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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2018

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Each day tens of thousands of vehicles travel back and forth across the Hillsborough Bridge. Traffic congestion and motor vehicle accidents are an all-too frequent occurrence.

Safety and traffic on Hillsborough Bridge

Question to the transportation minister: Minister, what options is your department working on to improve traffic flow and safety on the Hillsborough Bridge?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have put together a committee to review the plans for the Hillsborough Bridge. It's called the Active Transportation Committee.

It's been working with the municipalities, Cycling PEI and Island Trails. An RFP for design was awarded this year and the task group themselves are expected to have those options ready for review within the next few weeks and then from that, there will be some other discussions being held as to what everyone has come up with to look at.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

So it's clear that this minister does not have a plan.

Three things I often hear about from constituents: Dealing with the sewage issue, better active of transportation links between Stratford and Charlottetown and the safety barrier recommended in the province's own suicide prevention strategy.

Question to the transportation minister: When will Islanders see progress on addressing these issues on the Hillsborough Bridge?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This particular summer we've been doing strengthening of the actual bridge itself to be able to take the additional walking lane that is going to be installed and will also need to be strengthened in order to take the sewage line that is coming from Stratford.

The Stratford council has delayed that RFP and we'll be working, continuing to work with them whenever they're ready to proceed and we have a number of other communications that we have going on with them.

We do have a conceptual design – services that we have retained to do a conceptual design for a design of a trail across the Hillsborough Bridge and the causeway and again, our report will be out soon.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Aylward: Our office obtained a copy of the 2017 bridge inspection report by the minister's own department and I'll quote: There is no project funding set aside in the five year plan for any structural modifications to the Hillsborough Bridge –

Some Hon. Members: Ooh.

Mr. Aylward: – as a result of any future active transportation quarter or sanitary force main.

Funds for Hillsborough Bridge upgrades

Question to the transportation minister: Why has your department not set aside funds in its five year capital program for these very important and necessary projects?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, in regard to infrastructure funding for upgrades to that

particular bridge that comes under a different department budget line. It doesn't come under the capital.

We work with the infrastructure on our funding partners with municipal, federal, provincial to set aside funds that we are working towards those particular projects.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

As Leader of the Opposition said, we obtained the bridge inspection review, the written questions and its findings are very startling.

Inspection of Island bridges

Question to the transportation minister: How comfortable are you knowing that only less than one in five, 288 bridges are inspected every two years?

Ms. Biggar: We invest \$7 million annually in our bridge infrastructure.

We do ongoing bridge inspection programs. We have 11 structures that have been closed, to public notice, but we have an ongoing list of work that's going to be taking place and again as I noted, we do those inspections biannually. We hire and use professional contractors, engineers. Our own engineers are well qualified to keep on top of that are we are always working to maintain the safety of those structures.

An Hon. Member: Great.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Did you know that the ministers department says that 52% of those 288 bridges inspected in 2017 were assessed in fair or poor condition?

Poor condition of Island bridges

Question to the transportation minister: Doesn't that tell you that you have a big problem on your hands?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to look back since the hon. member may not recall that it wasn't until our government came into power that we started those annual bridge inspections.

Mr. Myers: So if somebody goes through a bridge today, you didn't do it. You're in charge when you want to be in charge.

Ms. Biggar: The overall conditions of bridges have improved since the monitoring program began and the rating system that's there actually there –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – to maintain and ensure that they're structurally sound and that they are safe for traffic and we will continue to monitor that program.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: 53% of the bridges inspected were rated at high or medium risk.

Question to the transportation minister: Do you consider that an acceptable level of risk for the safety of Island bridges?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, again as I said, we invest over \$7 million annually on our bridge infrastructure programs.

We continue to upgrade bridges in the member's own district. We did one in Tryon –

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – two on just Tryon, we have one that's going to be replaced next year and I'm sure he will be looking forward to see which one that is.

Our department is very conscientious on making sure that our bridge inspection program is the most efficient, most safe and most structurally sound that we can ensure that the travelling public are safe going across those structures.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2,108 performance deficiencies were flagged by the bridge inspectors.

Question to the transportation minister: If these levels of problems are found in such a small sample, couldn't we be looking at much bigger problems across the whole bridge work of PEI?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about structures we are also including in that, things like culverts that go across the road, a number of box culverts, wooden culverts, larger structures. That all encompasses all of the bridges and –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – across Prince Edward Island.

