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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 9 MAY 2018

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, while answering questions from the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters on recent charges laid by Canadian Border Service Agency, I made a mistake on the numbers.

To clarify my answer, I offer the following: all files reviewed by border services were provincial PNP clients from the 2008 program, which no longer exists –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) dynamite.

Mr. Palmer: – it is our understanding that out of all the immigrants and their families, who reported Sherwood Motel as their residence to border services, only 17 reported Sherwood Motel as their residence to the province over the six-year period.

Border services have not released the names of the immigrants. We have identified 17 applicants based on the Sherwood Motel address from our records. The remaining files being reviewed have not listed Sherwood Motel address on their application with the province.

This is a very serious matter, and we are fully cooperating with border services to get to the bottom of the issue. We've made extensive changes to our program since 2008, and these accusations are all related to the old program.

The Auditor General reviewed our 2008 program and recommended changes. Those recommendations have all been implemented.

The provincial government is not referenced in the court documents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. R. Brown: Great job.

Mike Currie program.

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

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

I've some answers to questions that were taken under advisement, I think, last Friday, and a couple of days before that, in relation to schools.

The first is who is engaged in the development of the emergency response plan for Island schools. The answer is all schools have lock-down plans and practice them on a regular basis. Student services works with schools to ensure plans are kept up-to-date and documented. Policing agencies help in developing the plans, participate in practicing the drills and offer suggestions for improvements.

How long has it been since we had a group analysis and critical appraisal of the current emergency response plan for our Island schools?

Following the province-wide school evacuation in September, 2016, a comprehensive after-action review was done to determine lessons learned and best practices for school evacuations.

As a result of this review, several measures were taken, including our new education emergency management committee evolving, which includes the EMO, Public Schools Branch, French Language School Board, private schools, post-secondary institutions, RCMP, municipal police services, fire marshal, and PEI Crime Stoppers.

Evacuation guidelines were created by the Public Schools Branch with the assistance of EMO and tested in a real bomb threat incident in January, 2017.

The Public Schools Branch and the French Language School Board have been invited to be part of the EMO centre team during future emergency events.

There was a question in relation to floor plans being publicly available online. I am advised that there are not floor plans available online. There were a couple of

drawings and pictures of classrooms, which have been removed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

As we all should know a successful and well-run immigration system is vital for PEI's economic future.

Yesterday's alarming federal charges were simply the latest example that all is not well within our provincial immigration program.

Confidence in immigration programs

Question to the Premier: Why should Islanders have confidence that our immigration programs are being run above board?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as the minister responded yesterday and earlier today, these programs have been thoroughly reviewed, including by the Auditor General, whose recommendations have been implemented.

In the spring of last year a very thorough review was implemented and a new process put in place.

Let me remind the House that our immigration programs comprise many streams. Fewer than, under 30%, would be in the investor programs, others such as people coming with particular skills, people coming as refugees. They're not only above board, but they're a great contribution to our province and to our dynamic population.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

If they were so above board and without concern or problems we wouldn't have had to have a very scathing report from the Auditor General; we wouldn't have the federal government continually coming in to try to straighten out the program.

The chronic mismanagement in our immigration programs has been one of this government's defining achievements over the last 11 years.

Mismanagement in immigration program

Question to the Premier: Why does your government have such trouble enforcing its own policies and simply following the rules?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there is a serious disengagement; I'll call it, across the floor when it comes to what is actually happening with our immigration and with our population in this province. Last year, Prince Edward Island led, among the provinces, in terms of the number, the percentage of immigration per capita.

We're proud of that. We can see our population growing. I mentioned this, last Friday, in this House, we, today, have a larger proportion of our provincial population between the ages zero to 14 than is the case of any province east of Manitoba.

We can go on and point to all of the ways in which our immigration is successful. People are here. They are doing well. Our province is growing. Our culture is developing. I think all Prince Edward Islanders, and I hope every member of this House, takes pride in that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Over the last years of chronic mismanagement by this government we have seen the federal government suspending our immigration program. We've seen a blistering Auditor General's

report. And now, we've seen federal immigration charges.

Do you consider these the signs of a well-run program?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a very serious matter. We take these charges very seriously and we're cooperating with border services to get to the bottom of this issue.

