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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF  
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

TUESDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2018



Responses to Questions taken as Notice

Questions by Members

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** The ethics commissioner flagged in her most recent report a senior government official who repeatedly refused to file required disclosure statements.

**Senior government official and disclosure statements**

My question to the Premier: Premier who is this senior official?

**Premier MacLauchlan:** The office of the ethics and integrity commissioner was one of the first steps that we took after coming to government. It was established on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

The commissioner has worked closely with senior public servants to achieve the goals of that office and the purpose of the code that was put in place. I'm pleased to report to the House that in her most recent report, the commissioner writes: at its creation, the expectation was that the office of the ethics and integrity commissioner would become a trusted resource for a conflict of interest, ethics advice and direction.

At the three year mark, she says: I believe it is fair to say that this goal is being achieved.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** It's pretty hard to believe that the goal has been achieved if the Premiers own senior officials aren't abiding by the rules set out.

The ethics commissioner stated that she informed both the clerk and the Premier of these repeated refusals.

Again, to the Premier: Premier, which executive division employee repeatedly ignored the requests of your ethics commissioner and thus refusing to file their disclosures?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** I'm pleased to inform the House that the filing in question has been completed, is with the commissioner and I believe that achieves the purpose of the existence of the commissioner, of the code of conduct in question.

I don't believe it is the proper course for me to disclose the name of the individual, but I'm happy to confirm to the House that the filing has been completed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The Premier is correct in the fact that he did bring in the ethics commissioner and the reason he brought in the ethics commissioner was because of the many scandals of this government and now we find out that senior officials are simply ignoring the policy and his own ethics commissioner. Shame. That's shameful.

**Ignoring of policy and broken rules**

Premier: why are the rules set up after years of scandal to try and clean up this tired regime repeatedly ignored and broken by senior officials and cabinet ministers?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Any requirements or responsibilities the Cabinet ministers have in this regard would be looked after by the commissioner of ethics.

To my knowledge, I don't believe the Leader of the Opposition has any grounds for making that comment and I think it's most regrettable – although it's not the first instance that we've seen from the opposition to be loading up their preambles to their questions with false accusations.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Answer the questions that's all we ask. Follow the rules and answer the question.

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

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

That's quite an accusation from a guy who had to bring in an ethics commissioner to fix up all the stealing that was going on over there.

This summer the government flooded the airwaves with a campaign called: maybe you should come home – offering to cover a one-way plane ticket to Prince Edward Island.

### **Cost of campaign to Island taxpayers**

Question to the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning: How much did that promotion cost Island tax payers?

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

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

I thank the hon. member for the question and that was a very good promotion and we had, I think, there was approximately seven people that contacted us and there was over 200 contacted Workforce PEI.

It was a very wonderful promotion to show people what we have here on Prince Edward Island and how –

**Mr. Fox:** How much?

**Mr. Gallant:** – the Island has transformed since they left maybe 10 or 15 years ago.

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

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

Well I heard that 80% of the 200 were calling to complain about it.

I recently attended a seminar that the Eastern Chamber of Commerce put on and they had a panel speak and they talked about the extreme labor shortages that they were facing here on Prince Edward Island.

### **Skilled trades' people returning to PEI**

Not one single person mentioned this campaign, either positively or negatively.

Question to the minister: How many skilled trades' people were successfully attracted home because of your campaign?

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

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

Our department is always trying to work with employers to help them with labour shortages and with skilled workers and I must say, this was a very successful campaign in contrary to –

**Mr. Fox:** How many?

**Mr. Gallant:** – what maybe the member opposite might say. There is approximately \$40,000 spent on this and it was money well spent and it created a buzz right across the province and right across the country and there was many people interested and checked it out and were coming back to PEI.

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

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

I'm not sure if you could do a nation-wide penetration with \$40,000 so I suspect you just put it for Islanders because you wanted them to believe you were doing something.

Funny thing is, when you go to the webpage – I wanted to know who won the contest – when I go to the webpage I get a: page not found and I'll table that later.

So, I can't even find out who won it.

### **Winner of contest and return to PEI**

Question to the minister: Who won the contest and did they decide to move home?

