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

FOR

TUESDAY, 10 APRIL 2018

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As Friday, I was absent for Question Period, there were questions relevant to procurement of acts good from the hon. Leader of the Third Party. And also questions, written questions response to Borden-Carleton member from March 2nd.

Speaker: Thank you.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

On the weekend, the Premier publicly announced that he has no plans of calling a snap spring election. He also appeared publicly to announce – or that he didn't rule out an election this summer, but certainly he was a little bit more coy on that end.

Fixed election date legislation

My first question is to the Premier: Premier, under a fixed-election date laws the next election should be held the first Monday in October of 2019. Will the Premier publicly commit here, today, to honouring our fixed election date legislation?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the entire point of the remarks that I made on the weekend was to, I'll say, quell the discussion that started not with me or on this side of the House of a pending election. Indeed, we finished up business here on Friday, and the opposition finance critic, the Member from Rustico-Emerald was pretty close to calling an election.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Myers: Ask him the price of gas (Indistinct)

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

The reasons for having fixed election dates are quite simple: to provide certainty and consistency to the public and to prevent one political party from manipulating the legislative timetable to their own advantage.

Again, I will ask the Premier, and hopefully, he will answer the question this time: Will you commit here today publicly that you will adhere to the fixed-election date that is law here on PEI?

Mr. Trivers: Easy question, easy question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I think a lot of the talk about election that has been in the air, again, not initiated by me, started with this same question being asked by the Leader of the Opposition before Christmas as we were coming to the end of the fall sitting, and indeed, in the year-end interviews. The Leader of the Opposition further fed that speculation of an election that could have been, at that time, within a couple of months.

I think, I encourage all hon. members of this House is to recognize we have just brought forward a great Budget to be considered later today, and further bills that will be presented today. We've got work to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Oh-for-two from this Premier. I've asked him twice now if he will publicly commit here in this Legislative Assembly today to adhere to the fixed election date, which is law on Prince Edward Island. Oh-for-two.

Next question to the Premier: What is it about the idea of fixed election dates that you have such a problem with?

Mr. Myers: You can't control them.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Myers: You can't control them.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I don't have a problem. We're here to do our work as legislators in this Assembly on behalf of the people of this province, who elected us to be here for that purpose.

Let me point out, as I have before, that the *Election Act* does include section 4.1. It says, "Nothing in this section affects the powers of the Lieutenant Governor..." and further that the *Election Act* on this very point about the fixed election date directly contemplates what might arise or what – that there might be some concern if there's a federal election and a provincial election at the same time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

So we're now oh-for-three, I guess.

It's political games like these that frustrate Islanders. Municipal governments use fixed election dates. Many provinces including; New Brunswick, Ontario, British Columbia all use fixed election dates. It's not that difficult to understand.

Question again to the Premier: What is so unique about our situation that you think fixed election dates are unworkable?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, with any legislation, what the hon. Leader of the Opposition refers to as what may be workable or not, there are always factors that need to be taken into account.

I might call to his attention section 4.1 sub three of the *Election Act*, which says, directly that the Legislature, when it passed this law contemplated that might be something that Islanders would have some concerns about to be asked to vote in a provincial and federal government election at the –

Mr. Myers: No, it says right in the legislation –

Premier MacLauchlan: – same time –

Mr. Myers: – six months, either side –

Premier MacLauchlan: – Mr. Speaker, that's it –

Mr. Myers: – you know that –

Premier MacLauchlan: – that is something –

Mr. Myers: I can read legislation, too.

Premier MacLauchlan: – that Islanders might be concerned about, Mr. Speaker, and it's in the legislation.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Some days, you know, I wish Robert Ghiz was back here because, at least, he understood the legislation.

To many observers, the games over fixed election dates seems like another example of good policy and common sense that take a backseat to partisan considerations. A referendum on electoral reform is to be held in conjunction with the next election. That, of course, takes time to organize and educate voters. It's becoming obvious that the Premier is trying to stack the deck in his favour, yet again –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Leader of the Opposition: – instead of allowing a democratic process to properly unfold.

Fixed election date and referendum

Question, again, to the Premier: Premier, are the games you're playing with election timing an attempt to undermine the referendum question?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, if there are games being played, and I rather that were not the case, they are coming from directly across the floor.