Our immigration program has changed significantly since 2008. There were recommendations made by the Auditor General. All of those recommendations were made and we continue to evolve the program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Indeed, this is a very serious issue, and we should be paying attention that Canada Border Services has been investigating this and are bringing charges.

It's unfortunate that this minister couldn't even give us correct facts yesterday when we were talking about this. Incidents like this and many others in the past have Islanders questioning how this government manages its immigration programs.

Trust of government in immigration program

Question again to the Premier: Premier, how can we trust that any improvements are being made after 11 years of mismanagement by your government?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our immigration program continues to evolve. The Auditor General reviewed the

program in 2008, made recommendations and those recommendations were all implemented. I think that is great evidence that suggests that our program continues to evolve, meets the needs of the province, and meets the needs of our applicants.

We're very pleased with the results. There are lots of new people coming into the province. Our economy continues to grow. Our exports continue to grow. Our province is doing well, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

When we have 566 people – 566, not 17 – claiming residency at a 46 room motel then we have problems with our immigration program. When the federal government is laying multiple charges, clearly we have problems with our immigration program.

Question to the Premier: Are you intentionally tarnishing PEI's reputation when it comes to immigration, or are you blind to the impact that this having on our province?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The program we're talking about today is from 2008. It has evolved significantly from there. There's been recommendations made by the Auditor General and all of those recommendations were implemented.

I understand that the people involved in this gave incorrect information to border services. That is not to our department, that's a federal department and we continue to evolve our immigration program and again, implemented all the recommendations of the Auditor General in 2008 and we know our economy is better today with new immigrants and new entrepreneurs in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So the minister here ran a bit of a clarification here at the start of the Question Period, talking about the number 17 that he said yesterday were the only people who were living in the motel in Sherwood, while we knew it was 16 – because the court documents that we had said that 99% of the immigrants were approved by his department.

Government approval of immigrants at Sherwood Motel

Question to the minister: Why did your government approve and vouch for these 600 people living in one location?

Mr. Fox: Good question.

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The program we're talking about is the 2008 version of that and it has been evolved a number of times. The number of residents that listed that address on their application was 17. So that program continues to evolve based on recommendation from the Auditor General and the information that we had is there was 17 had the address over six years at that address.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So it's common fact right across the board that the number that everyone believes to be true is the 600 number because it has been proven by court documents that were filed by the federal government – the border service agency. You may only have record for 17, but you approved 99% of the 600.

Records for immigrants under program

Question to the minister: How is it possible that your department has absolutely no

records for hundreds and hundreds of immigrants who applied for permanent residency under your program?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The 2008 program that we continue to talk about has addresses on those applications; they just are not the addresses from the Sherwood Motel. So, 17 of those had the address on it, the others had other addresses, but we're not sure which ones those are because they haven't released the names of any of those files that they're looking into, but we do know from all of our records that 17 listed that location as their address.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So Canada Border Services Agency executed a warrant at the Sherwood Motel and they identified another address – it was 16 Chancellor St. in Charlottetown – the personal residence of Yi Zhong and his family. At the Sherwood Motel, three pieces of mail with the Chancellor St. address sent to two unknown people that they believe are clients.

PNP applicants at 16 Chancellor Street

Question to the minister: How many PEI PNP applicants are listed at 16 Chancellor Street in Charlottetown?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again this is the 2008 model that was in place at the time. The Auditor General made recommendations. We had implemented those recommendations and now we have an expression of interest model. I will tell you some of the things that we asked for: Our office meets with all the applicants when they land in PEI. During this meeting, our office gathers information: mailing address,

lease agreement, phone number, email contacts, and any other relevant information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister here keeps going back to this was a 2008 program and they've changed it. They changed it because they were cheating it, basically. We have people here that he doesn't know where they are; he doesn't know where they live; he doesn't know what address they actually gave to them; he doesn't know where in the country they are; if they're in this country; what they're doing; who they are. They clearly hooked up with people that were shady in order to get into this, so that's why I'm worried. I'm worried because we have no idea who your program let into this province or this country.

