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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 29 NOVEMBER 2018

Responses to Questions Take as Notice

The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy and the Status of Women.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member from Rustico-Emerald asked, in regard to voluntary IDs. Presently, the voluntary ID is for five years. I would like to report that seniors aged 65+, there are 1,125 that hold those voluntary IDs, and effective January 1st, anyone 65+ will have those voluntary IDs provided free of charge by this government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trivers: Great Opposition.

Mr. LaVie: 60 ... 60.

Mr. Trivers: That's excellent, thank you minister.

Ms. Biggar: Told you.

Mr. Trivers: We know that was the real question.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Well I think there is one member over here trying to advocate for 60 to be the new 65.

For years this government has treated immigration programs like an ATM machine. According to the most recent Public Accounts documents, government pocketed close to \$18 million last year alone in PNP deposit forfeits.

PNP deposit forfeits

Question to the immigration minister: Minister, shouldn't such a large amount of PNP deposit forfeits have told you that something was amiss in how the program was being run?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I've said in this House before, we continue to make improvements in our immigration program and our retention rates continue to go higher and higher every year. But the entrepreneur stream was not performing to the satisfaction of Islanders, not performing to the satisfaction of this government, so I closed it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I think it's CBSA that shamed you into closing it. According to the Public Accounts since 2015, this government pocketed close to \$41 million in PNP forfeited deposits. Question to the immigration minister: \$41 million is a lot of money, why wasn't this trend flagged sooner by your department?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again as I've said, we continue to work hard to increase our retention rates, and we know that having newcomers coming here to PEI is more valuable than it is to have any default at escrow.

We changed the program so we could really understand the intent of those that are coming here to PEI, and we're very happy to have done that and we continue to have great success with that program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mismanagement of immigration programs

Since 2008, this government has pocketed \$120 million dollars in PNP deposit forfeits. Question to the immigration minister: Your government was profiting from the mismanagement of immigration programs. Is that why your government has looked the other way for so long?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, we were making improvements to our program all the time; and one of those improvements is the community endorsement. So –

An Hon. Member: That's a good one.

Mr. Palmer: – immigrants can move to communities through PEI, they're endorsed by the communities, and I know they're thrilled to have them in their communities. I think we should all be thrilled to have them here in PEI, because this government certainly is.

Mr. R. Brown: Right on, right on.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This fall after months, and really, years of urging from the official opposition, government finally did a program review of its business and entrepreneur streams in the provincial nominee program.

Feedback/review from PNP clients

Question to the immigration minister: Why wasn't there any feedback or input in this program review from actual PNP clients?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We did do a great review on our program and we implemented quite a number of those recommendations. One of those recommendations was to close the entrepreneur stream and replace that with a work permit that really helped us understand

the intent of folks that are coming to PEI and we continue to get great response from people applying to that program.

Thank you.

Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, it doesn't make it so; you say it was a great review. It's surprising that government didn't want to hear from actual people who are using this program, to hear their perspective.

Consultations of PNP review

Question to the immigration minister: Were the intermediaries and agents who deliver the program consulted for your PNP review?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, we consulted with as many people as we could to really understand what was happening in the program and to find out how we could make improvements to that. We did a scan across Canada to get a better understanding of how programs were being used there, and we were able to take the best of those – the information that we have from right across Canada and apply it here in PEI.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, from that answer, I guess your answer would be no, we didn't consult with the agents or the intermediaries. They're heavily involved in the delivery of that program, minister.

Question to the immigration minister again: Were Island communities and municipalities consulted as part of the review?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I met with a number of communities, myself. I went around the Island and visited a number of communities and we talked about our community endorsement piece of the program, and they were all very happy with it. There were a couple of wrinkles for us to iron out at the beginning, to make sure that people were coming with the proper information, but we worked through that. Those communities are very happy to continue the program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. LaVie: You're losing your clappers.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's not what we're hearing on this side of the House. Communities needed to play a larger role in this. The settlement of newcomers to ensure that rural communities, especially, grow and remain vibrant is part of your government's responsibility.

Building of communities re: immigration

How do we build more vibrant communities through immigration if their perspective isn't being considered?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will make a note to myself that I will invite these members with me the next time I go to tour their communities to talk to the CAOs of their communities that are involved in this program, because it sounds to me like they haven't been talking to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: We only have one CAO now; you took all our CAOs away.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess you picked and chose which communities you were going to consult with. That's not what I'm hearing.