I spoke directly on the weekend, and frankly, I was prompted to speak because of the, I'll call them games, to use the language of the Leader of the Opposition, that are coming from the opposition.

We were elected to serve here in this Legislature. We formed a government. We have a plan. We are working on it in this sitting. That will continue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let's get away from the games, then and we'll get to the straight talk. Island Abbey Foods is looking to hire a COO.

Premier's ties to Island Abbey Foods

Question to the Premier: Can you explain to this House, your ties with Island Abbey?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that I have any. I'm aware of Island Abbey Foods and Island Abbey Foods is a good operation and I may have had some investment in Island Abbey Foods in an earlier time, but we make our disclosures and as far as I know, I don't know anything about the COO. Maybe the member opposite would like to say something about that.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And you guessed right, I actually do want to say something about that. The Premier is invested quite heavily in Island Abbey Foods, but we'll get to those specifics a bit later.

The job posting states that: Dorilton Capital is looking for a COO for Island Abbey

Foods. Dorilton Capital is a New York venture capital firm – the actual owners of Island Abbey Foods. They came in the company only months after this Premier invested in them.

Question to the Premier: Is Island Abbey run out of New York or Charlottetown?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, this is not something I have knowledge of as Premier, but as far as I know – well I do know – that John Rowe is the CEO of Island Abbey Foods, he's also a chair of the board of the Island food partnership and as far as I know, that's how Island Abbey Foods is still run, but it's not something, frankly, that I would know more about than I do from his involvement in the public sphere in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, since 2012, Island Abbey Foods has been run out of Bermuda. Bermuda has been called the 'worst tax haven' by Oxfam International.

Off-shore tax havens and personal business

Question to the Premier: Why are you using offshore tax havens to conduct your personal business?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I thought we were here to answer about matters within our present knowledge. I have no present knowledge of that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I'll help enlighten you then Premier – I would love doing it. Bermuda's corporate registry shows Island Abbey Foods International Limited, IAF Holdings Limited, and IAF Science Holdings Limited – all current companies that were registered 48 hours before the PEI registered company was dissolved. The Island business is actually owned by New York City venture capitalists and the Premier has big dollars in it and everything is washed through Bermuda. Are you getting me now?

Question to the Premier: How is it that the Premier of Prince Edward Island is doing private business this way?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the member has just referred to a number of corporate transactions or names and registrations that I can't help him with.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Myers: So, Bermuda's a tax haven. They have zero income tax and they have zero corporate tax. Could it be that this was the mighty Island that the Premier has been talking about all these years because he has his money all hidden there so he doesn't have to pay corporate tax, so he doesn't have to pay income tax to Prince Edward Island? Boy, cause – not like he doesn't need the money here to run Prince Edward Island.

Question to the Premier: Why are you tangled up in offshore tax havens and how many offshore schemes are you involved in?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, in response to the earlier questions from the Leader of the Opposition, I indicated that we presented here on Friday a very strong budget, one that reflects capacity that we have as a province and as a government because Islanders are doing well, Islanders are making good investments, they're taking initiatives, they're leading and growing companies and to my knowledge, Island Abbey Foods is one of those companies that

employs a lot of Islanders. I think that's exactly the kind of thing – we recognized ADL here earlier and there's a good reason why our economy is doing as well as it is, because we have good companies that are doing well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So I'm talking about your involvement in the company and how you're sheltering money in Bermuda through that company. Your very first disclosure in April, 2015, you revealed that you got a dividend exceeding \$5,000 from Island Abbey.

Premier: How much did you take home from that that actual dividend?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, that was in the year prior to my coming into public life and I'd have to go and look, but if the member has the information – it sounds like he just gave the number. I made an investment in Island Abbey Foods when they were an up and coming company – it goes back –

Mr. MacKay: He didn't know anything about it two minutes ago.

Premier MacLauchlan: – a number of years prior to my getting involved in public life and I assume they continue to do well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So, the Premier knows full-well that in his disclosure, all he has to report was that he made money exceeding \$5,000 in the dividends, so he made way beyond \$5,000. He could have made \$100,000 on the dividends – all because he's sheltering money down in Bermuda.

