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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 18 APRIL 2018

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, I was asked questions from the Member from West Royalty-Springvale, as well as the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, regarding our capital provincial paving program also known as recap.

We maintain 5,375 kilometres of roads right across PEI. I would like to inform the House that, in fact, 18 districts received additional paving last fall out of that program. Of those, 10 are districts currently held by opposition parties including; District 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 15, 17, 18, 19 and 20.

Each year, my department uses tools such as traffic counts, pavement condition and spring pavement breakup to prioritize our paving program.

I'd also like to point out, our most recent tender from last Thursday, of the nine projects, six are in opposition districts. The total cost of those projects is \$3 million.

I think it's very unfortunate that some of the accusations coming from the member from West Royalty seem to be a case of sour grapes.

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

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

I should be clear that I'm rising in my capacity as the minister of justice further to the questions from the hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, yesterday to advise and to clarify that legal aid rates were actually reviewed last year. A subsequent raise of between 10% and 25% depending on the grouping that you would fall within was made.

The maximum amount would now be \$30,000. Again, there's a needs test depending on the seriousness of the matter that's applied beyond that.

I can report, in addition to that, that there was 395 family and civil applications approved last year. Forty-six related to child protection litigation and 47 involved serious domestic violence concerns. And 859 criminal applications, including youth matters.

I hope that clarify things, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

West Prince currently is in a crisis over the lack of access for family physicians. I might add that this is a completely unacceptable situation.

Family doctor vacancies in West Prince

Question to the minister of health: How many family doctor vacancies currently exist in West Prince?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can assure you and the hon. member that when it comes to health care in West Prince, my feet are held firmly to the fire by the minister of transportation, the minister of agriculture and the Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, and the minister of rural development.

Certainly, this is an issue that's been ongoing for some time in the West Prince area. We have developed a plan where we can work with the doctors in the area to aid in our in-patient care within the Alberton hospital system.

We do have two doctors that recently retired. I believe they both retired from the West Prince area. We are out diligently trying to recruit doctors and locums to come to that area in needs where highly trained skill professionals are dealing with the health care needs of those in the West

Prince area of the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

There's currently three family doctors missing, vacant positions in West Prince. Some of these, dating back well over a year. There's also a limited access to walk-in clinics in the area.

Impact on patients re: doctor shortage

Question to the minister: How many patients are directly impacted by this shortage of family doctors in West Prince?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Certainly, the physicians from that area are very proud of the work they do and are stepping up to fill gaps in the needs that do exist until we find those doctors that may come from anywhere in Canada or the world for that matter.

We are diligently working on trying to recruit doctors for that area. Yes, there is a shortfall and doctors are even filling in, in areas, you know, as I said earlier, in-patient care in Alberton hospital. They are actually filling in on walk-in clinics and things of that nature.

Doctors from East Prince are actually going up to fill when they are available to do so. We are fully aware of the situation there and are working double time to try to solve it, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Last week, we were talking about the Kings County Memorial Hospital and what the doctors were being put under there and the workload they're experiencing and the

eventual burnout that they're going to experience.

Now, we're talking about West Prince today and we're having the doctors under the same pressure up there.

The minister was asked: How many patients this affects. He didn't give an answer, so I'll answer it. There are 3,000 residents of West Prince that have no family doctor. Again, some of these individuals have had no access to a family doctor for well over a year.

Names of residents on patient registry

Question to the minister of health: Why are these residents being told by your government not to put their names on the patient registry?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Certainly, when a physician retires or leaves, their panel becomes available and they do have that option of going under the patient registry.

Currently, the hon. member referenced 3,000 in the West Prince area. Currently, there's about 9,000 province-wide. We had the opportunity to come to standing committee just a few short weeks ago to talk about this issue. And to the fact that when a doctor retires, it's often the best to kind of keep their panel together, so that when we do find a new doctor or a new doctor comes or even a locum, in that matter, that will take on these patients, they transition as a group of a panel. That's very important.

However, some patients do decide to go on the registry, and that's why this number exists from this area, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

According to the province there are currently 7,500 Islanders without a family doctor, but we know that number to be

closer to about 18,000. Only 567 West Prince residents are on the patient registry.

Question to the minister of health: Why did you create the patient registry if government is telling thousands of Islanders not to put their name on it?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, when we're out trying to recruit doctors, rural areas of anywhere in Canada are a little bit harder to attract doctors to. You have to get somebody from the rural area, and in particular, if it's somebody from the particular area, makes it that much simpler.