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

**Mr. Gallant:** The Employment Journey PEI puts out a newspaper on a monthly basis and they referenced a young couple that moved back to PEI where dreams come true and it's just phenomenal how wonderful this program was. If the member opposite wants to draw negative tones to it, so be it, but there was a contest and there was a winner

and we were very happy with the contest and how it went.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Myers:** Well I certainly know all my friends are still leaving, so thank heavens seven people reached out to this government because they had a hashtag and they thought they were cool.

It's funny to note that when the minister was trying to answer his question, the answer was in the Premier's book, he took the page out of his book and handed it back. So, the Premier doesn't even trust you with the answer.

One of the biggest road blocks of the housing crisis here on Prince Edward Island that this government has created is the availability of skilled labour i.e. you can't build buildings if there's nobody to build them.

#### **Measures to address housing crisis re: skilled trades' people**

Question to the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning: What specific measures is your department taking to recruit skilled trades people like carpenters, plumbers and electricians, back to the Island to help address the housing crisis?

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

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

Our department works very closely with the construction association and the truckers association and seafood association and –

**Mr. Fox:** They can't get workers.

**Mr. Gallant:** – the construction association came to us a year and a half ago and informed us there was going to be a shortage. We helped them and we have set in programs and there's been about 300 people last summer and another 100 or so enter the construction industry. So, I mean,

to the members question: there's all kinds of very positive things happening in the industries and might I add, our unemployment rate was 7.2% last month – that was the lowest since we started keeping records in 1976.

**Ms. Casey:** Nice.

**Mr. Gallant:** There's more people working on PEI than there ever has been and we're doing a lot of good positive things and people are seeing the advantages here on PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

So, to all those people that are waiting to have a house built, or to have renovations done on your house, or any of those businesses out there that are trying to expand and can't find anybody to do the work, or want to build a new building to house their employees in – this government's answer is: hey, lots more people are working! That's the point.

The point is, there is nobody to do the jobs – there is nobody here to do the jobs. Call a plumber today, and if your pipes are leaking, your house will be flooded before you find somebody because there just isn't anybody to come and do it. I don't know why this government doesn't understand that and why the minister chooses just to pick out answers out of his book there or read out of a newspaper, instead of answering with real answers.

Islanders deserve to have real answers, not read answers out of your briefing book that some staff made up for you.

#### **Tax incentives to fill vacancies in skilled trades**

What tax incentives are you creating to help attract – or help these employers fill their vacancies in skilled trades here on Prince Edward Island?

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

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

You know it's great as I said earlier, you know, for the member opposite to make kind of comments and accusations. We have –

**Mr. Fox:** They're true.

**Mr. Myers:** They're not accusations.

**Mr. Fox:** They're true.

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct) build a house.

**Mr. Gallant:** – helped employers right across this province. Our department has helped – well I'll tell you –

**Mr. Myers:** There's (Indistinct) building permit.

**Mr. Gallant:** – I had to phone –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Gallant:** I had to phone a plumber Saturday morning, and he was on the house, at the site in half an hour. So don't tell me you can't get people –

**Mr. Myers:** That's what happens when you're an important Liberal cabinet minister.

**Mr. Gallant:** – if you've got leaky water or something. Yes, we are having –

**Mr. LaVie:** I've been waiting for my plumber for six weeks.

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

**Mr. Myers:** I've been waiting for over six weeks, too. I guess we're not as important as you.

**Speaker:** Next question.

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

So it seems like this government relies heavily on gimmicks to attract skilled workers to Prince Edward Island, rather than lower taxes and better wages here in Prince Edward Island. Two years ago, this government was in Alberta handing out beer and scarves – beer and scarves. This summer, they're handing away a plane ticket to Prince Edward Island – that's their

gimmick this summer. Who knows what's next.

### **Attracting skilled workers back to PEI**

Question to the minister: When will this government move beyond gimmicks and questionable marketing campaigns to attract skilled workers back here to Prince Edward Island to address the labour shortage that we have?

**An Hon. Member:** That's right.

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

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

I'd just like to inform the members opposite that over the last two years, there were 7,000 full-time jobs created on Prince Edward Island. That's a testament to our business community and the economic boom here on PEI.

Yes, I will admit to this House that, yes, there is issues and people can't get things built when they want to be. We are working at that. I mean, the contractors can only do so much with the people they have –

**Mr. Trivers:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Gallant:** – and we will continue to help our workforce build on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

### **Length of time to receive building permits**

A question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: How long does it take for someone to get a building permit from your department?