Government enforcing own rules for applicants

Question to the minister: Why has your government been so lax on enforcing your own rules to ensure PNP applicants are qualified to be in this country?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, that was the 2008 model. We have now improved the program based on recommendations from the Auditor General and to further information that we receive from our revised entrepreneur program from 2012, which includes residency escrow deposit, we require and need satisfaction for the following documents: lease or purchase of a house; and tax returns confirming PEI as a province of residence; and utility bills confirming PEI residence; and letters from schools confirming dependents and role in school; and Visa or Mastercard statements reflecting PEI residency; and any other information that will prove residency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll read to the minister from the court documents that our office went up to Summerside to get today. At the border services – search warrants – in one specific case a family was using the Sherwood Motel address. They tried to portray their document as being sent to the feds from the Sherwood Motel. In reality, over the course of five days they had arrived in Vancouver, translated their passports, had passport photos taken, signed their application stating they were signing in in Charlottetown, mailed their applications from Vancouver using the Sherwood Motel as the sender's address, and then departed from the Vancouver International Airport to Seattle.

Canadian Border Services Agency and PNP system

Question to the minister: Do you agree with this Canadian Border Services Agency that there are organized networks of people trying to cheat your PNP system?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a very serious matter and we continue to work with border services to get to the bottom of this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

According to court documents, among the items that CBSA were looking for in their search warrants were: literature and documents related to permanent resident card applications and provincial nominee applications, literature and documents from the office of immigration and IIDI.

Requested information from EDT

Question to the economic development minister: What documents has Canada

border services requested from your department as part of this investigation?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said: this is very serious and we are fully cooperating with border services. As they need information, we're happy to provide everything that we have available to us. So we'll continue to work with them because we know that this is serious and we want to get to the bottom of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The types of documents CBSA were looking for in their search warrant include: application forms, correspondence, residency questionnaires, address notification forms.

Question to the minister: Has your department provided any of this information to Canada border services as part of their investigation?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are very happy to be working with border services to get to the bottom of this. We're providing any relevant information that they're asking for, anything that we can give to border services to help get to the bottom of this, we are, and we're doing it today and will continue to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the minister was more than a bit vague when asked some pretty basic questions about how his department runs the immigration file.

Government verification of immigrant residency (further)

Question to the minister: How does your department verify the residency of provincial nominees?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I stated, our department will ask for mailing address upon residents landing here.

Leader of the Opposition: Sherwood motel.

Mr. Palmer: Mailing address, lease agreements, phone numbers, email contacts and any other relevant information, and we also – at the time of residency escrow, look for lease agreements or purchase of a house, tax returns, utilities –

Mr. Trivers: But what if they give up their escrow?

Mr. Palmer: – letters from the school, Visa and Mastercard and anything else that will prove PEI residency.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Requests from Canada Border Services Agency

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, what is CBSA asking you for at this moment?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

They're asking for our cooperation and they're getting our cooperation. Any information that they need as an ongoing investigation, we're happy to provide.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Being able to verify residency of people seems like a pretty basic detail not to have a handle on. Applicants have to sign a declaration they intended to provide in the province of nomination. The province then nominates the person to the federal government.

Proof of residency before nomination

Question to the minister: Why were people nominated if their residency wasn't even proven?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The former program was reviewed by the Auditor General in 2008. It's now the expression of interest model, which we have created, which we have learned from years of being in the immigration business and we continue to get better at it all the time.

The current information that's required that we receive from applicants is lease agreements, tax returns, utility bills proving PEI residency, letters from school, Visa or Mastercard statements, and other information that proves PEI residency.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: That's great, minister, but obviously somebody forgot to look at them.

The court documents clearly state that 99% of clients that have been investigated were proved as permanent through the PEI PNP.

Issues within PNP program

Question to the minister: What work has your department done to figure out how widespread this problem is throughout the PNP?

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

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) trying to help.

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our new expression of interest model has immigrants landing in a number of places in PEI. We have municipalities that are working with immigrants to have them move into different areas of PEI, and we're very pleased with the success we've had early on in that and we continue to evolve this program as we work through it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Kensington-Malpeque.

Mr. MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Your PNP program has loopholes big enough for at least 566 people to slip through.

