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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF  
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

TUESDAY, 17 APRIL 2018



Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, on Friday there was a series of questions relating to the meeting of our Liberal caucus in Kensington on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March and I expand upon the questions and the response to the questions to confirm that it was a meeting of caucus – Liberal caucus, not Cabinet. I note that on reviewing the proceedings, there were three references in the preamble to those questions that referred to this as a Cabinet meeting. It was not a Cabinet meeting, and may I say that our caucus makes it our business to be out around in our communities and our meeting prior to the Kensington meeting, we met at the St. Peter's Bay Complex.

**Mr. LaVie:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Myers:** Bet you won't come to Georgetown.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** At the subsequent meeting, we met at the Eastlink Centre and subsequently attended at the Charlottetown Civic Centre at the Easter Beef Show. We make it our business to get out around and we do invite people to join us for lunch who are leaders in their community and people that we respect and we do that on each occasion, as we did on this occasion. I repeat, and it was clear, of course, on the face of the document that was tabled that this was a caucus meeting, not a Cabinet meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

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

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

Later this year the sale of cannabis will be legalized and in preparation, government has signed agreements with three companies to access cannabis supply.

**Value of cannabis agreement and tender**

My first question is to the Premier: Premier, can you confirm the dollar value of the agreement signed and were they publicly tendered?

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

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

We all know that the cannabis file is a file that's revolving as we speak. It's a federal initiative that we're working diligently on to ensure we meet the standards of what the feds have laid out for us. We're dealing with three different companies and there was MOUs signed. An MOU is not a legal, binding contract. An MOU is basically insuring that we're going to have that product available for consumers here at our retail outlets on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I'd like to thank the Minister of Finance for confirming that there was no tenders put out. Only one of the three companies involved to supply cannabis to government has any local ownership and as we know of recent media reports, it's even less than it was a few months ago.

**Island businesses and sale of cannabis**

Question to the Premier: What strategy does your government have to ensure that Island businesses can capitalize on the legalization and sale of cannabis?

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

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

Our goal as a government is to regulate before this becomes normalized and I think we're taking the right approach. There's many issues surrounding the cannabis file that we're trying to deal with on a daily basis, whether that be with location, age, legal offences – there's all kinds of stuff that we're dealing with and we're being very open and transparent about this. Relevant to the companies, I'm not going to stand here

and talk about a company that has 75% ownership in the US. If that was the case, I'd have to talk about BioVectra, I'd have to talk about Sekisui, I'd have to talk about companies right here in Charlottetown that employ hundreds of Islanders.

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

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

We have healthy agricultural bioscience and manufacturing sectors in this province and I'm sure no one in this House would disagree with that. Recently our caucus toured a local business that's developing innovative products for value-added extraction of cannabis-related products.

Question to the Premier: Did your government look at the potential of value-added opportunities for Island businesses with the sale of legal cannabis?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Mr. Speaker, we're looking at all companies and as we evolve this file, we're going to see more and more companies coming forward and there are going to be more and more companies from Prince Edward Island. We're dealing with federally-regulated companies at the present time. As licenses are approved by the federal government, moving forward, whether that be cannabis extraction or what have you – for oil – then we'll be dealing with those companies in Prince Edward Island. We want this to grow, but we need to regulate this prior to becoming normalized and until then, we're going to dot our i's, cross our t's and make sure we're looking out for the safety of Islanders.

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

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

This government has known for close to three years that Ottawa planned to legalize cannabis. This shouldn't have caught anyone by surprise.

### **Government's response to cannabis**

Question to the Premier: Why does your government's response to cannabis legalization seem to be thrown together at the last minute?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, our approach to cannabis legalization is in compliance with and meets the initiative taken by the federal Parliament. We have indeed been working on this on a cross-departmental basis with finance, with economic development and tourism, with justice and public safety, with health and welfare, with a very effective group who've addressed these issues and they take time and they have taken their time. Indeed, the approach has been spelled out over stages as made clear to Islanders and indeed is reflected in the bill that's been introduced in the House in this sitting.

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

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

The Premier speaks about consultation. Well, we're still hearing on this side of the House from experts in the field of law as well as healthcare professionals that there's been very little, if any, consultation with their concerns that they've brought forward. This government has had three years to come up with a plan so that cannabis legalization could be an economic opportunity for PEI.

### **Economic benefits from cannabis for PEI businesses**

Question again to the Premier: Why did your government not have a plan in place to maximize long term economic benefits from cannabis legalization in areas like agriculture, bioscience, and manufacturing?