The Newcomers Association – another group that needs to be an integral part of the PNP stream and who comes in on that.

Newcomers Association and review

Question to the immigration minister: Was the Newcomers Association consulted as part of the review?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I also just toured the Newcomers Association, and they were very excited to continue with the program because they know that brings lots of workers here to PEI. 85% of the program helps us fill critical gaps in our workforce and it helps us find people that can help to drive trucks, to work in convenience stores, that will work in retail – that are working in many aspects of this community. They are a great addition.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I was asking is: Did you consult with them about the review? Not whether you went to visit them and tell them how great everything is.

Immigration growth has had a disruptive affect on our local housing market, particularly in Charlottetown and surrounding communities.

Consultation with housing advocates re: PNP review

Question to the immigration minister: what housing advocates or organizations, if any, were consulted as part of your PNP review?

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our economy continues to boom. We hear that day after day here in the House, and we see that on the street. We're working very hard –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – to try to keep pace –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – with the economy. The economy is doing well, and I don't think any issues that we have with housing here can be blamed on the immigration program. As much as these folks over here would like to blame it on them, I don't think that's what it is. We continue to work hard, to grow our economy here on PEI and we're working really hard to help with the housing aspect.

Thank you.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) Donald Trump.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, we're not blaming the immigrants –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: Well yes, you are.

Ms. Compton: – what I'm asking you, minister, is have you consulted with housing organizations to see how that's affecting what is going on with our housing shortage? Totally different.

Immigration growth has also had a disruptive effect on school systems with new students contributing to overcrowding and class size and composition challenges. All challenges that education is facing.

Consultation with school system re: PNP review

Question to the immigration minister: How was the school system consulted for its perspective as part of your PNP review? How are they consulted?

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

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) build a wall.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Surely before my time in this chair, I recall that we made a significant investment with the department of education into additional supports here in Charlottetown and throughout PEI so that we could better serve everyone involved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: That money came from the (Indistinct)

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well from the answers I'm getting from across the floor from the hon. member, clients weren't consulted, agents and intermediaries weren't consulted, municipalities weren't consulted, community groups and other stakeholders weren't consulted, housing groups weren't consulted and the school system wasn't consulted.

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Consultations of PNP review (further)

Ms. Compton: Question to the immigration minister: How comprehensive of a review of the PNP program happened when you excluded all of these groups?

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

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

Mr. Palmer: We had lots of input into our review. We did a jurisdictional scan across Canada, because the intent of this program is to continue to grow our economy, to grow our workforce, to grow our culture. We looked at best practices across Canada to see how those were working, and we brought the best of those back here to PEI to implement them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know the minister must be tired of answering that same answer over and over again, so I'll let him turn to a different page in his book.

This Friday, the first of two residency fraud cases involving approved clients of this government begins. Under the program rules the province is responsible for the oversight of the applicants in regards to residency fraud.

Residency fraud cases of approved clients

Question to the minister: Why did you fail to pick up what border services did pick up that led to these two court cases?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We do follow folks that come through our immigration program and at some point when they get past a certain point it becomes a federal responsibility. The federal government is working and if they need any information, we're happy to provide it to them. We're looking forward to getting to the bottom of this issue and if there is – and we'll have a good outcome with this.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the outcome so far is a court case – an embarrassment to this province. But if that's a good outcome for this government and this minister, then so be it.

Six hundred approved clients claimed residency in the Sherwood Motel, should have been actually caught by your own oversight.

Question to the minister: How many of these 600 cases occurred in the years 2014, 2015, 2016 or 2017?

Mr. LaVie: Good question.

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

Mr. Palmer: We continue to work with border services to supply all information that they need. They have a separate database than our database, so we continue to exchange information back and forth on this very important case. We're happy to get to the bottom of this as quickly as we can, and do everything we can to support this investigation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So again like yesterday, it was a very simple question I asked. How many of the 600 occurred in any of the four years, and I didn't get any answer – disappointingly.

So I will move onto the next question.

We found out yesterday that border services provided a courtesy briefing to government prior to publicly announcing the charges. On page 20 of the FOIPP emails that I tabled yesterday, the CEO of IIDI directly sent the Premier's deputy a document outlining the program and told the Premier's office that 87 applicants had been approved so far that year. The Premier's deputy responded by saying *The Guardian* had reported 93 had been approved in two months of that year alone.

Comparison of applicant numbers

Question to the minister: Why would a senior staff state one number, and the media and the Premier's deputy state a different number?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These charges are very serious and we need to make sure we get the proper information. So we want to make sure that we go through all the data that we have and share that with border services. I think we should be very careful that we don't try to jump out ahead of this.

