU. He claimed he knew it existed but didn't know any of the specifics.

A question again to the Premier: The emails say otherwise. Why is misrepresenting the truth of the Auditor General not serious enough to warrant the resignation of this minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I really think that the only confusion in this room is with the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

The Auditor General's clearly laid out the timelines how this progressed, and the information that I've provided, that I've answered in this Legislature, is very clearly completely aligned with the Auditor General. The emails support that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

State of roads due to weather events

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

Earlier this week, an Islander driving along a paved road in St. Lawrence, Prince County, was injured and sent to hospital. A culvert had collapsed and the pavement above had fallen in, creating a crevice about a foot wide and deep, making the road impassable.

A question to the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: How many other points in the existing road network has your department identified that are similarly

vulnerable to weather events across Prince Edward Island?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, in regard to the bridge that had the incident up in St. Lawrence; that had been identified by staff on duty the night before. It was identified and marked for the travelling public that there was caution to be used, and every precaution was taken place to identify that.

That particular structure was and has been slated for replacement. Due to the big rainfall that happened over the weekend, it precipitated some extra damage that occurred which caused the indent in the road, and unfortunately, there was a person who, when they decided to cross over the area, had a mishap.

But I don't have the details of how many structures. I don't have them here in the House, and I'd have to bring that back.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

New perimeter highway and existing infrastructure

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

Government is spending \$32 million of provincial funds on a perimeter highway that many say we don't need, we can't afford, and we don't want.

However, there are many dilapidated highways and run down bridges all across Prince Edward Island that could instead be repaired and upgraded with these funds.

A question to the minister: Why has government placed a higher priority on building a new perimeter highway rather than updating our existing infrastructure?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, our department is engaged with making improvements to the TransCanada Highway, which is a major corridor for our exports on Prince Edward Island.

We are making improvements to highway structure in Mount Herbert, which was a major concern for residents in that area. That tenders is out. We met with the community there. They decided with us on what project would look like down there.

We're making improvements up in Bloomfield. We're replacing bridges; the Cairns Bridge down in the Leader of the Opposition's.

We're working on Souris.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: We're working right across. We're doing a bridge replacement in Abrams Village –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: We are doing regular maintenance and replacement of bridges, of highways so that our Island is safe for travel.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'd like to be able to tell the gentleman from St. Lawrence that our highways are safe, and I wonder how much extra work could be done with the \$32 million to make our highways safe.

An Hon. Member: One thousand kilometres.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: As our climate changes, we can reasonably expect to see more frequent and regular damage to our infrastructure –

An Hon. Member: Ten thousand kilometers.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – from weather events, but to date, government seems to rely

primarily on special warrants to cover these costs rather than planning for it in the budget.

Contingency fund and damaged infrastructure

Minister, why has government budgeted \$2 million less this year than last year in a contingency fund for unexpected damaged infrastructure?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, we have recently negotiated a new contract – a new agreement, I should say, with the federal government, that in the past there were over 500 kilometres of roads, connector roads, right across Prince Edward Island that were not eligible, which was a challenge, certainly, to make improvements to our main connections to where our high industries are, our farming and our fishing.

The road count on those in order to qualify for any kind of matching federal funds was 10,000 cars a year. We have negotiated down to 1,000 cars per year daily traffic count, and that opens up 50/50 per cent dollars to make improvements to over, and almost 500 extra kilometers, across Prince Edward Island, tip to tip.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. LaVie: Mom's watching.

Ms. Casey: Minister, Prince Edward Island is known around the world for its beaches, potatoes, seafood, and, of course, Anne. We're also known around the world for our Island artists.

Cultural strategy consultations

Minister, last month you announced the launch of the cultural strategy consultations.

Where did the consultations take place and what kind of response have you had so far?

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

Mr. Currie: Someone's got to ask me a question.

Mr. MacEwen: Don't be bashful.

Mr. Currie: Somebody's got to ask me a question.

Mr. MacEwen: Don't be bashful.

Mr. Currie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Over a month ago, we launched the beginning of the public conversation with Islanders on the creation of our cultural strategy and to date, we've had over 200 Islanders engaged, we had 30 small group face-to-face presentations with the team that is leading the conversations. We're using a social media platform – Facebook – to continue to generate the conversation. One thing that we are seeing very clearly is that Islanders want to talk about culture. They want to talk about the future direction and we want to make sure that they have a voice in making sure that our cultural community grows and prospers for generations to come.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Public perception of cultural strategy

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister: What are people saying when you're in these coffee shops? What are they saying they'd like to see in the cultural strategy?