**Mr. Trivers:** Great question.

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, from the time this file was first addressed, as I said, and from a variety of perspectives and

a highly collaborative approach and, indeed, with a public consultation, the question of the economic opportunity was present in those considerations. Economic development and tourism was at that table.

Our first two concerns in addressing this are to proceed in a way that Islanders can be well informed of the choices that they're making. Informed choice has been very much part of our approach and the other has been to make the product available in compliance with the federal legislation and there may indeed be opportunities. That day will come, and we're aware of those.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I'm not really hearing that there is much of a plan over there, but let's assume there is.

#### **Business plan on legalization of cannabis**

Question to the finance minister: Will you table the business plan that your government developed for the legalization of cannabis?

**Mr. Myers:** Good question.

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

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

I think what we intend to do, for all sides of the House, on a very – an issue that seems to have a lens on it because it is such a new issue for the Province of Prince Edward Island and Canada as a whole; is to bring, actually, the third party and the opposition together and address any concerns that they may have in committee.

But, in saying that, this is relatively new. It is ongoing and changing. The feds don't have everything complete that we desire at this point in time. So, we're continuing, evolving, but it's harm reduction, education and awareness I think is most important for our youth especially. That's where our focus is right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Trivers:** Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition indicated earlier, this government had close to three years to plan and prepare for cannabis legalization, but obviously they have no plan.

#### **MOUs and purchase agreements for cannabis with suppliers**

Question to the finance minister: Will you publicly table copies of the cannabis MOUs and purchase agreements your government signed with suppliers?

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

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

As far as I can tell, I can table those if it's legal. It's a third party so I'll have to take that back to the House and have an answer for him. But, they're making this cannabis topic out to be – and I heard the hon. member –

**Mr. Myers:** Smoking (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacDonald:** – in the media talking about: Why don't we just let everybody grow it and do that and do that?

This is why we're doing it. We're trying to get it off the street. We're trying to get it out of the hands of criminals, and we're trying to put our youth on awareness. I attended – and I wish the hon. member across from me had of attended – the MADD organization at Bluefield Senior High School in his own riding – that deals with his own riding, and let them tell the story about how important it is to educate our youth on the affects of cannabis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The province signed agreements with three companies to each supply the government with one million grams of cannabis a year. Two of these companies are not even located on the Island. One of them is on the

Island, but 75% owned out of North Carolina by a tobacco company. That's three million grams of cannabis a year being purchased by the government.

### **Cost of cannabis to Island taxpayers**

Question to the finance minister: How much will it cost Island taxpayers to acquire these three million grams of cannabis for retail sale?

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

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

Again, it's unfortunate that just because a company is owned by someone from out-of-province or a company or a corporation from out-of-province that we speak in this manner to them, because if you look at our aerospace industry and our bioscience industry, you're looking at 3,000 to 4,000 employees right across good-paying jobs. So, I'm not sure the point of reference the hon. member is making for a company that's out-of-province, or owned partially by out-of-province. Sometimes to grow bigger, that's what has to happen and I'm all for creating business and creating employment in PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Of course the minister didn't answer the question of how much the government is going to pay for those three million grams, and if he's so big on growing business in the province then why are they buying from companies that are not located in the province anyway?

Question to the finance minister: How long does government think it'll take before the government starts breaking even –

**Mr. Roach:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Trivers:** – on the sale of cannabis?

**Mr. Myers:** Nobody else can grow weed on PEI? Where have you been? You were in the RCMP (Indistinct)

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

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. MacDonald:** Again, Mr. Speaker, he talks about this like we've got enough supply and demand here on Prince Edward Island for a company. Our total goal on this was to ensure that we did have supply for demand on Prince Edward Island, and that's why we signed a non-legal, binding contract, which is an MOU, with two other companies off-Island which are traded publicly.

They're that large on the New York stock exchange, they're traded all over the world and if you look at what all of the other provinces are doing, I think we have a real opportunity to ensure the safety of our youth, our education is in place, health awareness is in place; all those factors come into play because, I think at the end of the day, those are the most important things when we're dealing with cannabis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Silly me, here I thought small was big and we were the mighty Island, but apparently we can't grow enough cannabis here to supply our own needs. The province will have to absorb costs related to cannabis legalization, so will Island municipalities.