Let's let the court proceeding do what they need to do. We're there to support anything we can do to make sure that folks that are coming here to PEI will respect our rules and follow our rules, and that's what they've been doing.

Thank you.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So yeah, it's very serious and I guess that's the whole reason that I'm asking questions today, that I asked questions yesterday, that I asked questions the whole month of May about this exact file.

Also been told it's very serious every one of those instances and it seems to be a stock line, and I suggest maybe the minister gets another briefing from Mary on this and gets a little more up to speed or maybe Mary can give him a different line to use tomorrow when we ask the same questions.

Yesterday also revealed that when the local media contacted the government asking the minister to answer questions, they were told he wasn't available. Rather, it was the Premier's personal deputy, the departmental deputy, the Premier's communication director, executive council senior comms officer, the departmental senior comms officers who crafted the lines for the CEO of IIDI.

CEO of IIDI answering questions

Question to the minister: Can you explain why they avoided using you to answer the questions, and they took all of those people to direct to the CEO of IIDI how he should answer the question?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Maybe if my friend across the way listened to his own question, he would recognize that I was unavailable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. R. Brown: That means he's not available.

Ms. Biggar: He's not there.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) hiding.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's pleasant to see the Premier chuckling so heartily about an issue that's so important, an issue that's embarrassing us down at the courthouse here right now. An issue that he said he was going to cleanup when he sat with Bruce Rainnie in February of 2015 and said: not under my watch.

This Premier today laughing about the whole thing, laughing about the embarrassment that he has brought to this province.

I'm going to ask the minister again: Why minister, during this whole thing, because you weren't unavailable the whole time because you were here every single day, why did they avoid letting you answer any single question and instead used the CEO of IIDI?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It seems our friends can't take yes for an answer. In my whole time here, all I've been hearing is close the program, close the program. Well it wasn't meeting the needs of Islanders; it wasn't meeting the expectations of this government, so I closed the program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Everyone knows that the federal government closed the program. They know that you didn't have anything to do with it. You guys were draining the program and taking all of the money and spending it wildly is what you guys were doing. The federal government stepped in and said: we're closing the program because we're sick of you embarrassing us up here in Ottawa.

One of the spin doctors first sought approval from the Premier's deputy and the Premier's comms director before looping in the departmental deputy minister. In this email, the comms officer stated they were being extra cautious on this file.

Federal government closing of PNP program

Question to the minister: When did you become aware that extra cautious seemed to be code for cutting out your deputy and you from the loop on this scandal?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the spin doctor on this side of the room seems to be doing a great job over there talking about 15% of this program. The remainder of the program fills important labour gaps here in PEI, which nobody every wants to talk about over there. That helps businesses to grow, which no one on the other side seems to want to talk about. That continues to help grow our economy, and helps – for the first time in my life – our population got younger, and that was a result of our immigration as well.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So the minister said that he shut down the program, we know he didn't because the federal government did. He said it today, and I believe he said it yesterday as well. Back in the spring, he said no, no that program was closed down in 2009.

Actually, and I'll table it again today, in the speaking notes that Mary made for him last spring, it says directly in it that they eliminated that program in 2009.

Question to the minister: If that is the case – and back in the spring you were reading the notes that Mary gave you that said you closed it in 2009 – how can you say you closed it this year as well?

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

Mr. Palmer: I can take away here today and get a newspaper clipping if the member is looking for of when we closed our entrepreneur stream here in PEI because maybe he didn't see that part of it, but I thought we talked about it in the Legislature here, but I certainly will get the media advisory for him as well.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government spin doctors told the local media that if the province discovered any residency fraud, they would forward the information on to the federal government.

Fraud cases in PNP program and investigation

Question to the minister: Has this government ever found for themselves a single case of fraud in your PNP program since 2007, and if so, how many and have you sent them to the federal government for investigation?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are files that come to our department, we continue to investigate those, we'll look at them, we do our due diligence on those –

some of those we accept but some of those we don't.

So if we don't get all the information that we need or if we're not comfortable with it, if we don't understand the proper intent coming from those folks, we will reject those applications.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For the past few years Innovation PEI has invested \$250,000 through the Ignition Fund and **seed** capital spread across up to 10 Island start-up businesses.

I've previously raised concerns about how government measures the outcomes of the program, but today I want to focus on the lack of diversity within the program.