Again, we do it on a semi-annual –

Mr. Myers: A potato truck going through them doesn't cause any issues (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – basis.

We are confident and always keeping on track of what needs to be done right across Prince Edward Island and at times, if there is a concern, we will restrict it until we get in and move forward with a replacement or necessary repairs.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, for over the last two years I've been urging government to replace the Searletown bridge and she kept on saying: It's fine. There's nothing wrong with it. She refused to look at it, and then we had a car fall through it.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Cost of temporary repairs to Searletown bridge

Mr. Fox: Question to the transportation minister: How much did the temporary repairs to the Searletown bridge cost this summer?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

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

Ms. Biggar: I'll take that information back, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm told that the costs were over \$18,000.

Repairs to Tryon bridge

What about the Tryon bridge down the (Indistinct) a car went over that and it practically fell through and cut the tires all from underneath it.

What are you doing about that bridge?

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

Ms. Biggar: I see, Mr. Speaker, that the member today is again having trouble with his facts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Biggar: Cars did not go over the bridges, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: Cars did not go through the bridges.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, as I noted, we are always conscientious of safety and if there's ever any doubt that there's a risk or a safety

risk, that bridge will be closed until we can get it fixed.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, that car did fall through that bridge and there were other cars that were damaged and they ended up restricting the bridge and reducing it.

2017 Searletown inspection report

The 2017 Searletown inspection report estimated the bridge and the recommended repairs of \$101,000.

Question to the transportation minister: Why was nothing done then?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, right across Prince Edward Island we are investing in replacing bridges. We just did an \$8 million bridge down in Souris. We did one up in Cascumpec. We did one in Murray Harbour this summer, which is going to be officially done in December and I know that the Member from Belfast-Murray River is looking forward to having that done.

Those are all investments we're making in bridges, making sure that we are investing in communities, and we will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: I think we need to remember that 53% of our bridges are in medium or high-risk categories across the whole Island.

Replacement of Searletown bridge

A question to the minister of transportation: Will you commit to this spring coming up to replacing, in whole, the whole thing, the Searletown bridge in District 19?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, we have lots of work we're going to be doing this spring and I'll be looking forward to having those discussions when we get to the capital budget.

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

Communication with district road supervisors

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the transportation minister: How often do you communicate directly with your department's district road supervisors?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, normally, unless there's something that I need to specifically ask that a constituent from a particular district is looking for information, those modes of communication usually go through the deputy or through the supervisor.

Normally, at times obviously, I am CCed on those communications and when I reply back to something that has three or four different people on it, including the district road supervisors, I guess you could call that a communication.

But, normally on a day-to-day basis, I rarely communicate with those individuals.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, we've been hearing some odd stories and we filed a freedom of information request for the minister's emails with all district road supervisors. We found odd things; 53 pages worth of frontline staff getting direct emails from the minister.

An Hon. Member: Whoa.

Mr. Myers: Oh.

Communication directly with line staff

Ms. Compton: Do you consider it appropriate to bypass your deputy and senior management to deal directly with line staff?

Mr. Myers: Oh.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Normally, if it's a district supervisor in my MLA district, that crosses three different supervisors in my own particular district so there's three district supervisors that boundary on my own individual MLA district. So, at times, when I get requests from my constituents for particular work, I will forward that to that particular district supervisor to follow up on, and that is how some of those email communications occur, not from me as a minister, but from me as an MLA.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are more than two dozen district road supervisors, but the funny thing is all we got back from our FOIPP were 53 pages of emails with Prince County road supervisors.

Approval of contracting of equipment via email

Question to the transportation minister: Do you routinely approve the contracting of equipment directly with road supervisors by email?

Mr. Myers: Oh.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: I don't even think that's legal.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I work very closely with our Prince County supervisor. We were just up there, the

Premier and I, up to visit at the government garage. I was up to the Alma –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – government barbeque this summer. We had a great visit up and touring with staff. We like to get out to the frontlines. I tour around, the same as other MLAs in this House get out and they tour around the district with their district supervisors.

I get messages all the time about who is driving around in trucks with who –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – and I certainly –

Mr. LaVie: You drive around?

Ms. Biggar: – like to keep in touch with all of our staff to make sure that they're aware that I appreciate the work that they do on a day-to-day basis.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess you communicate with the other road supervisors other than email because the 53 pages were from emails for the Prince County supervisors.