We do know that it's easier to transition full panel sizes to new doctors. We'll continue to work on that. We know this has been the case in that area for some time. We are trying to recruit. It is difficult to recruit to rural areas, but we have a major focus on this and we'll continue to work on it, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's quite clear and quite evident that the patient registry is not working. In fact, I would have to say that it's actually broken. Government has toyed with the idea of using private sector recruitment to fill these vacancies.

Private sector recruiting and doctor vacancies

Question to the minister of health: Isn't it time that we look at new ideas like private sector recruiting to solve problems like doctor vacancies?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Certainly in the department we have a very valuable recruitment team that goes out, identifies – work hard to go out and capture physicians to come to work on Prince Edward Island.

Currently we have, I believe it's the largest compliment of doctors or physicians on Prince Edward Island – currently over 225 province-wide. This is a group of individuals who work diligently in this area, have a major focus and vision of what we need in all areas of our doctor recruitment and they go out to continue to work that. I'm sure there's all kinds of networking that is done and some of it may be privately, I'm not sure, but certainly this is a team that has this focus of health care on Prince Edward Island, has a focus of recruiting doctors and go out and work at it every day.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister and his recruiting department came to standing committee a little while ago to talk about the struggles with recruitment and a few successes as well. At that time, they felt that they could do a much better job of recruiting, rather than private sector.

Minister: Do you think we should put that to the test again?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In my discussions with our recruitment team and in discussions they have with other recruitment officers across Canada, they all suffer the same challenges. They're all out trying to recruit the same individual to come to their jurisdictions to do work in their healthcare systems. This is not new, Mr. Speaker. This has been going on for a number of years as physicians try to establish their own work-life balance situations. They want to be in larger, urban areas. These are challenges that all jurisdictions face across Canada and we try to make that point very clear at standing committee –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Mitchell: – and I try to make that point very clear again today.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member from Souris-Elmira is right. Let's be leaders. Let's not just say that we're all on the same boat. I don't see what the harm is in having a recruitment department doing what they do in your department, and then we have private sector recruiters doing the same thing. I don't understand. Why don't we have multiple people doing this?

Mr. LaVie: Your system's not working.

Mr. MacEwen: I see many members over there nodding their heads when the Leader of the Opposition raised the idea. Like: Yes, that makes a lot of sense. If you go down to Tim Horton's and you pitch that idea, they're going to say: That makes a lot of sense. What's the holdback? Why don't we just get the private recruiters going at the same time as your department?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I tried to allude to a little bit earlier, I do believe our recruitment team – they do go out, they reach out to other networks including, I guess you'd call them private companies that go – the term is called headhunters.

Our recruiters do go out and talk to headhunters to determine who's in the area; who's available; who might come to Prince Edward Island; who, in particular, might come to a rural area of Prince Edward Island and they do that on a regular basis. This is not a closed door for them. They don't sit in their office and make calls from their telephones. They're out, they're working with others, and they're trying to attract the best health professionals to our province.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Return of doctor to Tyne Valley medical centre

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When can the residents of Tyne Valley expect their doctor back to the medical centre there?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I alluded to earlier as well, the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy has kept me well-abreast of the concerns of the area from the Tyne Valley residents. Dr. Montgomery will be returning, I believe, in the very near future. Dr. Montgomery did a very valuable service for us at the Province of Prince Edward Island – stepping up to handle in-care patients at Alberton Hospital; so that hospital remained sustainable and open for those patients and clients that need this care. Obviously, there are a couple other doctors there that were willing to take on their patients, but that still left a significant gap. Dr. Montgomery stepped up, helped us out in that area, and allowed that very excellent health care transition from when they would come into the hospital, until they left.

So we are very, very thankful and very fortunate to have Dr. Montgomery in that area, providing that very valuable service.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At the first of March, people were trying to book appointments for their medical needs with nurse practitioners. They couldn't get appointments. April was booked up – the entire month was booked up. This was at the first of March.

What do you say to the people of Tyne Valley that are trying to get an appointment and are told: No, sorry, you've got to wait six weeks?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

What I neglected to indicate a little bit earlier that to the best of my knowledge there is a locum now in the Tyne Valley area that is assisting as well a nurse practitioner and soon there'll be two new nurse practitioners heading up to that area once they begin their working contracts. We know full-well that Islanders expect very high-quality, professional healthcare professionals taking care of their needs on Prince Edward Island and we work towards making sure that that is the case, not only in Tyne Valley, Alberton, O'Leary, but in all regions of Prince Edward Island and we'll continue to work on that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition alluded to the problems that are happening down at the Kings County Memorial Hospital – about sending people to ER. That's what these patients are being told: Go to the ERs.