About 70% of grants in recent years have been awarded to businesses owned by men only. To add insult to injury, this year's recipients, only three of which had women co-owners, were announced during the first national gender equality week and the news release only mentioned the male owners.

Favouritism of Ignition Program

Question to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: Why does the Ignition Program so heavily favour men over women and what is the minister doing to correct this problem?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was at the event and I know there were a number of women that were co-owners of a number of those businesses. I don't have the exact details here with me, but I can get those and bring them back and I can also get the numbers on the applications as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Just to clarify, as I just mentioned: three of the company's had women co-owners who were not mentioned in the press releases.

The under representation of women in business is not a new problem, but the minister seems at a loss of what to do about it.

Luckily for him, the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women has a specific mandate to advance the quality and opportunity for women in all government policies, programs and services.

Improving outcomes of Ignition Program

Question to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: Can you tell me how many times you've met with the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women to discuss improving the outcomes of this program?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I meet with the minister quite often, we talk about a wide range of things and that's one of the things that's important to this government and to this minister, in particular, so we continue to make those improvements and recommendations and we try to move that as far ahead as we can, Mr. Speaker,

Thank you.

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

Ms. Bell: This year's equality report card from the Advisory Council on the Status of Women noted that there has been great progress within government and expanding the use of gender and diversity analysis.

Could the minister share with the House what changes he intends to introduce to this program as a result of performing a gender and diversity analysis.

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

Mr. Palmer: We're making changes to our programs right across government and we're doing that all the time.

We're continuing to evolve them with new information that's available to us, with studies that we do internally; we continue to make improvements because that's what we do in government.

We don't stand around and complain about things all day; we actually get some things done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During estimates in the spring session earlier this year, we heard for the first time about an exciting new program for Islanders with disabilities to provide a secure income and recognize their needs for financial security.

The new accessibility supports launched in July of this year and included the assured income program. The program does not appear anywhere online except in one government brochure.

We have been advised by staff in the department that the program policies are still in draft and they are considering our request for copies currently.

Meanwhile, there are no public guidelines on how much it provides, or for whom, or eligibility for the same.

Existence of assured income program

Question to the Minister of Family and Human Services: Does the assured income program actually exist currently?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, yes it does and it was well received by many of our clients who were formally with the Disability Support Program. It's been operational since July and the vision of the accessibility support is

more around social inclusion and economic participation for Islanders and giving those Islanders who do have disabilities back their dignity.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Bell: We look forward to receiving information about this program so we can also provide this information to constituents as they contact us.

In the meantime, we heard about a key recommendation in the Poverty Reduction Action Plan launched this fall about the secure income program, also for people with disabilities.

Question for the minister: Are the assured income program and the secure income program, the same thing?

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

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At the risk sounding crass, I would prefer if the hon. member just called my office directly if a client of hers has an issue or have a question. As the hon. member indicated when she was interviewed by CBC, her office is being flooded with phone calls about people with housing issues, but we've yet, like I said, to receive one telephone call.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Bell: So unfortunately, we didn't get an answer to the question but we are hearing that the calls that we get are the ones when the clients have been refused.

In the meantime, speaking about the secure income program, it is one of the key recommendations in the poverty action plan. Yet, at the press conference for the launch of that plan, we heard that the program would not come into effect until fall 2019.

Islanders with disabilities waiting for financial help

Question to the minister: Why are Islanders with disabilities having to wait another year for dedicated financial help from this government?

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

Ms. Mundy: Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that Islanders with disabilities are receiving support.

With the new accessibility support program they are now receiving single point of entry. They do not now have to find themselves going from worker to worker searching for information. It is a single point of entry and it is a client-centered program.

We include the individual, the individual's community, as well as the individual's family to create a case plan to support that individual.

To the hon. member's other question, the secure income and the assured income, are two different programs and we will continue to roll out the accessibility program, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

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

My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Farmers, perhaps more so than anyone, know how important protecting our environment is. They are so closely connected to our land and many have worked that land for decades and generations.

They have seen the changes in the land, the crop yields, the planting and harvest seasons. Unfortunately, too often farmers and negatively and unfairly associated with the affects of climate change.

I can tell you, I know farmers who are adopting some of the most progressive and innovative changes to help combat climate change.

Government's have been announcing a number of efficiency programs, which I think are fantastic, but they're almost entirely directed to households and some businesses.

Mr. LaVie: Question?