### **Revenues shared with municipalities to offset costs**

Question to the finance minister: Will any of the revenues generated by the sale of legal cannabis be shared with Island municipalities to help them offset their costs?

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

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

Presently, the federal government is providing funding right now to the municipalities in the way through the RCMP or police services, so that's one way.

Until we have our feet underneath us in regards to this file, and how much is going to be charged for cannabis, who is regulating cannabis at a national level and proceeding forward, some of the questions – and obviously it's by reason, but some of the questions the opposition is asking are irrelevant until we move forward with more details from the federal government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

So, this government doesn't know how much they're paying for cannabis. They don't know how much they're going to sell it for. They have no business plan. Yet, they're building stores. They talk about public education and prevention and harm reduction, so here's a question for the finance minister.

#### **Revenues from cannabis dedicated to public education**

Will a fixed percentage of annual revenues from the sale of legalized cannabis be dedicated to public education efforts?

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

**Mr. MacDonald:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

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

Legal aid services are very important to a lot of Islanders across the whole province, and what we're hearing is that these services, and the budgets allotted to legal services, are being kept at the same amount.

#### **Legal aid services' budget**

Question to the Attorney General: Is the legal aid services budget being considered to be increased for the demand that's being shown?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

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

The hon. member has brought up a good question, and legal aid is something that has been a focus in this province over the last number of years and in particular, we have seen tremendous growth in legal aid on Prince Edward Island in the family law sector and with the addition of what we'd call bridges council in the last few years.

Yes, legal aid is growing with the need, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

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

Well, it's good to see that the minister actually recognizes that legal aid services are increasing. Under the current income thresholds, someone making \$1,474 or more a month before taxes makes too much money to qualify for legal aid. That threshold does exclude a lot of Islanders.

#### **Review of income thresholds to qualify for legal aid**

Question to the Attorney General: When was the last time that income threshold to qualify for legal aid were reviewed?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

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

I do want to clarify that there is what we call a flexible means test in place to be able to ascertain who would be eligible for legal aid funding and that test is based on the seriousness and the complexity of the legal proceedings. It's not a straight income test.

That said, we do look at the general utilization of legal aid within the province and as I indicated, we've seen a tremendous expansion, particularly in the family law side of the provision of legal aid services in this province over the last decade or so, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

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

Well, not many Islanders making \$1,400 a month before taxes could afford legal services themselves. If you don't qualify for legal aid and you can't afford a lawyer, many Islanders are turning to representing themselves. This is a concern.

### **Number of Islanders representing themselves in court**

Question to the Attorney General: Is your department tracking the number of Islanders representing themselves within the court system due to financial circumstances?

**Speaker:** The hon. Justice and Public Safety.

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

To answer the question directly, I am not sure of the answer to that question. I'll say it in a different way to say, I'm not sure how easy that would be to do. Self-represented litigants represent themselves for a variety of different reasons.

Again, let me say that within the legal aid program that we do have, we do our best to ensure, with the resources that we have available to us, and in concert with our federal partner that legal representation is there. The courts, through the assistance of the legal community in the province and operations like CLIA, have also done a great deal to ensure that people get legal advice in a timely and competent manner.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

**Mr. Fox:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

It's very simple. Somebody walks into legal aid, and they get refused, you put a checkmark. If they don't get refused, you put a checkmark in another box.

As the cost of legal services becomes out of reach for more and more Islanders, the need for good access to legal aid will only grow. Both the legal aid budget and the income thresholds aren't meeting the current demand. You admitted earlier that the demand is increasing.

### **Review of income thresholds to qualify for legal aid**

Question to the Attorney General: Will you commit today to review the current income thresholds to qualify for legal aid to ensure that the growing number of Islanders, who need legal assistance, can get it?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

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

Again, I'll reiterate, that we do constantly look at the financial capability of legal aid clients, and those that would wish to access the service, to pay. But, that is not the way that this test works, solely and exclusively, and it's got a great link into the seriousness and complexity of the matter involved.

We look at that, I think, in connection with federal government that we have. We do our absolute best to ensure that the greatest service can be offered to the people of Prince Edward Island possible. I think that service has continually grown over the past number of years, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

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

In January, the Leader of the Third Party wrote to the minister of justice to suggest we collaborate on amendments to the *Conflict of Interest Act* based on the recommendations by the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

The minister declined and drafted his own legislation, which resulted in two bills being tabled. Our legislation includes all of the commissioner's recommendations. The government's bill leaves out the two most important recommendations; that members

of the public should be able to make complaints directly to the commissioner, and that the cooling off period for ministers be increased from six to 12 months.