Is this not going to just exasperate the problem that's going on in Summerside and Alberton at the ERs if we just keep telling them to go? Are we going to go down the same road as Kings County?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

When it comes to the situation in Kings County Memorial Hospital, we find ourselves in a situation that we haven't been into for a number of – I'll say years. We now have a full complement of doctors in the Kings County region, so we do have the complement now to provide that ER service and other services: acute care, primary care, all those other aspects of service that we were not fully able to provide in that region for some time.

This is very beneficial for the region of Kings County Memorial Hospital and we will continue to work in other areas of Prince Edward Island to try to provide that same and equal, sustainable service in all regions of our province.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The reason that we're asking these questions today is because we've had a number of people coming to us from the West Prince area wondering. They're just finding this information out. When we have ER closures in other places, we get it out to the public. It seems to be with this government that: We've got to shelter that. We've got to hide that. Let's be a lot more open with the people when this stuff happens again. Yes, we're going to have shortages. Yes, we're going to have some problems. You talk about retirements, but why do we need to – when we call for an appointment, that's when you find out that it's not going to be for six weeks.

Communication strategy for West Prince

What's going to be the communication strategy for the good people of West Prince the next time this happens?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to ERs at all hospitals across Prince Edward Island, we do, I'll say, a very wonderful job of getting that word out to those residents in that area that a situation has occurred, it's out of our control, and the remedy will be for you to go to a different ER. The problem in West Prince, it's not the ER, hon. member; the ER functions fully and wonderfully in that area. This is about inpatient care in Alberton hospital – which we do have a gap there that we're trying to mitigate and actually, through the help of the members that I alluded to earlier with other medical professionals there, we're looking to resolve. Actually, if it takes stepping out of the box and looking at the big picture, that's what's going on today and will continue to.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Island pharmacies are a big partner in the frontline delivery of our health care here on Prince Edward Island.

Pharmacists working to full scope of practice

Question to the minister of health: Do you support letting pharmacists work to their full scope of practice?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly taking my chair a few short months ago, I've had opportunities to talk to pharmacists from one end of the province to the other. I do understand that they have wishes that they could practice full scope and over the last number of years, they have been added scopes of work, whether it's immunization, whether it's allowing to fill drugs – re-prescribe for individuals. We've done a lot of work in that area.

It's an area that we will continue to work on and have discussions with pharmacists to say: What do you think would best suit your needs. These pharmacists are all across Prince Edward Island in, I'll say, rural areas that provide wonderful service when the customer comes in through the door – where that pharmacist can help them to figure out the best medications so that they get their sickness taken care of very efficiently, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As you know, thousands of Islanders don't have a doctor; thousands of Islanders. Islanders are forced to go to the emergency rooms. We're forcing them to go to the emergency rooms just to get prescriptions filled, just to get prescriptions filled. Pharmacies are the most reliable contact point in the healthcare system.

Question to the health minister: Doesn't that make our pharmacists even more important?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These pharmacists do play a very viable role in healthcare in Prince Edward Island. As well do physicians in walk-in clinics, and I do know from my experience, walk-in clinics, even if it's in this area, there are people from the hon. member's area that come in to walk-in clinics in the Charlottetown area, or other areas surrounding the Charlottetown area.

They do provide a very vital service as well, but as far as full scope for pharmacists, we're looking into that. We're talking to them about that, and we'll continue to work on that, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Island pharmacies provide an important continuity of care to Islanders.

Impacts of generic drug pricing

Question to the minister of health: Have you heard any concerns about negative impact on our pharmacies from generic drug pricing?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

We have all kinds of great discussions with pharmacists and pharmacy owners all across the Province of Prince Edward Island. From time to time, we do get into those discussions of generic drugs, high-cost drugs; drugs that need to be added to the formulary.

Pharmacists play a very important role in those discussions as well, and I expect that those will continue on as changes are made, both at the provincial formulary level and with our pharmacy level, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, with more generic drugs two things are happening. Two things are happening. Government drug costs are falling. Revenue to pharmacies are falling, and that could impact the service they provide to Islanders.