Government crack down on tax cheat setup

Question to the Premier: Why has your government never cracked down on this particular tax cheat setup that you're personally involved in?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I don't really see there's any point in me trying to respond to that kind of language or to the line of questioning that's being advanced here. I'm very proud of the good companies that we have in our province, of the work that they're doing to grow the economy in all parts of our endeavors, whether it be in the primary sectors or in the newer sectors and certainly there are many great examples of that. I don't think it helps their work or our confidence in business, which leads the region, to be using this kind of language.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Premier for his great advice. Let's go back to what we were talking about here – how he's apparently using Bermuda to shelter money.

Your own government published this recruiting document – it was right around the time – right a month before, actually, Island Abbey changed and started doing business out of Bermuda, and this is what it says – this is a recruiting document – it says: Most companies set up subsidiaries of the parent and flow revenue and cost through an offshore operation, limiting the tax implications in Canada. So, this is a government document that you guys put out.

Payment of taxes to PEI or Bermuda

Question to the Premier: Yes or no. Is it in the best economic interest of Prince Edward Island that corporations are located in Bermuda and pay no taxes to Prince Edward Island, or located on Prince Edward Island and pay taxes to Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I think the question of that publication referred to by the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters has been dealt with two to three years ago and we acknowledged at the time that we didn't think that was a suitable way to be promoting Prince Edward Island as a business destination.

Let me say, that I have, from the time I became Premier, and we continue to believe that an economy where the resources and the benefits and the partnerships are as local as possible in terms of the benefits to Prince Edward Islanders is indeed a healthy and sustainable economy for our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This document that I spoke of, it's been tabled in the House here before – everyone has it. This document was floating around just weeks prior to this transaction happening that the Premier was involved in because he was a shareholder – which he has told the House that he was and we know because we have his disclosure. So, we know for sure that the Premier was directly involved with preferred shares. So, he wasn't just a basic shared holder, he had preferred shares in the company, which means he was just there to make money – just there to make money. Premier, you were also finance minister at the time when you first came into government.

Question again: How many millions of dollars in corporate income tax has PEI missed out on because of these tax havens that you allowed businesses to develop here in Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Do you want to take that?

Mr. MacDonald: Yeah, sure.

Premier MacLauchlan: Go ahead.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Prince Edward Island, we've just released a balanced Budget here in the province and we were at the Chamber of Commerce this morning in Summerside and sitting with a bunch of business people and many of those business people were small companies, large companies like ADL that's here today.

The way Prince Edward Island has been performing over the past two-and-a-half to three years has been excremental in the basis of how we do business in PEI and what it contributes to the economy in Prince Edward Island. If it's Honibe or the Abbey company or John Rowe and his wife who started that company in the basement of their home; if they expand with venture capitalists out of New York or Washington or whatever it is, the bottom line is they're paying taxes in Prince Edward Island and they're hiring people on PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we just saw a little preview of things to come. When the actual leader of that party gets sick of answering questions, the next leader gets up and answers it for him. I guess they're not that big of shoes to fill, actually. You're doing quite well. You're doing quite well filling in when he won't stand up to his feet.

Premier investments in Bermuda

Question to the Premier: Do you knowingly have investments hidden in Bermuda?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: No, Mr. Speaker. I do not.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

The party I represent values active citizenship and grassroots democracy. Plebiscites are one mechanism for Islanders to express their democratic will and we've had a large number of them, of course, on Prince Edward Island over the decades. But, not all plebiscites are created equally and the rigour of the process by which they are held is what determines, at least to a large extent, their legitimacy.

Legitimacy of plebiscites in Three Rivers

Question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: Several plebiscites have been held in the Three Rivers area surrounding the amalgamation process underway there. How does the minister rate the legitimacy of those plebiscites?

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

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

I want to thank the Leader of the Third Party for that question.

First of all, I want to send out a great thank you for the community leaders in Three Rivers, the mayors and the municipal councils of the area. They're elected by the people in those areas to represent the people in those areas and they do a tremendous job.