### **Recommendations from Conflict of Interest Commissioner**

A question to the minister of justice: Why did you not include these two key recommendations in your bill?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and Attorney General.

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

I do very much welcome the opportunity to get to my feet in relation to this. I would note that the bill that was tabled here in the Legislation here in this sitting was actually a bill that was drafted by the committee in respect of which, yourself, Mr. Speaker, is the chair.

So, we received that draft bill approximately a year ago. The hon. Leader of the Third Party wrote to myself in January in my capacity as minister of justice and asked if we would be putting legislation forward to which I responded that, yes we would, and I look forward to having a further discussion about that legislation as it went forward. After that, I heard nothing more about it. I should state to the House that I did write a letter to yourself, as chair of that committee, Mr. Speaker, yesterday in hope to get the committee's further assessment of the situation.

Thank you.

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

### **Legislative management committee rejected recommendations**

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

Minister, did you really bring forward these amendments without first inquiring as to why the legislative management committee rejected those two recommendations, or even checking to see if all parties were in agreement?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

I am a bit troubled, I will say, by this line of questioning. The reason behind that is that my understanding is that hon. Leader of the Third Party is on that committee. The official opposition is on that committee. We often would hear the hon. Leader of the Third Party in here saying that we need to collaborate and work together.

In the spirit of respecting those committees, we took the bill; I took that bill as Minister of Justice and Public Safety and the Attorney General that was put forward to our office. I sponsored it, as it often would happen to get it on the floor so that it might be debated here in this Chamber by all the members of this Chamber.

I think, out of respect of that committee, that's the proper process in this situation.

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

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

You have stated that that committee is composed of all three parties, but government members have been known to use the majority on committees to push through their own agenda over the objections of other members.

### **Decision of recommendations**

To the minister of justice: Can you confirm that the members of all three parties agreed with the decision to ignore two of the commissioner's recommendations?

**Ms. Casey:** (Indistinct) confidence.

**Mr. Roach:** (Indistinct)

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and Attorney General.

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

Again, I am troubled by this line of questioning. As you would well know, and out of respect for yourself, as chair of that committee, I am not considering myself to be in a position to question yourself and the authority that you had to send that letter to me asking me to advance that bill on behalf of the committee.

I would understand when a committee puts an ask like that forward that that is the will of the committee, and that I'm not in a position to begin to question the will. I advanced that bill as a government minister and as the Attorney General and Minister of Justice and Public Safety on behalf of that committee out of respect for the chair of the committee and the committee itself.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Almost two years ago the Premier delivered a member's statement on election finance reform in this House. In that he stated, and I quote: I do believe that the federal law passed in 2003 is our most important guidepost.

Yet, last week the Premier said, during debate on campaign finance reform that, and I quote again: This is not a simple process of it coming Prince Edward Island's turn to hop on the bandwagon that's going by.

### **Campaign finance reform**

A question to the Premier: What happened in the past two years to make you go from a glowing appraisal of these changes, to characterizing them as a bandwagon on which to be jumped?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I said, and I'm happy to say again, that campaign finance reform and the questions that are raised when that topic comes up do, indeed, call on us to think about the specificity of our situation on Prince Edward Island; to be respectful of the democratic process that we inherit and that we are responsible for, and, of course, that we can

have an opportunity to improve when the opportunity arises. I did, in my comments, last week, indicate that there a couple of things that had come to light that might, indeed, call for this House to take that into account when we come to the question of campaign finance reform.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

On Thursday of last week, the Premier also said that we should not be, and I quote again: Embarrassed or ashamed because that is the way that things have been done in the past.

### **Partisan interest and public interest**

A question to the Premier: It is true, indeed, that we cannot change the past, but don't you think we should be embarrassed and ashamed to be stuck in the past by allowing partisan interests to trump the public interest?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I am not embarrassed or ashamed to serve in this House, to be part of a government, or to inherit, build on, and respect the precedence, and the good work, and the people who have served here before us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Yesterday evening the Green Party started a petition on this issue and we already have over 200 signatures.