Question to the minister: If you didn't know about this situation, how can you be sure this is the only one?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This evolved program that we now have was based on some recommendations that we received from the Auditor General back in 2008, and it continues to evolve –

Mr. Myers: Yeah, because (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – from there.

We now ask for more information than we had back in 2008, and some of those things – once applicants land in PEI –

Mr. Myers: Then you just need (Indistinct) signature (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – during this meeting, our office gathers the following information: Mailing address and lease agreements, and phone numbers, and email contacts and any other relevant information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Work continues on phase two of the \$65 million Cornwall bypass. Last year, a very public, and for government a very humiliating, Supreme Court case over a dispute regarding expropriation played out in court with the final decision awarding the landowner an additional \$295,000. And on top of that, expenses, legal, appraisal, accounting, things like that, which was an additional cost to taxpayers.

In her decision, Judge Matheson said many things; including criticizing the province's appraiser and pointing out that he had not taken into account some critical factors in his work.

Expropriation of land for Cornwall bypass

Question for the Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy: Is there any other land expropriated by the province for the completion of the Cornwall bypass that is currently under dispute?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As part of this particular project – I might add that this is a project that is a continuation of projects that have started back in the 1990s that prior to that was running right through the middle of Charlottetown, the road.

There's 24,000 cars go through that particular –

Mr. LaVie: Answer the question.

Ms. Biggar: – area of Cornwall.

We have over 25 properties that we have been working with property owners throughout the process.

Mr. LaVie: Answer the question.

Ms. Biggar: Most of those are finalized now and we are continuing those discussions with landowners.

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

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

Judge Matheson chastised the provincial appraiser for not taking into account the fact that expropriation is not a negotiation between a willing buyer and a willing seller, and that the landowners are having their property forcibly taken from them with little leeway to negotiate compensation.

Provincial land appraiser for Cornwall bypass

Minister: Is the province using the same appraiser in the current disputes who was criticized so heavily by Judge Matheson?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I noted, there's a total of 32 properties in all, seven of which were previously owned by the government; 25 are being acquired. Twelve off those have been acquired, 11 of those have been negotiated, and two of those have been under negotiation and are yet to be completed.

Mr. R. Brown: Good.

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

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

So, we've established that indeed there are properties under dispute and I think it's safe to say that the province is using the same appraiser who was criticized so heavily.

Judge Matheson also urged the province to amend the *Expropriation Act* to bring it into line with the rest of the country where compensation related to expropriation is calculated based on fair market value rather than, as our act states it, due compensation.

Updates to *Expropriation Act*

Minister: With several potential cases before us, has this crucial update been done to our act?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, within our particular department we have a policy on how we deal with landowners, and I think, I want to be clear; there's a difference between negotiations and disputes. When I want to be clear that we have negotiated 11 properties, we've already acquired 12, and we are at present negotiating with two property owners and that will soon be complete.

Mr. Myers: Negotiated (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bed numbers and wait times at Mount Herbert

Minister: How many beds are at the provincial addictions treatment facility in Mount Herbert, and can you give me the breakdown of the bed usage such as detox and the transitional, and what is the current wait time to be accepted into the facility?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I would like to thank the hon. member for, I believe, I counted three questions there. That's an excellent way to speed up Question Period. But nonetheless, they are great questions.

Our provincial addictions facility; currently there's 34 beds there. There are 16 in-patient beds, 18 transition unit beds. Typically, there is an average of four admissions per day. Admissions are triaged and dealt with on cases of urgency, so that varies for

individuals on admission times. But, in order to be admitted to the transition beds, a person has to be medically detoxed for a five-day period.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, your first supplementary.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have had people from my district who have reached out for help. It's very important that when people really out for help that they get it, that they receive that help, and not be rejected.

Wait times for detox

Minister, can you tell us why there is such a long wait time for detox?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, currently, we range an average of four admissions per day. Those admissions are triaged, so those with the most urgent cares are prioritized. In some cases, it may be a pregnancy. It may be other underlying health issues that make their needs come first.

Our transition unit has helped to decreased wait times to our inpatient beds and that's a very positive move.

As well, if anybody is feeling that their wait times are very long, certainly we do encourage them to see their family physician, some other social worker or other community care people in their area, or to show up at emergency rooms all across PEI.