We have an email where that's just what happened.

A road supervisor has been approached by a private contractor about getting some work for a Bobcat with a sweeper and closed by saying: Just wanted to get your thoughts on this. You replied: I'm good with that.

Emails from contractors to minister

Question to the transportation minister: Do you get a lot of emails like that in the run of a day?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Some Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Myers: Here it is.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on what the minister said because I did have the privilege to travel with her two weeks ago to visit the Prince County garage at Slemon Park and we went from one office right into all of the bays in the garage right out to the wash bay and the minister is very familiar with the staff. She's a good –

Mr. Myers: No doubt she is.

Premier MacLauchlan: – representative of her area, of her county and of our province.

She's a very strong minister who's got hands-on and looking out for the interests of the travelling public of this province and she's got the highest respect, and I really saw that firsthand of the people who work in her department, and I really appreciated that and I hope the opposition does too.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I'm glad the Premier found it – to get up. That was great because, Premier, you created an Ethics and Integrity Commissioner because of all the shady shenanigans that have been going on with this government for the past decade.

Ethics and Integrity Commissioner re: direct contact with minister

Question to the Premier: Will you show leadership and refer this matter to the Ethics and Integrity Commissioner for further review – the contact of road supervisors directly from the minister; 53 emails in her own Prince County area?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the hon. member has raised the question of the Ethics and Integrity Commissioner. That was one of the first things we did when we came to government –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – on March 31st of 2015.

It wasn't because of shady practices. It was because we believe in good public service, we believe in supporting our public service.

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: We believe in serving the public, in an open and transparent fashion, and I am pleased to say that the Ethics and Integrity Commissioner has done a great job now, over three years and has supported our work. We are really proud of what she is doing and the ways in which our public servants continue to do a great job in their jobs and in serving the public.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday in Question Period, the Minister of Family and Human Services spoke at length about this government's upcoming investments in poverty reduction.

The minister mentioned increases to social assistance shelter rates, of 3% last June, and another 6% coming soon. The 6% is the total called for in the five-year Poverty Reduction Action Plan; that works out to 1.25% per year, likely far less than rental rates will increase in the current market.

In other words, Islanders on social assistance are not getting ahead. They are merely not falling behind as quickly.

Increase in shelter rates vs. cost of housing

A question to the minister: Do you think your plan's 6% increase in shelter rates over the next five years will be enough to cover the cost of housing?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am very proud of the Poverty Reduction Action Plan – first ever, I will add, in Prince Edward Island. I'm proud of the people who lent their voices to the action plan, and who stood up and carried the voices of Islanders to that action plan; 66 recommendations and this MLA, this hon. member, chooses to pick one.

We are looking across government at investments. We are looking across community to help us with those investments. It is not one department's – poverty cannot rest on the shoulders of one department. It is a cumulative effect and we are doing our part to make sure that Islanders can live in dignity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Even with a cumulative 9% increase, shelter rates are still hundreds of dollars short of what Islanders actually have to pay for housing right now. The goal in the Poverty Reduction Action Plan is simply not enough.

A question to the minister: What is your timeline for increasing shelter rates to the point of actually covering the full cost of housing?

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

Ms. Mundy: Mr. Speaker, we are currently rolling out rent supplements which are helping Islanders, who are living in safe, appropriate housing right now, who cannot afford it.

We are already on target to meet our target of 275 for this year, and we are doubling that amount for next year. We are also increasing, as the Premier mentioned yesterday, 4,000 homes in Prince Edward Island, that have received renovations through our home renovation programs, because of the investments we have made.

Poverty is not just about shelter. Yes, that helps, but it is a cumulative effect. We are doing many things; this is a five-year plan.

We are not going to do everything overnight.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The latest report of the Auditor General noted that rates for clothing, household and personal items have not been increased in over a decade. There is no mention of these in the poverty reduction 66 action items.

Rates for clothing and personal items

A question to the minister: Why does your poverty reduction plan not address these glaring deficits?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point pointed out yesterday, this member comes into the House and misleads Islanders.

That is not a fact. In fact, we are in our fifth year of increases to food allowances; \$2.8 million we have invested into food allowances.

We have also invested, as I said, in our home renovation – we are increased our shelter rates, we have a generic drug program; we have increased our personal exemptions, so that now 5,200 Islanders are not paying any taxes at all. We have reduced our electrical rates.