### **Banning of union and corporate donations (further)**

A question to the Premier: Do you really think that the majority of Islanders think that it is acceptable for you and your party to take money from corporations and unions

when seven provincial jurisdictions and the federal government have all banned this practice?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, it was clear in the spring of 2016, when I spoke on this matter and introduced a minister's statement. It was further clear when I wrote to the leaders of the official opposition and the third party at the end of that year that this is on our minds. It seems to me that the only time we hear from the Leader of the Third Party on this is in Question Period, which is something that's open for discussion, and we welcome that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

My question today is to the Minister Responsible for Justice and Public Safety.

Minister, since the enactment of the *Human Rights Act* in 1976, the Prince Edward Island Human Rights Commission has been empowered to administer and enforce the act and to develop a program of public information in education in the field of human rights to forward the principal that every person is free and equal in dignity and rights, without regard to age, colour, creed, disability, ethnic or natural origin, family status, gender expression, gender identity, marital status, political belief, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or source of income. Minister, it is this clause that I would like to focus my questions.

Our province is quite proud to be leading in population growth; however, many Islanders, including Indigenous Islanders and newcomers suffer discrimination, but for various reasons do not use the services of the Human Rights Commission. And a human rights review panel stated: human rights commissions need to invigorate their education mandate.

#### **Mandate for Human Rights Commission**

Minister: What is your department doing to ensure the Human Rights Commission has

all the necessary tools to carry out their mandate?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and Attorney General.

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

It's great to get an opportunity today to speak to some of these great justice programs that we have in this province. The Human Rights Commission is certainly no slouch in terms of the service that it provides to Prince Edward Islanders. I think there are a number of different matters that have been settled that have come before the Human Rights Commission in this province that have been precedent-setting across the country and we would commend the Human Rights Commission for the work that they have done in that area.

This is something that we take seriously. Our department in Justice and Public Safety provides operational funding of in excess of \$400,000 to the Human Rights Commission each year and they use that as they direct appropriate. In addition, we look at all government departments as being able to help in the provision of this service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Lewis Point, your first supplementary.

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

Minister, the 2016-2017 Human Rights Commission Annual Report highlighted the education and outreach activities of the commission. There were 61 educational presentations for approximately 1,400 students, teachers, employers, employees, service providers, and community leaders all done with a part-time education officer with a month-to-month contract – with the increase in our population and the understanding that when individuals understand the rights of others, they are less likely to violate these rights.

#### **Full-time education officer for increased need**

Minister, will your budget reflect that Human Rights Commission has a full-time

education officer to carry out the increased need for the commission?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General.

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

Again, we are very proud of the work that's done by our Human Rights Commission and again, the other departments within this government and perhaps a great example of that to turn everybody's mind to is the commemoration event in relation to the Sixties Scoop that took place at the Confederation Centre here this fall. It was a partnership of the Human Rights Commission and led by their information officer, but it also involved very heavily my other Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture. It was certainly something that we were very proud of and enabled new resources to be put towards recognition of things like Indigenous rights. The budget's yet to come on the floor, but we would see if we looked in the book that there is an increase in the line item this year.

Thank you.

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

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

Premier, three members of your caucus voted against your government regarding disinfection services. Before the vote, it was clear to all Liberal members that this was definitely a whipped vote. Prior to voting against government, these three members each received closed-door sessions to change their minds. Following the vote in the Legislature, I overheard you inform Teresa Wright of *The Guardian* that it was a free vote and she printed the story. As a result, Paul MacNeill of *The Eastern Graphic* praised you in the media as a premier that was going to do things differently by allowing a free vote.

### Members and free vote in Legislature

Premier: Why would you take credit for something you did not do?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has obviously a more detailed recollection of this than I have, but it's my recollection – and I stick by it – that our members spoke their mind here in this House and in other discussions and, indeed, that we did approach this as something that was worthy of debate and that's the way we do things.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Premier, do not be fooled by my red tie. My vote was not for sale and it was certainly not free.

Premier: When you were talking to the press, you were talking to the electorate. Are you concerned about the trust they placed in you as leader of the province?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I don't have any say and I don't think I ever did in what tie the member chooses to wear or how far ahead he tries to get by wearing that tie, but I'll be very clear: we have topics that come up regularly in policy development, in matters that are on the floor of this House, and that we have active discussions – discussions that we enjoy, that we have in a spirit of respect for each other and we recognize that there are many sides to the issues that we engage in and that's exactly how we operate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Premier, on budget and money issues, it is understood and expected that Liberal Party members must be on the same page.