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the former minister has said, the province is on a tear and the economic development going on in the Province of Prince Edward Island is phenomenal. We are leading the country when it comes to –

**Mr. LaVie:** Do you know what a tear is?

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. R. Brown:** – development here. It's a testament to the revenue that is coming in –

**Mr. Fox:** One week? Two weeks?

**Mr. R. Brown:** – a testament to the amount of people that are working. It should take two to four weeks to get a permit issued. I agree, there are issues with it, but we are working on those issues.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** Thank you, minister.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

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

We've been hearing from a lot of builders and Islanders that are frustrated with long and costly delays and it's obvious that you've been hearing from them as well, and the delays in getting these building permits approved. These delays hurt our economy and are an obstacle to Islanders who are taking real action to help solve this housing crisis.

Question to the minister: Would it surprise you to learn that it takes months – not weeks, not days – but months to get a building permit from your department?

**Mr. Fox:** That's right.

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd have to agree with the hon. member. But you have to understand, these are building permits; we want to make sure that the building permit is properly filled out and that the construction is going to be proper. We want top quality housing built here, and that's one of the reasons the Province of

Prince Edward Island is adopting a national building code. This protects house owners. We are working on the issues. I said: there is a boom going here on Prince Edward Island. Sometimes we have to take our due diligence to make sure that the permit is proper.

There are a lot of subdivisions going up. We want to make sure that a permit isn't issued –

**Mr. Fox:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. R. Brown:** – that affects another property owner. We are running out of land for development in some areas and we have to do our due diligence to make sure that we don't destroy something that's already being done good.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

So the problem is that these delays are causing builders and developers to lose crucial time during building season.

#### **Addressing issue of backlog in permit applications**

Question to the minister: What is your department doing to address this growing backlog in permit applications?

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

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We had these discussions in the last sitting of the House. As I said at that time, we are looking for planning officers. We went out this summer, we advertised for planning officers – no one came with the price we had on the table. We increase the salary range for planning officers –

**Mr. Myers:** That was the point of my question.

**Mr. R. Brown:** – we went back to the market place, we had a few applications, we interviewed some people, we asked them to come to Prince Edward Island. But they're – planning is a big, important issue across this country. Planners are in big demand –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. R. Brown:** – in this country. The economy is booming everywhere in Canada. We are working on it; we have reorganized the department in the last couple of weeks to address some of these concerns. As of today, we offered somebody a job to come for the planning; they had another job somewhere else. It is a very competitive job –

**Mr. LaVie:** I got lots. I got lots.

**Mr. R. Brown:** – we're working on it, and we're going to solve it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

That's kind of funny to hear that because in the opposition office, we looked and looked, and we couldn't find all these job postings that are out there looking for people to help staff the office to improve the time to get the building permits.

It is really clear that staff is having trouble processing these large volumes. This takes a toll on the staff that is there.

Question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: Are you not concerned that this backlog in permitting is going to leave distress and burnout for the existing staff you have?

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the member for the question. I agree. The staff in the department is working overtime. They are working extremely hard; they are trying to get

through the processes. We have a set of processes in place. I want to commend the staff of the department. They are doing a tremendous job in this economic boom, we're trying to help the staff by getting more staff, but as I said, we're in a very competitive market. We are working with the staff

But make one thing clear – we're not going to lower our standards when it comes to building permits. We're not going to lower our standards when it comes to development. We have to have proper development in proper locations and properly done. I have seen too many times where development permits have been rushed, and at the end of the day, they cause more troubles than they solve. I will not lower the standards.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** Thank you, minister.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

**Mr. Trivers:** So this is an excuse we're hearing from this government in many areas. They can't recruit positions, they can't recruit land planners, they can't get anyone to come back to the Island – they're offering free plane tickets.

#### **Filling of position in building permit office**

A question for the minister: Is it because of your mismanagement that you can't get anyone to come and work here and fill your positions?

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

You know, the opposition has a rough time getting it. Since Justin Trudeau has come to power, the economy of Canada is booming. This is an issue right across our country. We are one of the best countries in the world, and people want to come to this country. Prince Edward Island's population strategy is working. We are getting a tremendous amount of people coming here to Prince Edward Island –

**Mr. LaVie:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. R. Brown:** – is it anybody's fault? No, it's no one's fault. Things are going great, we got to catch up and we're working on catching up to make sure that development is done in Prince Edward Island, but in a proper and a good way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

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

Incoming permit applications are stacking up by the dozens. Existing permit applications are taking months to get approved. Extra staff resources aren't being made available to handle the volume. The efforts that this government is taking to help on the staffing side obviously aren't working.