Reduced services at pharmacies

Question to the health minister: What are you doing to make sure that our Islanders don't end up paying the price with reduced services from the pharmacies?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know that the member across the floor is very in tune with his constituents. The cost of drug reduction when generic drugs are put into place saved his constituents, his residents a lot of money so that they are able to stay in their own homes. They are able to provide very workable lives with low-cost drugs.

This is not about pharmacies' bottom lines; this is about constituents of his and mine, and all members of this floor, and all Islanders, being able to afford drug programs on Prince Edward Island and the generic program was a very valuable program that provided low-cost drugs to families, seniors, and those that cannot afford them.

Some Hon. Members: Affordable.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Pharmacies give flu shots. They verify prescriptions. They advise patients of a better management of health to their system. A lot of these value-added services for Islanders are being provided now out of the pockets of pharmacies. They're paying for it out of their own pocket. The pharmacies are no longer able to provide these extra health services.

Providing of extra health services

Who is going to be there for these patients?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member when it comes to affordable drug programs for our children, our youth, our families and our seniors, this government will be there for your constituents, hon. member.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

There has been a lot of discussion in this House recently about rural governance and amalgamation, and rightly so, as it is a complicated issue that has provoked strong feelings and much debate all across the Island.

Oftentimes, the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment has, in response to questions on the process, referred to the fact that the Three Rivers proposal is currently in the hands of IRAC and that we all need to wait until their deliberations are complete before we pre-suppose what the next steps will be.

Public consultations and IRAC

Question to the minister: Has IRAC any experience in handling an issue as complex as this, and do you feel that they have the capacity to carry out the public consultations which are mandated in the act?

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

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

IRAC provides an excellent service to Islanders from one end to the other. IRAC handles all the land-use permits that are going through their authority, so they know rural communities because they see the land transactions going through for non-residents, corporations and things like that. I think that IRAC has the capacity and the expertise to adjudicate this procedure, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Some people have also expressed concerns about the degree of independence of IRAC in such a politically-charged environment as we find ourselves with this debate on amalgamation.

IRAC and rural amalgamation

Minister: Do you have confidence that IRAC will act in an independent manner when it comes to rural amalgamation?

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

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

This government believes in strong communities from one end of Prince Edward Island to the other end. We believe that strong communities make a strong province, and that's why Prince Edward Island's population is growing. That's why Prince Edward Island's economy is growing, because we have strong communities from one end of Prince Edward Island to the other.

We'll continue to work to make strong communities. Does IRAC have the independence? Yes, sir.

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

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

The chair and CEO of IRAC is apparently a good Liberal, having donated \$6,690 to the party between 2007 and 2013, prior to his appointment in 2014.

Influence of Liberal party on IRAC

Can the minister reassure this House that the Liberal Party of PEI will not have any influence over the IRAC proceedings?

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

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that IRAC would work as an independent to adjudicate the procedures that are happening.

The people at IRAC – what is the Leader of the Third Party saying? Anybody that contributes to a political party any time in their history is not allowed a job? Is he going to fire all the judges down at the court house? Is he going to fire everybody that ever made a contribution to a political party in Prince Edward Island? If that's the system we're in, thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

Montague Consolidated School is a very important institution to all residents in my area. This school is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, school in the Province of Prince Edward Island. Given the design of recent new schools, schools that have been recently finished and schools that are currently under construction, it is acknowledged that this school is way out of date, and that this school needs to be replaced.

Replacement of Montague Consolidated School

Can the minister tell us here today what his plans are for a replacement of the Montague Consolidated School, and does he have the dollars budgeted in his management plan going forward?

Mr. LaVie: Election coming?

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

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

Thank you to the hon. member for the question.

We've had a number of questions of late in relation to the procedure for capital repairs to schools and like any other capital repair procedure, the Public Schools Branch is charged with making a determination as to

the state of that infrastructure, and it's readiness to provide the education we need to Prince Edward Island students.

I am aware that they are aware that Montague school is aging infrastructure and needs to be looked at in the medium-term with an eye to its ability to continue on in that capacity.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I thank the minister for that.

Can the minister advise us if he has visited Montague Consolidated School and had a firsthand look at the school and the dated layout that is needed to be replaced as has been the case across the Island in other communities?

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

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

As the hon. member would be aware, it's a couple of years since I've been to that school. We have made attempts to get together, actually, and go down and take a look at that school of late. For one conflict or another, haven't been able to do that immediately. I do have some level of awareness of it.