Efficiency programs for farmers

Mr. McIsaac: Question for the minister's department: Could they introduce some efficiency programs geared directly to farmers so that they have the same opportunities as other Islanders to receive this financial help.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: The hon. member is indeed, correct, that the farming community certainly understands the impacts of climate change, we've seen it this fall, we've seen it in the spring and they, more than any other organization, is really trying to address those issues.

In fact, I am happy to say that we do have a program that helps farmers adapt to become more friendly with clean technologies and things of that nature and it's actually called a PEI clean technology program and we offer up to 30% funding up to \$10,000 per farm or agri-processor that has an environmental farm plan, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I think the federal government has a role to play in this as well, and I know the signators to the new CAP program have put new dollars in over the next five years to help with many programs.

Maybe you can speak with the federal minister of agriculture and agri-food Canada to discuss this very idea with him.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: We are very fortunate, Mr. Speaker, to have a minister of agriculture for the Government of Canada and Prince Edward Island here, the hon. Lawrence MacAulay, and my understanding is that they are working towards a green energy program nationally and it's going to come through, probably, the Canadian agricultural partnership program.

I would say that we have contacted the Canadian department of agriculture and have identified that we have the structures already in place here to implement such a program and we'd be happy to partner with our federal partners to see farmers get good programs, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The other thing I'm hearing from the farmers is it seems like there's a lot of red tape when they get to those programs. I know you have an awesome staff in at the department there.

Application process re: programs for farmers

I'm wondering if you can tell me how much you can work with them to try and simplify the applications for these programs.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, in our department of agriculture in the Province of PEI we are really cognizant of the impacts of application forms and paperwork; that sometimes the farmers are very busy out trying to harvest their crops, plant crops, and raise their livestock.

But, I would also say we have tremendous staff in our department and if any farmer wants to contact our department, we have

extension workers and we have crop insurance agents; we have all kinds of stuff out there that would be happy to sit down with our farmers and help them with any application forms.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the new NAFTA, or the USMCA, Canada gave the American dairy industry access to almost 4% of the Canadian market. To put this into perspective, this is equivalent to 100% of the milk produced by Nova Scotia's 215 dairy farms plus all of Prince Edward Island's 165 dairy farms.

Addressing concerns with feds re: dairy industry

It is my understanding that the dairy farmers of PEI board has met with the Premier to express their grave concerns with this new trade agreement.

A question for the Premier: Have you taken those concerns and addressed them with the Prime Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and I did indeed meet with the dairy farmers of PEI and a group of, I would say, 10 good farmers and board members of the dairy farmers, and they were quite clear in presenting their concerns and we were very clear in acknowledging that those are real concerns and that we want to work with the dairy farmers of PEI in every way we can including measures that will come forward through the federal government and we are working on that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hopefully, the minister of agriculture has had a chance to meet with the board as well.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Agriculture in rural PEI forms the base of our Island economy. The 165 Island family-owned dairy farms are critical to our Island's economic base, and the ripple effect into our economy is huge.

The milk produced by Island dairy farmers feed businesses large and small, from ADL to Cow's Creamery, to Purity Dairy, even to Glasgow Glen Farms.

Question to the minister of agriculture: What are you doing to ensure that we don't lose family-owned dairy farms, destabilizing our Island's economic base?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, very good question.

As minister of agriculture, we value the dairy farmers in Prince Edward Island. There are approximately 165 dairy entities in Prince Edward Island and we have a program, just like the program I just recently mentioned there, the PEI clean technology program that is out there.

But, I think the bigger question here is making sure that we are able to adapt to the particular changes as the USMCA gets signed. We have not seen, actually, a final text of that agreement at this point, but I think it's really important that farmers – it looks like there will be transition funding that will be available and my role will be to make sure that we get our fair share for Prince Edward Island dairy farmers to access those funds, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Indeed, minister, that is one of the big roles you will have, is to make sure that any funding from Ottawa does make it to the farmers and to make sure that these family-owned farms do not go under.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Trivers: Question to the minister of agriculture: What conversations have you had so far with the federal government to

make sure that you take a proactive approach to that role?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Premier mentioned earlier, I did have the opportunity to meet with the dairy farmers of PEI and I've also had the opportunity to meet with ADL, and just recently the minister of economic development and I and the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning had a tour of the recent expansion at the ADL plant in Summerside.