So, Islanders are trying to fix the problems, like the housing crisis here on this Island; the problems that have been created by this government's mismanagement. Ironically, government is standing in their way, by not issuing building permits.

### **Addressing housing crisis**

So a question to the minister: What are you going to do to support local builders and developers to help them overcome your lack of planning and address our housing crisis?

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the member for the question, and it's good that we're having this debate.

We have to understand Prince Edward Island is a tremendous success story here. We've never had so much growth here in Prince Edward Island since Prince Edward Island has begun. The growth is phenomenal here on Prince Edward Island. People want to come to Canada and want to Prince Edward Island. –

**Mr. Trivers:** Beer, scarves, free plane tickets – that's not a plan (Indistinct)

**Mr. R. Brown:** – our efforts are working.

As the former minister of workforce said: 7,000 jobs have been created. These are new families wanting new homes. Senior citizens want to downsize.

**Mr. LaVie:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. R. Brown:** Development is great. We are, maybe, one of the most successful governments in Prince Edward Island's history when it comes to creating jobs, creating development, and growing the economy.

Do we have to catch up to it? Yes, we do and we will be catching up to it.

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

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

I want to follow up on questions my colleague from Charlottetown-Parkdale asked last week about shelter rates for Islanders on social assistance.

The poverty action plan will increase the shelter rates for Islanders on social assistance by 6% in the next few weeks – and that's fantastic – in addition to the 3% increase that took effect in July earlier this year.

### **Shelter rates for family of four on social assistance**

Question for the Minister of Family and Human Services: Taking into account these increases, where will the shelter rate be for a family of four on social assistance?

**Ms. Biggar:** (Indistinct) finally got your facts (Indistinct)

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

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

I went back to my office after our little exchange last week and did a little bit of fact

checking myself. In fact, compared to other provinces across Canada when it comes to social assistance allowance, which includes shelter, which includes personal, which includes personal comfort allowance, we are above middle of the pack.

When it comes to Atlantic Canada, we are second only to Newfoundland. So we are above Nova Scotia, and we are above New Brunswick when it comes to all of those things. That's not even taking into consideration all of the other initiatives that we have done across government and across community to help those people on social assistance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

We're talking here specifically about shelter rates for social assistance, and I understand it's part of a bigger basket of things that are available, but we're talking specifically about shelter rates.

The answer to the question is \$933. That's the rate for a family of four on social assistance, and that's meant to include heat and light. The current average PEI market rate for a three-bedroom apartment is \$1,250, and that often does not include heat and light.

A question to the same minister: Do you think that the shelter rate for a family of four on social assistance is sufficient?

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

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

We do admit that there are housing challenges right now, and that's why we have been working hard to implement the first ever housing action plan Prince Edward Island has ever seen with record amounts of investments.

We have been rolling out rent supplements to social assistance clients and to the public in general. We are going above shelter rates

on a as is basis. As we take in clients and we assess their needs, if they are needed to go above the shelter rate we have been doing that and we will continue to do that, as well as providing a suite of other services to make sure that Islanders do belong and they do thrive on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

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

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you.

Again, I'd like to remind the minister we're talking about shelter rates for people on social assistance. People on social assistance are not eligible for rent supplements. That's an entirely different program.

With a minimum of a \$317 discrepancy between the market rent and the shelter rate provided by this government, it's clearly not enough.

### **Social assistance clients not eligible for rent supplements**

Question to the minister: How and when is your government going to close this gap?

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

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

Maybe the hon. member didn't hear my last answer. I said that yes, we are rolling out rent supplements and we are extending them to social assistance clients.

We also, as our clients approach us and we assess them, if they cannot find housing within that rent, we are working with them on a case-by-case initiative to make sure that we are meeting their needs and that they are not incurring any additional expenses.

This in addition, again, to the increases that we made to our asset allowance, our wage exemptions, our \$250 child inclusion allowance. We have to look at this as a government as a whole and a whole of community and we cannot focus on one program, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

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

The poverty action plan provided 275 rental subsidies to help Islanders struggling with housing and this has been increased to 490 subsidies this year. This subsidy was available to those already in housing who were paying more than the recommended 25% of their net income to housing costs.