I will reiterate –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – again, that it doesn't matter what level of awareness I have. It's up to the Public Schools Branch to determine what they feel is appropriate in relation –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – to that school and to put a recommendation forward to our office.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will the minister work with the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy to complete a replacement assessment for the Montague Consolidated School this spring, and direct staff in both departments to complete a replacement assessment of this school that accommodate current and future students' needs and confirm this replacement is included and funded in the fall budget of 2018 for immediate replacement?

Mr. LaVie: I can guarantee you (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: You got your two news schools. Be quiet.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

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

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

That does demonstrate just why we need to have an organization like the Public Schools Branch that is charged with this. What I will commit to do is go back to the Public Schools Branch and to ensure, as I know that they are, as I have had this conversation with them already, that they are aware of the reported state of Montague Consolidated School –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – their facility staff do have an eye on that school.

I'm sure that they are looking at that as they are with many of our schools, which are beginning to show their age with an eye to determining when they may need some capital investment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

My question is for the minister of transportation. As everyone in the House remembers, a few years ago, we had a major problem with bridges on the Island. And responsibly, the department looked and did a serious review of all the bridges across the province.

Unfortunately, at that time, there were a number of bridges that were deemed to be not going to be opened again. Since that time though, very fortunately, we have had three successive balanced budgets and we've had money put into bridges.

Budget for updating bridges

Can the minister tell us she has had a change of heart and is looking at –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. McIsaac: – fixing those bridges?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: I've got two.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the member mentioned, we had some challenges. We implemented a structure that we would ensure that bridges were inspected on a regular basis because the safety of the travelling public is paramount to us.

Since 2015, we've invested \$120 million in capital road and bridge projects, including the construction and rehabilitation of 16 bridge structures alone. There were 10 bridge structures closed, as was mentioned. When we do that, though, we don't do it lightly. We take into consideration; the traffic, what is the radius of a detour, and we'll continue to prioritize and inspect those bridges.

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

Mr. McIsaac: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the territory of Nunavut, they have a very famous road that's called the Road to Nowhere. In the district of Lyndale there's a Settlement road, which is soon going to take on that name, as well.

We are very interested in having that bridge repaired. Is it possible that we could, now that there are the extra dollars, look at that one, start with that one of the 10 and come back with a review as to what, possibly, it might take to get that bridge open?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our capital budget that we tabled in 2018-2019 included \$53 million for roads and bridges, new equipment and buildings. That did include \$5 million for bridges. We have an unexpected expenditure with the Murray Harbour bridge for that community.

I mentioned though, that we do a thorough bridge inspection program with our capital projects. We have six bridge replacements planned this year for eastern PEI along. That is paramount, as well. To those are major travelling areas for the public. That project for Murray Harbour, as I mentioned, is going to be a \$3 million project on its own. We have to look at priority where the largest traffic flows are –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – and we do not have any plans to reopen those 10 bridges.

Mr. Roach: You've got your bridge. Be quiet.

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

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

I mentioned earlier that we did have three successive balanced budgets. A lot of that due to the agriculture community in this province. They put a lot of dollars into the coffers. This Settlement road, the bridge that

attaches it through to the district of Lyndale, has a lot of farmers on that road.

Even if we could get the bridge repaired to the point where we could get cars and trucks to follow it, and we would agree to keep the heavy equipment off it.

Settlement Road in Lyndale

Could the minister report back that that might be a possibility to get that passage open, at least to that extent ASAP?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you –

Mr. LaVie: A walking bridge.

Ms. Biggar: – Mr. Speaker.

Our infrastructure program is investing in connectors for Island farmers, Island fishers right across PEI. We were able to open up new criteria for road construction. We've invested over \$218 million in road construction, including bridges right across PEI, for those farmers in that member's district to get their products to market. We will continue to work on that objective.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Recently, Facebook has been in the news because of personal data being shared for political purposes without those people's consent.

A number of Islanders have approached us from District 11 and told us that during the Charlottetown-Parkdale election Green Party staff and volunteers who were out campaigning door-to-door began the conversation by saying that someone in the household supported proportional representation.

PR coalition campaign data

Does the minister of justice know how the Green Party of PEI would have been in

possession of this PR coalition campaign data?

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

Mr. J. Brown: No, Mr. Speaker, I don't nor would I know how that might happen, I guess.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Green Party President, Anna Keenan, serves as campaign director for the PR coalition. She registered and administers the database website for the PR coalition campaign. This website that she administers contains the data on collected donations and stored personal information on thousands of Islanders. It appears this data is now in the possession of the Green Party.