Again, this member comes into the House; she focuses on one area and often doesn't even get that right.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

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

A few weeks ago, the provincial government published an advert in *The Guardian* regarding its climate plan. An ad generously funded, I might say, by the taxpayers of Prince Edward Island.

The ad extols the Liberal plan while decrying the cost of and I quote: All other plans – unquote.

Government ads in *The Guardian*

Could the Premier please tell us, whether he believes that this was a partisan ad?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, that ad was place and there are others that will be placed in a series that is about our energy plan, about our climate change action plan, and about the steps that are being taken by Islanders –

Mr. Myers: Call for an election and pay for it yourself.

Premier MacLauchlan: – in response to incentives offered by this government and we're proud –

Mr. Trivers: It was shameful.

Premier MacLauchlan: – of the number of Islanders who are indeed, taking up those incentives –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: I was embarrassed for you.

Premier MacLauchlan: – who are reducing our carbon footprint and that's exactly what this is about. It is about public engagement to ensure that we are meeting our climate targets.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

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

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

As one local journalist commented on Twitter, and again, I quote: Hard to see this misleading graphic – misleading graphic – as anything other than an election ad – unquote. Under our forthcoming advertising standards bill, which we will table today, an ad would be considered partisan and thus prohibited, this ad that appeared in *The Guardian*, and I will be tabling it later today.

Public money on partisan ads

A question to the Premier: Do you think the Provincial Government should spend public money on partisan ads?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I believe the provincial government should and does, spend money on public engagement, on public information – enabling Prince Edward Islanders to know the options that are open to them, the incentives that are available to them, the steps that they can take –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – to achieve our carbon emissions target –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – and I hope that's –

Mr. Trivers: It was even worse than the flyer.

Premier MacLauchlan: – the Leader of the Third Party would agree with.

This is about public engagement. But it seems to me that the Leader of the Third Party thinks that anything you do to communicate with the public or to inform them of what is taking place in their interest, or to give them an opportunity to act, is partisan –

Mr. Trivers: You didn't even (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: It's only partisan because he doesn't like it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I don't think any of us would have any problems at all if it were indeed public engagement or public education, but this was clearly not.

The advertising bill that we will be tabling was informed in part by advertising legislation brought forward in other provinces, as well as Robert Ghiz's 2004 advertising bill.

In the past, the Liberal Party of this province has supporting holding government to account on how it spends tax payers dollars on government ads.

Advertising accountability

Does the MacLauchlan team no longer support advertising accountability?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I might point out that one of our first initiatives was called: Be aware, get your share. That engage Prince Edward Islanders in benefits that are available to them to the point where –

Mr. Myers: Even Robert Ghiz (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – that we had a 7% increase in income tax filing, so that Islanders access benefit.

But let me go back to the ad that the hon. member is asking about. I think his problem is that he does have a plan, which envisages Islanders paying on the order of \$47 million in additional taxes.

We were letting Islanders know that the agreement that we had reached and had approved from Ottawa is a much different arrangement, which will meet our climate targets, which doesn't have the tax burdens, and will achieve environmental leadership and energy democracy in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: I think you just invented energy democracy.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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

My questions are to the hon. Premier.

Our province, although one of the smallest jurisdictions in Canada, is a producer of some of the best agriculture and fisheries products, as well as many other manufactured products.

Meanwhile, the territories in our North are experiencing a level of food security that is unacceptable in such a rich country as Canada.

Food security in the Northern territories

Premier, frequently you meet with Canada's first ministers, has food security in the North made it to the minister's table since you took a seat at that table?

Speaker: The Hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for raising this question.

It has indeed been raised, this question of food security in the north, and it's one that for which I have a great deal of appreciation.

The senior person at our first minister's table now is the hon. Bob McLeod, the Premier of Northwest Territories. This is something he has raised on a regular basis. The premiers of Nunavut have, in succession, raised these issues, as has the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador.

This indeed is something that is on our minds collectively, and it's something that we, as Prince Edward Islanders, are happy have raised at the national level, and to see if there are any opportunities we can contribute to solutions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford, your first supplementary.

Mr. McIsaac: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Several of us as MLAs of this House, including yourself, Mr. Speaker, had the opportunity last month to visit Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, and experience firsthand the high cost of foodstuffs and other products for the residents due in large part to transportation costs.