### **Rent subsidies and wait lists for units**

Question for the Minister of Family and Human Services: How many applicants were there for the rental subsidy and what is the average wait time to get a unit?

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

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

We don't have an average wait time, because we deal with clients as they come in the door, as the greatest need. So the client, who has the greatest need when they present themselves to us, will get the rent supplement or will get the unit, or somebody that might have been there for quite some time.

The amount of rent supplements that we have, we have doubled it to actually 500. We have also committed to \$17 million plus an additional \$30 million in conjunction with last year's budget and with the further announcements that my colleague, the Minister of Finance, made a couple of weeks ago. That is a huge investment in housing over the next few years, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

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

So speaking about rental subsidies, there were over 13,000 applicants for the 490 subsidies available. To quote the Director of Housing Services, Sonya Cobb: There are always people waiting.

### **Determining who gets a subsidy**

So minister: How do you determine who gets a subsidy and what do you say to the people who don't?

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

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

When we talk about our applicant list, yes there is a large number of people on it, but not everyone on that applicant list is ready to move. We have offered subsidies to people who are not ready to move, and they say: You know what? Skip over me and go to the next people.

We have been drilling down into our applicant list, and we have come up with a figure of 1% of that applicant list are actually people who are in dire need today. We are able to act and we have been acting and we continue to act to make sure that those most in need are getting the services and supports that they need.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### **Lack of housing re: rent supplements**

**Ms. Bell:** Given that the rental subsidy does not actually create new apartments, could the minister explain how a rental subsidy helps Islanders in housing need if there are no apartments available to rent today?

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

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

Again, the fact is the applicant list does not mean that people are homeless. The majority – and I would say that would be 99% of those people who are on that applicant list, are people that are in safe, appropriate housing.

So, they are not homeless. They have homes in their communities that they are living in. It is just that it is more than the 25% of their income, and that is why they are on the list.

So those rent supplements will be helping those people, because they do not necessarily want to leave their communities and the homes that they're in to move to another unit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

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

I was very proud of the results of this government's 17-18 budget.

Last week I heard some comments about our economy from the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale in the House that, quite frankly, took me by surprise. Over the weekend, I received a lot of questions about some comments made by the hon. member, so I did a review of Hansard to confirm the comments.

My questions today are for the Minister of Finance, in hopes we can clear the air in some of these surprising comments.

The Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale states, as per Hansard: We do not have an increase in the expenditures in pressure places like health care, housing and education.

**Mr. LaVie:** (Indistinct) I thought they got rid of motions.

**Mr. MacKay:** (Indistinct) 25 seconds.

### Accuracy of province's surplus

**Mr. Roach:** Minister, what the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale is saying about our government revenue being up, our expenditures being down, is this accurate?

**An Hon. Member:** That's a good question.

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

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

I think absolutely, we're increasing expenditures and we're prioritized on health

care, family and human services. Obviously, you just heard some of the initiatives from the minister, and education. Health is up \$26.2 million, family and human services is up \$30 million and education is up \$10.6.

The government's priority areas represent about 60% of our overall expenditures and for anybody that saw the programs and the announcements that we've been making just in the past couple of months, would be relevant to –

**Mr. Myers:** Three days. You made like 20 in three days.

**Mr. MacDonald:** – seeing the increases in our expenditures –

**Mr. R. Brown:** Liberal times are good times.

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacDonald:** – over our revenue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, your first supplementary question.

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

**Mr. Fox:** No preamble.

**Mr. Roach:** Minister, we have a large number of companies and corporations and hard-working individuals that work day in and day out across this province and they are the people who have made our revenues as good as they are.

**Mr. Fox:** No preamble.

**Mr. Roach:** So, the member also called a \$75 million surplus you announced, supported by the independent Auditor General, funny money.

**An Hon. Member:** Funny money.

**Mr. Roach:** I remember how tough it was when I was minister of finance, but I was always proud of the work that we did.

**Province's \$75 million surplus**

Can you please explain to the hon. member, this House, and all Islanders just exactly how our province got to this positive result of having a \$75 million surplus?

**Mr. Myers:** She told you: Funny money.

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

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

I just want to add to that as well.