As you know, the process is laid out in the *Municipal Government Act* and that process is now proceeding through IRAC and I will allow IRAC the opportunity to fill its mandate under this process and bring back a recommendation to the government.

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

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

I saw no connection between my question and the answer I just received.

The final approval in the municipal restructuring process happens when the minister makes a recommendation to Cabinet.

Order of impartial and inclusive plebiscite in Three Rivers

Will the minister order an impartial and fully inclusive plebiscite covering all of the Three Rivers area to legitimize his final recommendation to Cabinet?

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

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

Thank you for the question.

Rural PEI is growing at a phenomenal rate. Rural PEI population is being renewed all through Prince Edward Island. Permits in the rural area are already up over 35%. Rural PEI is growing. Rural PEI is a great contributor to the economy of Prince Edward Island.

As I said earlier –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – the process is in IRAC and if IRAC chooses to make certain rulings and recommendations to the Government of Prince Edward Island, we'll take them into consideration when we get those recommendations from IRAC.

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

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

Indeed, IRAC will make recommendations, but it's up to this minister to go to Cabinet and make a final recommendation on what the process will be.

If the minister will not order a plebiscite for Three Rivers, how exactly does this government propose to determine the will of the residents in the Three Rivers area?

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Or, will the decision simply be dictated from the fifth floor?

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

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

I want to thank the Leader of the Third Party for that question.

A process in place and IRAC is in that process. I want to also thank the people that participated in putting this proposal together. Those individuals came forward on their own to make their community better and to make Prince Edward Island a better place. I think we owe it to them to offer the process that we set in place to play itself out before we make runoff and undermining their ability and their work they put into this process.

Again, community leaders came together. Community leaders had meetings. They worked extremely hard, volunteered their time. I think we owe respect to those community leaders, those citizen groups to come back with a recommendation through IRAC.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Judge Ralph Thompson in the 2009 report of the commission of land and local governance recognized that in order to reform rural governance on PEI, it would be essential to conduct a thorough public engagement exercise in order to determine the consensus of Islanders. With a series of failed attempts at rural amalgamation behind us, and no shining example of a truly democratic and inclusive process, it is clear that this consensus has not been achieved.

Failed process of rural amalgamation

Will the minister of Minister of Communities, Land and Environment admit that the process of rural amalgamation to date has been a failure?

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.

This discussion has been going on now. There were reports back to 1988, the Boylan report, the new foundations report. Community groups have been engaged and Islanders have been engaged. As I said

earlier, community leaders have come together. People within the community of the Three Rivers area wanted to make their place a better place for them, their families, their grandchildren, and future generations.

We owe it to that group that the process be followed, that's outlined in the *Municipal Government Act*. I implore the people of this Legislature, there is a place – there is a formula in place. Let's honour that formula and let's get the recommendation back from IRAC, who will be having public meetings into it.

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

Mr. Roach: Trying to reinvent the wheel.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll take that as a no, then, from the minister.

Public policy failure doesn't always have to be a bad thing, however, if we can learn from our mistakes.

Lessons learned from failed amalgamation attempts

A question to the minister: What lessons have been learned from the failure of the Three Rivers process that will be applied to future deliberations on rural governance?

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

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

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

Is the hon. member – and I honour the hon. member – is the hon. member saying that the district that she represents in the City of Charlottetown that went through an amalgamation process in 1995 – is she indicating that that was a failure? Is she saying that Charlottetown is a failure? Charlottetown went through amalgamation. Stratford went through amalgamation. Cornwall went through amalgamation.

Ms. Biggar: Summerside.

Mr. R. Brown: And Summerside went through amalgamation.

I think that they were tremendous successes and I'll stand by that.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would agree that there have been examples of successful amalgamation, including the ones for Charlottetown, Cornwall and other areas, but in this case for Three Rivers, the amalgamation process has not been successful. The one thing that has been made clear by the various public meetings, plebiscites and municipal council votes on the Three Rivers amalgamation is that there is no consensus on the issue.

Will the minister commit to reviewing lessons learned and a citizens' assembly concept with his staff and bring back a discussion paper to the House?

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

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

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

There are citizens' assemblies in the area. They're called councils; Montague, Lower Montague, Brudenell, Cardigan, Lorne Valley –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) Islanders.