Trade deals with products to the north

If we can negotiate trade deals like CETA, TPP, USMCA – is there not some way, with the help of the federal government, to possibly link our high quality products here on the Island with our neighbours in the north.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: This is something that would be entirely in line with the work that's being done through the food partnership towards Canada's Food Island.

There is a program that is under – now under the responsibility of the hon. Dominic LeBlanc in his role as intergovernmental affairs also has northern affairs and internal trade. It's called the Nutrition North Canada program. It's something that I've heard within the past month – Minister LeBlanc speak about on the program – the House – where he says that that program has lost its way, and indeed, I understand it's in his mandate letter to work with the northern communities to do better with that program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford, your second supplementary.

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

I'm glad to hear that because I think it's something that we can do as a small province to be a bit of a leader in this way because it's definitely needed.

Last Thursday, a fire in the Northmart store in Iqaluit – one of their main supply stores suffered a major fire, putting more pressure

on the level of food security in the north. This one disaster is a prime example of how quickly a bad situation can be made worse.

Shipment of produce to Iqaluit after fire

Premier, last year the province joined with the Island producers to send a shipment of produce to Georgia to help our southern neighbours after the devastation of Hurricane Irma. Is this something the province could spearhead again for our family in the north after last (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I'm aware of that fire at the Northmart store; in fact I've been in it and observed the high price of food in the north that's been commented on regularly.

Indeed, the organizations in the farming community, and many of the farmers, the producers and organizations combined last year to respond to, first Hurricane Irma in Florida and Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, to send shipments of food. Indeed, this is something that we'd be willing – of course, has been said a number of times in this House, the farmers have had a late fall and a tough season. But I believe now that we're getting to the point that we are, this is something that we as a government, and that Prince Edward Islanders as a people would be happy to explore to respond to the dire situation in the north.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So we've been hearing a lot of grumbling from construction companies about the Cornwall bypass, in particular, the large slice of pie that has been cut out by the minister for the premier's cousin.

Concerns from construction companies re: Cornwall bypass

Question to the minister: Have you heard these same concerns?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: It's great, Mr. Speaker, to be able to rise to talk about the arterial highway after the hon. Leader of the Opposition talked about the importance of safety in his community. The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora talked about the importance of safety in his community. I felt obligated to stand and talk about the importance in my community.

The arterial highway will reduce cars to 10-15,000 per day travelling through a road that was built in 1955. I find it's troubling to hear what the opposition has to say in relevance to the safety of my community. I felt the importance, not only that, but there's markets that are being –

Mr. Trivers: Can't even get a speed radar sign.

Mr. MacDonald: There's the hon. member that was talking – criticizing, trying to make a link to the arterial highway with seniors going to Moncton on a trip.

Mr. Trivers: Absolutely.

Mr. MacDonald: Absolutely. So you're criticizing seniors going to Moncton on a trip from the community of Cornwall.

No further comments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: What a joke that little diatribe was because the question is about the cost and the fact that it was all carved out and given to the Premier's cousin, it's nothing about the safety about your community. It's how you guys are carving up the money and putting all this money in to deep Liberal pockets that have close connections with the Premier.

Island Coastal and Cornwall bypass

According to the answer to a written question, Island Coastal received 45% of the \$75 million worth of work. Do you consider that a disproportionate share for one company to get on a multi-million dollar project?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This particular project will improve the safety of the residents of Cornwall, taking over 27,000 cars that go there on a daily basis – down the middle of their community.

This particular project is a federal-provincial project; everything is forwarded to Ottawa for auditing. Anything that goes out is tendered and all those tendered come back and whoever is the lowest bidder on these tenders are the companies that are bidding and the companies that get the tender.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So the Premier's cousin got pretty near half of the work so far, but the other half was split between 31 contractors.

Paving tenders off Cornwall road

Question to the minister: Who won the tender to pave the onramps and roundabouts off the Cornwall road?

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

Ms. Biggar: Again, as I said all those are tendered work pieces that go out.

This project, also, is employing Islanders right across PEI and putting money in the pockets of families that are working on those particular projects with those great construction companies that are all contributing and putting forward tenders on these projects – a project that is going to increase efficiency, increase safety, and community and allowing Cornwall to expand.

It's on a construction boom. Look at that housing that's going up out there; the improvements that are going on and going to increase safety around the school. We will continue to work with that community.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Another disgusting display at attempt to answer a question here in the Legislature when I simply asked who won the tender. The reason she can't answer the question is there was in fact no tender – she gave it away to one of the companies who was complaining about the big piece of pie that was cut for the Premier's cousin.