Our economy since –

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. R. Brown:** Sorry.

**Speaker:** Hon. members, let's have a little bit of respect; just a little bit of respect. I mean, this is got – I know there are members of the opposition; you will not listen to the answers. I don't mind the fact that you don't care about the answers, but at least listen to them anyway.

When somebody is speaking – when somebody is trying to answer a question, be quiet. For God's sake, listen to the answer anyway.

Go ahead, hon. Minister of Finance.

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

Our surplus is nothing for anybody in Prince Edward Island to be ashamed about or apologize to. I think it's absolutely tremendous that it's on the back of the small businesses and Islanders. They deserve all the credit.

Our economy since 2014 has grown by \$1 billion and the corporate sector with corporate income tax up \$18.2 million; personal income for Islanders is up \$31.5 million; and the goods being purchased and consumed through sales tax are up \$65 million. That's why that we continue to reduce taxes in Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, your second supplementary.

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

Minister, I guess it's unfortunate that members across the floor seem to think that saying \$75 million of funny money, that's the hard-earned and hard-worked hours of every Islander across this province.

**Mr. LaVie:** Cooked the books.

**Mr. Roach:** I hope you can go home and tell them you think that their hard work is funny money.

**Mr. MacKay:** Don't forget the (Indistinct)

**Mr. Roach:** Minister –

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Roach:** – the member from the Third Party also questioned if our government truly recognize the value of all Islanders.

**Surplus and support to vulnerable Islanders**

With our strong fiscal position being criticized by the Third Party and now by the opposition, how will this new surplus support Islanders, especially those who are most vulnerable?

**Mr. R. Brown:** Good.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance.

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

It's irrelevant that some of the announcements that we've made in the past in regards to corporation income tax and our personal tax exemption, and also one that I think plays a significant role is the reduction in electricity.

But also, we're starting to make priority investments in housing, which we've talked about earlier today; new schools for Stratford and Sherwood; 230 new rent supplements, which we just finished talking about; 175 new housing units and 20 new transitional housing units, which a tender

will go out next week on the demolition of the site that's being prepared for that.

So, \$30.9 million in capital improvements in health care, which is a big one, which many people are concerned with, and we'll continue to make those investments.

The hon. minister of health has just announced additional doctors in the past two days.

So, we're going in the right direction and we think it's a tremendous success for Prince Edward Island to have a surplus and we'll continue to worry about our future and those people that are coming behind us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Dumville:** Mr. Speaker, I'll be directing my question to the hon. Minister of Communities, Land and Environment and not the agriculture minister, as this question has an environmental aspect.

Minister, bale wrapping has become a major method of silage storage in this province.

### **Disposal of agricultural plastics**

Is agricultural plastic burned or buried in landfills?

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some of it's burned and some of it's buried. But, I want to thank the member for that question. I want to thank the Member from Montague-Kilmuir who introduced the plastic bag – the single-use plastic bag ban, the first in the world and this province is working towards implementing that.

We are working with our agriculture community and other organizations to see what we can do with the plastic.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Dumville:** Minister, I have been informed that enersave PEI, I'm not sure if that's the exact same today, it might have changed names, will not take the used plastic if it is dirty or has netting attached.

Is this a concern?

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Mr. Speaker, we're working with the industry.

We have a meeting with the federal minister on Friday, a tele-conference, and one of the issues on that tele-conference with the national minister is plastics and the detrimental effect it has on our environment.

I must say, the other ministers across the country are quite impressed by this Legislature for passing a bill that a lot of them really don't have the stomach to do. We are taking a leadership role here and we should be proud of it.

We will be working with the federal government, hopefully on going to other plastics and that in particular. There is a company in Halifax that can recycle plastic back into oil, diesel oil, and we are in discussions with that company to see what they can do for Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Dumville:** Minister, grade eight and nine students in Russell, Ontario, have patented an eco-friendly, biodegradable product called Yay Bale that can be shredded and left on the field or fed to livestock.

### **New technologies for disposal of agricultural plastics**

Minister, has new more environmentally friendly technology been introduced since

bale wrapping has been implemented in our province?

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I want to thank the minister of economic development. There are some recruiting aspects going right now on bringing a company here to Prince Edward Island that is making plastic bags, not from petroleum products, but from starch, and those are recyclable and there are negotiations – he may get mad at me on this, but negotiations are going very well there.