Mr. R. Brown: They are community and they are citizens' assemblies, duly appointed and duly elected by their citizens in their area. They're the citizens' assemblies, and they have an opportunity to now bring their plan forward to IRAC. IRAC will open the process to the public. The public will have a period of time to discuss this and to comment on it. I'm not going to break the rules that are outlined.

For years people have been saying: Put a process in place so we can look at rural PEI

and see how we can make it better. That process is in place. We should honour it.

Thank you.

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

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

My question is for the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

In Dromore, in an area near my riding, there's a road there, Route 214, formally known as the Jimmy Hughes road, that has a stream that crosses the road. On a good day, that stream goes under the road. In the spring of the year or after heavy rain that stream goes over the road as well as under the road.

Infrastructure dollars for roads and bridge replacements

My question, I guess, is to the minister, now there was an announcement of some extra dollars for bridging and infrastructure, is it possible that we can get this crossing fixed?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, the Budget we tabled, our balanced Budget last week, did refer to federal-provincial contributions since 2015 in the amount of \$360 million. Those investments went into communities right across PEI improving safety on our roads. Our Capital Budget that we tabled last fall also outlines \$53 million for roads and bridges.

In our current project list for the upcoming season includes six bridges being replaced in eastern PEI for a total of \$6.2 million. So, you can see we are doing work on bridges.

Mr. McIsaac: Great.

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

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

Thank the minister for that, but this road, which is a – it is a seasonal road, but our farmers and we have a good group of farmers with us here today, travel on that road from the spring to the fall. There's a lot of equipment goes over that road. There are plenty of fish that go under that road.

We need this road repaired. The watershed groups in that area have been asking for this for several years. Just wondering if the minister can give us a timeframe on when this might happen.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We certainly appreciate the great work that the watershed groups do all across Prince Edward Island. We understand the importance of these areas to the agricultural community and we will continue to work with them.

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

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

There was a box culvert in this road. It was replaced by two 36-inch culverts that are now not doing it right. We need a five-foot box culvert under there. The watershed groups have talked about this. For the sake of the farmers and for the sake of the fish, can you give us a timeframe on when this may get fixed?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We will be going out this summer. I want to assure that area, the watershed groups, and the agricultural community out there. We will have a look at that; review it, to be determined by those who are certified to

determine the needs of an area, but we will certainly be out there and have a look out it
—

Mr. Myers: Oh, burn.

Ms. Biggar: — to see what needs to be done.

An Hon. Member: Great.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the Premier: During the strategy planning with Liberal members and others on January 6th, 2017, Robert Vessey stated: the Premier wants e-gaming put behind him. Next, Spencer Campbell stated, and I quote: We are the government lawyers on this file.

Legal counsel providing legal advice at meeting

Question: Were you aware that legal counsel, Spencer Campbell, was in attendance and providing legal advice to the committee?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: No, I was not, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: Yeah, right. I see him coming to your office all the time (Indistinct) Sergeant Schultz.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Were you aware that at other strategy meetings, and I count 10 meetings in 2017, some with lawyers, two on some occasions were a central part of these discussions?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before: committees do their work, and I don't have any oversight or control of
—

Mr. Myers: Who pays the lawyers?

Premier MacLauchlan: — those committees. But let me say, that — out of the question that was asked here last week, it was subsequently said that that had not been the case. I can tell the House that it was reported in the public media that I was to have told the Member from West Royalty-Springvale something very specific about his chances of his getting into Cabinet, and I can assure the House that I did not and would not have said those words.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I assure the Premier, I stand by everything I've ever said.

Payment to lawyers

Question to the Premier: Did the Liberal Party pay for these lawyers provided to the Liberal committee members, or were they paid for by the taxpayers of Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as I said, in response to the previous question, I'm not aware of who would have attended those meetings, but I might say —

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: — that we do have people who serve as volunteers and it may well have been in that capacity, but I have no direct knowledge of that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The health and safety of our students is critical to positive learning environments.

Environmental health concerns at Three Oaks High School

Question to the education minister: When were you first briefed on the environmental health concerns at Three Oaks High School?