I think there are two components of this that are really important to note. One is to make sure that in Prince Edward Island our processors get access to what's called TRQs, it's the tariff rate quotas, and under the previous agreement under CETA and under TPP, I believe it was negotiated under a previous federal government; PEI did not get its fair share of TRQs. The other is making sure that if there are transition funds that we get our fair share for our producers and for our processors, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's my understanding that today the dairy farmers of Canada issued a statement to the federal government. To prevent further damage to the Canadian dairy sector, they are asking that the federal government do not sign the USMCA until US oversight of the Canadian dairy system has been removed from the agreement. They say it's a matter of Canadian sovereignty.

Government support for Island dairy farmers

This is a question to the minister of agriculture: Do you stand with Island dairy farmers and support them in this request?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, as minister of agriculture in PEI, I want to make sure that our dairy farmers are supported in every way.

When it comes to trade deals, these are negotiated with the federal government with other particular countries, and we've now seen three major trade deals happen in Canada here with the CPTPP, the CETA, and now the USMCA. I think it's very important that our supply management system will stay intact, and in this particular case it will stay intact. They did lose some market access that will have to be shared by some of these other jurisdictions.

But, I think it's really important to note when we were at ADL, there are some great partnerships that have occurred. I know there's a company in Denmark that has partnered with our ADL corporation here and they are looking at providing really good, quality dairy products to consumers here in Canada, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The dairy board has been very proactive, and in light of the new USMCA, there has been a flood of posts about how to buy local dairy products, how to identify them. As a result, companies like ADL have seen local sales spike, even running out of some products.

So, Islanders want to buy local and support their friends, neighbours and the Island economy. But, one of the big problems with buying local on the Island here is often it's hard to identify locally-produced products. We've seen it with dairy and we've seen it in other areas as well.

Identifying local products

A question to the minister of agriculture: What are you doing to make sure Islanders can identify Island products and buy locally?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, that is one situation that has been very fortunate about all this discussion around trade deals and the impacts it might have on our dairy farmers, and Islanders have been very supportive of our Island dairy industry and they are

actually seeing great increases in our market access here.

In fact, the dairy industry in Prince Edward Island has been growing at over 3% annually over the last number of years. In fact, in Canada the dairy industry has been growing at about 2%. Remember, this trade deal that we're talking about is 3.6% over six years of market access. So, the dairy industry in Canada is growing faster than what the amount of trade will be – access that will be granted to other countries, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, once again, the provincial protein tender issued this fall by Health PEI specifically gives preference to off-Island brands. It's right in the tender, in the spreadsheet, like Maple Leaf, J.M. Schneider (Indistinct) most specially for value-added products.

This is something I've been lobbying to change for years now, but it seems that the request that I've made on behalf of Islanders, Island farmers in particular, are falling on deaf ears.

Sourcing of local Island food

Question to the Minister of Finance: When it comes to government food tenders, why are you not sourcing local Island food?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we've proven that we're sourcing Island food. There are specifics around procurement that we have to deal with. It's in regards to – and back to the NAFTA negotiations, Rona Ambrose, who is supposed to be here today –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Ms. Biggar: What a set up! What a set up! What a set up!

Mr. Henderson: Very supportive of the deal, I'm told.

Mr. MacDonald: – was very supportive of the NAFTA deal and an adviser to the Trudeau government and we acknowledge that and commend her for that effort.

We've also visited the schools, most recently, the educational schools, and we're dealing with providing local products to schools, so we're starting programs in that regard to deal with local products.

So, we're doing everything we can to provide access to our local markets, to Islanders, and reduce our trade imbalance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Got him on the ropes.

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

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is simple common sense. Why not use tax payer's money to fill the food tenders that the Island government needs to purchase? It's very simple, very common sense. And the minister really didn't answer my question. I'd asked: Why are you not sourcing local Island food?

Percentage of food tenders for local produce

So, I'm going to ask the minister, if he's confident that there is some source of Island food going on, I would ask the minister if he will table across government departments, the percentage of food tenders that are filled with local Island produce.

Mr. LaVie: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: I think part of that question should be: Can we table those initiatives based on who applied for those tenders? It may be easier. But, we could certainly take a look at that. I have no problem whatsoever. We're the first ones in government to stand up and say we can go and access local food and product here on Prince Edward Island to help out local. I

continuously tweeting out buy local, I was doing it last week with a minor hockey team that were buying local produce –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: – selling local produce.

Ms. Biggar: I'm sure you don't.

Mr. MacDonald: This member needs to understand there are procurement rules from province to province, and within Canada. We're under the Canadian Free Trade Agreement.

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) heard at standing committee it's not an issue.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Trivers: Not an issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]