Premier: Will you allow your members to vote their conscience on issues they feel are deeply important to their constituents?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** This sounds like the kind of the question that we might have discussed among our caucus. We might, indeed, on some future date, but let me say: We have a dynamic, engaged, happy, and united caucus –

**Mr. Myers:** They look happy.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – and I think, perhaps, whatever opportunity that –

**Ms. Biggar:** We've got each other's back.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – there may have been to pose that question within caucus is perhaps behind us now, but we're together, we're working as a team, and we're happy about it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

A number of years ago there was great discussion around Prince Edward Island about Veterans Affairs and the cutbacks that were going there.

#### **Veterans Affairs location positive for Charlottetown**

The question is to the Premier: Do you agree that overall, having Veterans Affairs here in Charlottetown is a positive thing for Charlottetown?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I agree that it is positive for all of Prince Edward Island to have a national ministry have its headquarters here. If you go back to the late 1970s, early 1980s when that move first took place, and compare it to what has been seen in our province in the meantime. It absolutely has been a positive thing for our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I, too, agree. I think it's fantastic when you see governments want to decentralize government out in the areas who are depressed and needed the work.

In 2013, the now rural development minister wrote an op/ed to the paper and he was calling for a department to come to Alberton. What he said was: 50 good-paying government jobs in a town the size of Alberton would have the same economic impact as 500 jobs would have in Charlottetown.

#### **Support for moving a government department to Alberton**

Question to the rural minister: Do you still support moving the department to Alberton?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

**Mr. Murphy:** Of course, I don't think I would be doing my district justice if I said no –

**Ms. Biggar:** (Indistinct) answer to that.

**Mr. Murphy:** – and I've been calling for such a move since I was mayor of Alberton some 11, 12 years ago.

Yes, I still stand by that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The minister said, at that time, in his op/ed, that the 50 government jobs relocated to Alberton would have the same impact as 500 would have in Charlottetown or in Summerside.

#### **Economic impact of government positions to new community**

Question to the minister of rural and economic development: Has your department done any research into the positive, economic impact that government positions would have in your community?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

**Mr. Murphy:** Yes, I guess, the emphasis that this government is putting on rural Prince Edward Island shows whenever we name the whole government department dedicated to rural PEI.

We, recently, in our budget, almost \$2.5 million for rural growth initiative; great program, going to do great things in rural Prince Edward Island. We continue to work to make rural Prince Edward Island a better place. We appointed the rural – the regional advisory councils, four different councils spread out right across the province. We're awaiting some great advice to come from them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

We all assume that the minister of rural and economic development has both the ear of the Premier and the same desire that he had in 2013 to bring a department to Alberton.

### **Government department move to Alberton**

Question to the rural and economic development minister: What department are you moving to Alberton?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

**Mr. Mitchell:** (Indistinct) got a Holland College up there.

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

Are you saying I could have my choice?

**Mr. Myers:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. Murphy:** I think that's something that would have to be a Cabinet decision, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

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

Okay, so it's a Cabinet decision. In 2013, you thought this was really important, you wrote an op/ed for it. I think you may have even asked questions in the Legislature. You're a minister now. The Premier, obviously, has put a lot of faith in you by putting yourself in that chair.

When you brought this to Cabinet, what the response of your colleagues and what department do you plan on bringing to Alberton?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

**Mr. Murphy:** I missed the last part of that question, Mr. Speaker. What was the last part? Sorry.

**Mr. Myers:** What part?

What did your Cabinet say and what department are you bringing in?

**Mr. Murphy:** Well, that decision hasn't been made yet, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, your final question.

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

For those of us, who are rural MLAs and represent rural communities, we do think it's very important to have the same opportunities in the rural communities because the minister responsible for communities the other night, in debate, said that everything is in Charlottetown, that's why everybody is moving here.

Well, what we think that we should be looking at what opportunities to move government back to the people where it belongs. I know that the minister responsible for rural matters here on Prince Edward Island agrees with me because in 2013, he agreed with me and I know that he's got the ear of the Premier.

### **Government departments decentralized**

Question to the minister responsible for rural development here on Prince Edward Island: Do you plan on going to bat for Alberton and rural communities to have government decentralize out into them, or is the rural minister just a title?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Rural and Regional Development.

**Mr. Murphy:** I think it's, not only because I'm minister, but for all rural MLAs to be fighting for things for their districts. I certainly do that. I certainly advocate, I don't think it's any secret where my position is on decentralization; I think it's more could happen.

We've appointed these advisory councils and let's see what they come back with. Maybe, that might be one of their recommendations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]