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

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I can say that early in my term as minister, I did attend the Three Oaks renovation, which is a great renovation. It's a – as my recollection serves, a \$23 million project that we're very happy to have announced and have nearing completion.

Sometime, in the couple of weeks after I was appointed as minister, and I was happy to get an update on the project from the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy and her staff, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There have been ongoing environmental issues with this project. In 2016, there was an oil tank leak that spilled over 11,000 litres on school property. The Public Schools Branch flagged several breaches in protocol with removing lead paint and asbestos ceiling tiles in a March 2017, internal email obtained by our office through freedom of information.

Environmental safeguards for students and staff

Question to the education minister: What stepped-up environmental safeguards were put in place to protect students and staff on these incidences?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to, certainly, clarify that before any work was started in the school with any

students in there, all remedial efforts were made to remove any hazardous materials –

Mr. LaVie: Oh!

Ms. Biggar: – and that was done, actually, in the fall, I believe, of 2016, early 2017. So, when we started to go in to look at the project it was found out to be that we had to do some other remediation first. That was totally completed before any other work was started on any other part of construction.

I want to assure everyone that that is a safe working environment strictly adhered to by workers compensation, but environmental officers.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As far back as last fall some students began to report having issues with nausea, headaches, and breathing issues. In that internal email PSB staff wrote that: 'Hopefully, the risk to students and staff is low. Hopefully; key word 'hopefully.'

Question to the education minister: How can students have a good learning environment if they are having health issues while construction goes on around them?

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

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Our department takes the health and safety of students very seriously. Together, working together with the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy, I'm very happy to report that there has been air quality management and testing going on at Three Oaks during that time. Great efforts have been undertaken to ensure that, to the extent possible, all of the construction areas are sealed off to the rest of the school.

Students have undertaken their classes in different portions of the school while those construction projects are going on. There's a daily meeting with the principal of the school while this is going on.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Students and staff were sequestered and evacuated from the school during an evening grad activity last month due to a potential environmental safety risk. Dust and vapours from removal of the floor tiles escaped the construction into the rest of the school.

Environmental test results for TOSH projects

Question to the education minister: Will you publically release all the air quality, water, and other environmental testing results for Three Oaks during this project?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I want to assure everyone that's listening: parents, staff, and students that the air quality at the school is safe. It's monitored through environmental services every day. All abatement is taken place to ensure that as little possible dust is infiltrated into the area. I believe there was a bit of a breach on one occasion and so we had followed up with that, working with the school staff, working with workers compensation to ensure everyday at the school, whether there are students there, that it is a safe environment.

Mr. Speaker, anything that I have – I'll certainly find any other information that may be available.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week a letter was sent to parents said extra measures are being taken to deal with this issue, but that school transfers would be considered if it were in the best interest of students' health and learning.

Changing schools due to environmental risks

Question to the education minister: Do you think uprooting students in the middle of the school year and changing schools is a solution to these issues?

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

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this email was sent out by the principal of the school and the –

[audio malfunction]

Mr. J. Brown: – has been working together with the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy to make this renovation – a \$23 million renovation of a high school as seamless as it possibly can be. They've done great work to do that.

With any construction project there are unforeseen events and the Public Schools Branch and the school staff have committed to working together with parents to ensure that where there are students that feel that they aren't as comfortable as they possibly can be in that learning environment, they'll work with them to ensure that they are comfortable in whatever learning environment suits them best.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When this project began in 2016, just before the District 21 by-election, the cost was \$15 million. Two years later the cost was projected to be over \$23 million, which the minister has stated twice.

TOSH project 50% over budget

Question to the education minister: How did this project manage to go 50% over budget?

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

Mr. J. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I must say we are very proud of the capital projects that we are undertaking in this department and last year we announced a \$50 million capital program for the next five years and that's following on the heels of this capital improvement to Three Oaks High School.

This project first started a number of years back, before our economy went on a tear, and we've seen construction costs go up over the course of that time, which is an indicator of how well things are going in this province. We recognize that and certainly we have committed to that capital improvement to Three Oaks High School and we remain committed to it, and to the success of those students at Three Oaks High School, and that project will be completed in the very near future and the students will look forward to enjoying it for the next number of years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]