Mr. LaVie: You wrote that question (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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

Mr. Currie: I know what they're saying in my coffee shops too.

Mr. Myers: What are they saying at the Sportsman's?

Mr. Currie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The cultural sector in this province generates over \$125 million dollars in our provincial economy, Mr. Speaker. And certainly there's a lot of synergy and a lot of exciting conversation about Islanders having a voice about the direction. We don't have to look too far, but artists and musicians that have been raised and are performing – not only here in the province – are winning Juno Awards and being very successful at ECMAs.

The conversation is that art should be part of every child's school experience. They've got a deep sense of pride in culture and what it means to them and we need to celebrate and encourage diversity in our cultural sector. The conversations are rich, they're full and people are excited about the direction we're moving with the strategy.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Draft report of cultural strategy

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister: When can we expect to see a draft report?

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

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

We hope to present to Islanders the conversation and the strategy by the fall. As the minister of education, I've had the opportunity over the last number of months to participate not only in Music Monday, but

to watch young students perform in honours choir.

This week is the launch of Colonel Gray's play *Disney's The Little Mermaid*. We see the ongoing successes of band programs in our province and, obviously, the continuing development of young artists in our communities. We, as a province of 145,000 people have a rich culture and a wonderful potential to continue to celebrate and to develop the cultural sector here in the province and continue to put – not only Prince Edward Island on the region and on the map, nationally, but on a global stage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Shortage of substitute school bus drivers

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning. There are approximately 20,000 students on Prince Edward Island who travel to school on a school bus. Recently we heard about a shortage of substitute school bus drivers.

Minister, can you tell the House: Is there a shortage of school bus drivers?

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale for the question. Hon. member, there is a shortage in substitute school bus drivers and, as a result of that, my department, along with the Public Schools Branch, has partnered with rural community learning to put on some training courses and this is a first step to try to alleviate this problem with substitute bus drivers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: What do they say in the coffee shops (Indistinct)

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister: Would you give a little more detail on what you're doing to address the shortage of school bus drivers?

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) Sportsman's (Indistinct)

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The department, as I'd indicated, along with Rural Community Learning Incorporated, has put on three courses in the Summerside area to hire three new substitute drivers also in West Prince and we're looking at doing that in the Charlottetown area to help alleviate this problem.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Training and job opportunities for substitute bus drivers

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister: How many are being trained? Is there more to be trained? What's already in the queue for training and is there more to be trained? Are there going to be job opportunities in the future?

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

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This will be the first step in solving the problem of the substitution of bus drivers and if anyone wants training, they can contact Skills PEI for any future positions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Good announcements during polling period

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

It has come to light that the Premier has ordered all of his Cabinet ministers to find good announcements during polling period – this according to emails that were tabled by a Cabinet minister yesterday.

Question to the Premier: Premier, why do you think it's proper to manipulate a public poll in such a manner?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, for the time we came to government, we said that we were committed to openness and transparency and just last night the House leader was good enough to distribute to all members speaking points, and I know the Member from Souris-Elmira took great advantage of that and did a good job.

Mr. Currie: You looked good last night.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Currie: You did. You're the next leader.

Premier MacLauchlan: You did a good job.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday afternoon, we tabled emails so that everybody will know that we're doing everything we can to get the message out to Prince Edward Islanders what a great job we're doing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you I find it offensive that the Premier would stand and make light of this. Obviously, everybody in this Legislative Assembly knows that the minister that tabled this email – this confidential email – was done by mistake. It had nothing to do with being open and transparent, and Premier: You know that yourself.

We have children and youth at risk. We have Islanders struggling with mental health and addictions. We have people struggling to keep a roof over their heads and put food on the table.

Again, question to the Premier: Where are your priorities at when you're trying to milk some publicity out of programs that vulnerable Islanders need and rely on?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me repeat and I'm not joking in the slightest.

This is about openness and transparency. It's letting Islanders know about the great programs from which they can benefit. It's about letting Islanders know how they can access programs. I'm glad this is brought up because it gives another opportunity for Islanders to know the great work of this government. One of the things, for example, that we worked hard to get the word out on and we're doing it 365 days of the year, is Be Aware & Get Your Share. We went and worked with community organizations and that's the job of government, Mr. Speaker, is to do everything we can to communicate with Islanders so that they can take part in democracy and so that they can benefit from the great work of this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: All year round.