So what she did, she took nearly \$2 million worth of work untendered and handed it out to her other Liberal friend.

Question to the minister: Can you confirm that you didn't tender it and you, instead, handed it out to another good Liberal friend?

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

Ms. Biggar: Again, as I said, this is a project that's in partnership with the federal government. All the work that we do is forwarded, it's audited, it is looked at through the audits in Ottawa. All the procedures that are put in place are followed that are required by us as a funding partner, a partnership with the federal government on the largest project that we – and funding right across PEI because of our partnership with the federal government on the new Build Canada projects, we're able to do this improvement, improvements in your community, improvements in everybody's community and we'll continue to do that work.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So late, late, late in the summer there was barges landing in the Charlottetown Harbour loaded with gravel and one big Liberal contractor was loading up piles of gravel in their backyard.

Other contractors were calling me, saying: why is it that such-and-such is loading up on gravel? There's no more work – there's no more work to be called, why would you load up on gravel this time of year? Low-and-

behold, all of a sudden they're out doing the onramps and paving out in Cornwall, untendered.

Island Coastal and Cornwall bypass (further)

Question to the minister: Will you admit to this House that you broke the law and gave \$2 million worth of work to a Liberal company – illegally – to pave the onramps to the bypass in Cornwall?

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

Ms. Biggar: We just did paving on the Cornwall Trans-Canada Highway extension to do an extra phase –

Mr. Fox: We have the pictures.

Ms. Biggar: – last week we just finished it up, we're ahead of schedule on that particular project and we are very pleased with the progress that we have made – it's going to make travelling safer for the people of Cornwall.

Mr. Fox: Untendered.

Ms. Biggar: Again, all our work that we have put forward is audited by the federal government as a funding partner.

Mr. Fox: How are you going to cover that up?

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Leader of the Third Party was talking about partisan advertising for government and I couldn't let it go by with the answers from the Premier.

The ad, I think one of the one ads you were talking about in particular was the carbon tax affect ad that ran in *The Guardian* talking about all of their plans. It was just a really awkward looking ad for a government to put out.

Government ads in *The Guardian* (further)

Can the Premier tell me: Did you actually see that ad before it went to print?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: I did not see that ad before it went to print and that would not be unusual, it's not something that the Premier does in the normal course.

Let me say, I opened the paper that Saturday morning, we had been preoccupied with that question, I think it was on the Tuesday if I'm not mistaken, that the national approach was announced and indeed there were four provinces that were subjected to the federal backstop.

So it's not hard for me to understand what it says about the other plans and indeed if the official opposition had pursued its course – which is to do nothing – they would have had the backstop and if the Third Party had pursued their course, which was publicly advertised, they would have had the federal backstop or its equivalent.

It's not hard to see what all other plans are; it's the plans that are in New Brunswick, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid, your final question.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ignoring all that stuff – Premier, I would expect this honestly from someone who's been sitting in the chair for 11 years, there's other people over there that might say: yeah whatever that's an ad, yeah give it to them.

There's no way in the world you would approve this three years ago when you were elected. Not a chance in the world if you had have seen that, that you wouldn't have said: No not that one, not that one.

I get that you're up here explaining it but let's be very very honest, if you had have seen that ad, there's no way you would have approved that three years ago – and I'm even guessing if you had of seen it before it went this time, you would've said: No, don't print that.

Speaker: Do you have a question?

Mr. MacEwen: That was it. He wouldn't approve it.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: I will say a word, I have no question, but I might as well, I've got 25 seconds.

Let's remember the context of all this. There had been attention nationally, headlines have been talked in this House for three years about: is it going to be this, is it going to be that and who's going to do what.

On that date in October when the federal government indicated what the deal was going to be or what was accepted or not accepted in the provinces across Canada – Prince Edward Islanders had good reason to be relieved in a context where there had been a lot of different ideas suggested, in fact a lot of them from across the floor.

So for the government to say to Islanders – this is the deal for Prince Edward Islanders, a deal that is going to be acted on in this House and you'll have a chance to have your say on it then, we'll see if you're for it or not – that is providing information to Prince Edward Islanders and we think that's the proper thing to do when you have a chance to do something of this significance for their benefit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Myers: Especially when it's their money.

[End of Question Period]