I think with our leadership in passing the first plastic bag ban in the world, companies now are looking here on Prince Edward Island nationally a lot. It's a phenomenal piece of legislation that has been passed in this Legislature, and companies now are looking to PEI with their innovative ideas because they say: That's a government that has a head on their shoulders and we want to work with a good government. And they will work with (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

**Mr. LaVie:** Mr. Speaker, the building permit issue just isn't an issue here in Charlottetown. Up in Kings County we have building permits – 30 building permits sitting in an office here in Charlottetown.

### **Building permit delays**

My question is to the minister of communities, land and permits: How are these delays helping develop our rural communities?

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** It's great to hear, Mr. Speaker, that not only Charlottetown is in a boom, but all of Prince Edward Island and that's because of this good government working hard with the business community of Prince Edward Island.

I also want to take – and thank our staff at the department. They are working extremely

hard. I know I get calls every day from people from across Prince Edward Island looking for their permits.

We will be meeting with the contractors over the winter and developers over the winter. In order to help them to say: here's how you fill a permit in properly and here's how you get it fast-tracked or a better process in place.

So we'll be working with the developers and the construction people over the winter to speed up the process.

But again, the things are so booming here on Prince Edward Island, we have some work to do and we're willing to do that work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

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

The minister mentioned earlier in Question Period where they couldn't find anybody to fill the development officer position. I find that very very difficult to believe when there is so many people across PEI looking for work.

They could have got one out of the many thousands that are looking for work. I'll get them a position, personally, if they're looking for a position.

### **Vacant position at Access PEI in Souris**

My question is to the minister of communities, land and permits: Did you know that the development officer position at Access PEI in Souris is vacant?

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Yes and that's one of the reasons we're out looking for people to fill those positions. The member from Georgetown said earlier: we're having a difficult time finding carpenters and plumbers, that's a result of a successful province.

We are working on it, we are working hard on it –

**Mr. Myers:** Give them a free plane ticket.

**Mr. R. Brown:** We have been contacting development officers all over the country trying to lure them here, but the demand is so high we're having a difficult time.

We will be improving our processes over the winter. We reorganized the department a bit and I can guarantee that things will be getting better in the near future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

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

I don't know where this minister was for the last six months because I was at the access building in Souris at my office when his staff came up and took the development officer government rig back to Charlottetown. The last I seen it it was going across LaVie bridge with the tail lights on.

**Mr. Myers:** Oh, no.

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. LaVie:** Question to the minister of communities, lands and permits: Do you plan to fill the development officer position in Eastern Kings that is vacant at the access building in Souris?

**Mr. Myers:** Good question.

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A definite yes.

**Speaker:** Final question for the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

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

What this minister did, he took the position and moved them into another department of government which left that development officer vacant.

When he shifted that person into another position you'd think he would have had

somebody at that time to fill the officer position; but no, they didn't have anybody.

Six months, 30 permits sitting right here in the Charlottetown office and people in Eastern Kings waiting to build; waiting to build.

### **Building permit delays and development**

My question to the minister of communities, lands and permits: How are these delays helping develop rural communities?

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

**Mr. R. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Maybe I will have a course over the winter for all the MLA's here in the Legislature. I know you are all getting calls, I know that people are asking for their permits, I know they want permits right away but we have a set of standards we have to abide to, we will abide by those set of standards.

I've seen too many times where developments are rushed and they cause more troubles than they solve.

**Mr. LaVie:** Rushed? Six months?

**Mr. R. Brown:** So we will be following a set of criteria here and I will work with each and every member in this House in order to ensure that building permits get issued here across Prince Edward Island.

There's no doubt this is one of the most successful governments here on Prince Edward Island –

**Mr. LaVie:** Fake news.

**Mr. R. Brown:** – surplus budgets –

**Mr. LaVie:** Fake news.

**Mr. R. Brown:** All kinds of jobs, lower taxes, lower power rates –

**Mr. Myers:** You set aside (Indistinct)

**Mr. R. Brown:** This is the Shangri-La of all provinces here on Prince Edward Island.

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. R. Brown:** If I lived anywhere else in Canada, I'd want to come back to Prince Edward Island because it's the greatest place in Canada – Canada's the greatest place in the country.

Thank you very much.

[End of Question Period]