Ms. Biggar: All year round. Every day is a poll.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Ms. Compton: Then why did you need an email? Why did you need an email?

Mistaken tabled email on good news announcements

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'll quote from the email: Good afternoon, last week in Cabinet, the Premier asked that each department put together some good news announcements during polling period. Not 365 days of the year – during polling period. This when we've had grandmothers in in front of committees, we've had groups in in front of committees that are essentially in tears, asking this government for help and all you want to do is try to up your numbers during the polls by coming out with good news announcements.

An Hon. Member: Every day is polling day.

Mr. Aylward: Again, a question to the Premier: Why would you instruct your ministers to bring good news announcements forward only during a polling period?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: So few of them he's has to bring them up, I guess.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the polling period is 365 days of the year –

Mr. Myers: No it's not.

Premier MacLauchlan: – and the work of this government is 7/24, 12 months of the year. Because of – there's so much good work being done. There's so many programs that the people need to know about. There's so many initiatives being taken that of course it's part of getting the work – not just

getting the word out, but engaging Islanders is to be sure that there's a schedule for that so that –

Mr. Myers: I can't wait to see your numbers.

Premier MacLauchlan: – so that the Islanders can know about the great work of our government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

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

I feel ashamed. I feel ashamed for this Premier, that he is conducting himself in such a manner, especially in this Legislative Assembly.

Clearly the Premier is feeling the heat of discontent with his tired Liberal government. He has lost sight of what's really important; people, not his political fortunes.

Premier to lead by example

Again, question to the Premier: Is this what you meant when you said you'd be different and boasted that you would lead by example?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, communicating about the programs that are available to Islanders is about the people who will benefit from it, and that's exactly the reason we're here in this Legislature. It's why we have a public media. It's why we have Engage PEI. It's why we're committed to openness and transparency.

If the people don't know whether it's about housing programs or about allowances or about an opportunity to file their income tax so that they can benefit from –

Mr. Trivers: Must be doing laundry. This is the spin cycle.

Premier MacLauchlan: – provincial or federal programs, then that's what government and what people on all sides of this House should be committed to; effective communication and engagement with Prince Edward Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Needs of vulnerable Islanders

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

When we talk about the unmet needs of vulnerable Islanders, we don't mean this Premier and his tired Liberal government.

Again, question to the Premier: Why are the needs of your failing political career more important than the needs of vulnerable Islanders?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me remind the members opposite – and I'm sure we all are well aware – that we started this session with a balanced budget –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – a balanced budget that included \$35 million additional for healthcare for Prince Edward Islanders where the needs are greatest –

Mr. Currie: Big money.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – \$6 million in education where the needs are great, programs – a long list of programs –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) pinkie today, you know (Indistinct) he's angry (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – that are a benefit to Islanders, and family and human services –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – from comfort allowances to housing programs –

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) announcements everyday (Indistinct)

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – and it's very important when you have a government that has priorities that are addressing the priority needs of Prince Edward Islanders, that Islanders know about them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: Yes.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Establishment of a child advocate office

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

I'm all about working with the government. I'm all about trying to help the government do the right thing for Islanders. So, today I'm going to stand here and I'm going to give a suggestion to the Premier because, ultimately, if he does this and takes this suggestion he will, ultimately, help his polling numbers.

The question to the Premier here today: Will you stand in this Legislative Assembly today and announce the establishment of a child advocate office here on PEI?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) polling period, it's okay.

Ms. Biggar: You had an opportunity to tell all about it.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, that matter was discussed Thursday of last week, Friday of last week and I was pleased to see that the public media did such a great job of getting that message out to Prince Edward Islanders. It's going to be back on the floor in committee here shortly; what we're doing with the approach of first things first and putting in place the parenting coordinator, the children's lawyer, and other measures that I believe that are appreciated on all sides of this House.

But it's a great example of why it's important for Islanders to know about the services and the –

Mr. Aylward: So the short answer is no, you will not announce it today.

Premier MacLauchlan: – benefits and the programs that are available to them on the basis of the priority that's going to meet the greatest needs –

Mr. Aylward: So the answer is: No.

Premier MacLauchlan: – first.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]