Personal information in possession of third party

Minister, are you concerned with the passing of personal information, collected under different pretenses to the Green Party of PEI?

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

Mr. J. Brown: Mr. Speaker, yes, is the answer to that question. This is a very serious allegation –

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – it is the reason why we would have freedom of information and protection of privacy. We'd focus on the first part of that more frequently than the second.

Information in this province, and as the hon. member indicated, it has more recently come to light in the context of US political goings on and certainly I would hope that it's not appearing here in the province.

Be that as it is, I take the hon. member's indications very seriously, and would commit to working with you to looking further into them.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, minister.

I have a copy of the registry information for the domain name pronpei.com. The registrant contact and the administration contact is Ms. Anna Keenan. I'll be tabling that.

Jordan Bober, the Green Party fundraising chair, serves as the digital campaigner for the PR coalition, soliciting voter information and donations. He also served as the campaign manager for the Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale during the District 11 by-election.

Third party targeting votes in by-election

Minister: Do you suppose it's a coincidence that the Green Party was targeting voters in the by-election using data, their party president and by-election campaign manager were collecting under other pretenses?

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

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

I should state that I would not be too quick to suppose anything, but as I indicated, this is of a great concern, particularly when we have municipal elections that are essentially upon us. Certainly I would, as I indicated, commit to taking this back to my department to see what we may be able to do to assist in an investigation in relation to this matter and I would encourage the hon. member as well to – if she's not already – to report this to the Chief Electoral Officer's office as they would typically be charged with the handling of any information collected during – or utilized, I guess – during a campaign insofar as I'm aware at this point, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The personal data on thousands of Islanders that was collected under the guise of the PR coalition appears to have been given to the

Green Party of PEI. This could include names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, credit card numbers and financial information, political party affiliation, and many other data points. Minister, the deliberate leaking of information to other organizations without knowledge or consent of the person is a serious matter.

Sharing and usage of personal information

How will this government address the sharing and usage of personal information by senior Green Party officials and their political party?

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

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

Again, I would take this as a very serious allegation. It's one that there are two offices set up within this province to deal with – being the Privacy and Information Commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer. As I indicated, I will take this back to my department and see what further we can do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Protection of Islanders under FOIPP Act

Minister: What legal protection do these Islanders have whose information has been deliberately shared with the Green Party? What do they have under the provincial FOIPP Act, or the federal *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act*?

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

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

I don't propose to get into providing a legal opinion here on the floor of the Legislature today, but as I indicated, I do – this sounds like a very serious offence if the allegations that have been leveled are, in fact, true and

certainly as I have committed already, I will reinforce my commitment to the hon. member and to this House to take this back to my department and to look further into it. I will be back here to provide an update as to what I've been able to find out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Senior Green Party officials are still soliciting donations and information from Islanders through their PR website front. They are pushing monthly donations through this database website and I will table a screenshot of that in the House later. I'm calling for these actions to be suspended until a further investigation can be completed.

Government action and sharing of data

What action will government take to stop the data collection, the soliciting of donations, and the sharing of data with the Green Party of PEI, and to investigate what has already taken place?

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

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

Again as I had indicated previously and will reiterate, I would encourage the hon. member to report this to the Chief Electoral Officer and the Information and Privacy Commissioner and certainly I'll take this back to my department and commit to determining what, if any, help we might be able to provide in relation to this – what seems to be a very serious complaint.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, your final question.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The only organized lobby group active during the recent plebiscite, who had the president of the Green Party of PEI serving

as campaign director, finally admitted publicly to receiving approximately \$75,000 in funding support. Of this, \$30,000 came from unions and \$20,000 came from political parties.

Minister of justice: Are you concerned about these revelations, and does government have any answers as to how this conflict will be dealt with?

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

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

As I indicated yesterday when I was on my feet speaking to a motion, I originally had some level of concern particularly with the union donations and perhaps in this context I maybe should have had more concern in relation to the personal donations that were being made.

But, as I indicated, we would take all of this very seriously. They are very serious allegations and again, we would encourage the hon. member to report them to the Chief Electoral Officer and to report them to the freedom of information and privacy commissioner, and I'll take them back to my department and I will commit to connecting with the hon. member if she's interested and available to participate in seeing what we can do to further an investigation in relation to this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]