Currently, not only is this available at Mount Herbert, but services are available in Charlottetown, Summerside and Montague, as well, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road, your second supplementary.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, it's very important that summer holidays are coming up so there is going to be even more of a staff shortage at the

treatment centre so that waiting list will continue to grow.

Staffing issues at treatment centre

Can you tell me why the treatment centre is presently not fully staffed?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Currently, at the addictions facility we have approximately fifty-seven-and-a-half full-time equivalent positions there.

In the recent past, we did have some part-time positions where people had left and moved on to other opportunities. We are looking at filling those. We had interviews last week for some of those positions.

We're also looking at areas where we can consolidate some of the part-time positions to provide full-time positions. Obviously people would like to have more full-time work. That would help alleviate the situation of summer holidays and others. We are working on that and we hope to have some good numbers there in the near future.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Minister, it has been brought to my attention that Prince Edward Island engineers are at a disadvantage compared to other engineers across the country with respect to liability.

Engineers on PEI carry more insurance and some carry insurance after they retire because of associated liability. What I mean is after a project is completed, there is no limitation period, so an engineer could be liable for life. All other provinces in Canada have limitations, and most are 15 years.

Amendment to *Engineering Profession Act*

When will there be an amendment to the *Engineering Profession Act* to add an

ultimate limitation period to ensure there is not a competitive advantage to our engineers?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any time we can have discussion with the engineering associations, we are open to doing that. It is my understanding there has been some discussions at present with the PEI engineering association and the department of justice. As those continue on, those would go onto my department as well.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, is there anything we can do in the interim like Nova Scotia and New Brunswick did, who have limitations of action legislation, which is a stop-gap provision to cover the practice of engineering until such time as the province implements legislation to adopt a provincial ultimate limitation period?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We recognize the professionalism of engineers on PEI, right across PEI and the work that they do.

As I mentioned, we will continue to have those discussions with them and look towards the future on where that may go.

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

Ms. Casey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, during your discussions was there any talk about when we can expect the *Engineering Profession Act* to come to the floor of this House to make these much needed changes?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This particular discussion involves more than just my department. It's a cross-departmental discussion that would need to take place before that could happen; before we could bring that here. Those discussions need to continue. At such time as we are in a position we would be happy to take something forward if we come to those conclusions.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I raised the issue, last fall, about the North Lake bridge. I asked questions to the minister of transportation, would she meet with the community of Eastern Kings after the community long asking the minister, couldn't get answers, so I asked the question for them in the House.

Minister, you did meet with the community of Eastern Kings.

Community meeting re: North Lake bridge

Can you tell the House today the outcome of that meeting?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We did follow through on our commitment to meet with representatives of the community in regard to the North Lake bridge. We are continuing to monitor the North Lake bridge. We had good discussions with them on that and we will continue to monitor it.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The North Lake bridge is used by all three industries. The biggest industries here on Prince Edward Island; the fishing industry,

the farming industry, the tourism industry. It's a great economic driver of Eastern Kings is the bridge.

Repairs to North Lake bridge

Question to the minister of transportation: Why won't your department commit to fixing the bridge?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, when a restriction is put on a bridge for specific weight of traffic, one of the factors we look at is the radius of what a detour would involve. This particular area, the North Lake bridge, we reviewed that and it was determined that there had to be put restrictions on. The actual detour is approximately seven kilometres. The traffic is able to flow through there without impediment –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – and we are keeping in mind the fact that –

Mr. Myers: – you guys lose your minds.

Ms. Biggar: – we are investing in roads and connectors for our industries right across PEI. That all plays into decisions that we make in regard to what kinds of upgrades we make on infrastructure.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are detours put on because of the bridge issues. There is work being done at North Lake on the west work with large boulders being put in. The detour is torn up from heavy trucks. They had not alternative route. They had to go across Northside Road, Route 16, and it's torn up beyond repair.

Replacement of Northside Road, Route 16

Question to the minister of transportation: Will you be replacing the Northside Road, Route 16?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We'll certainly look into the condition of that particular route because we are aware that there has been extra traffic put on that particular area. We'll continue to look at that and follow-up on the concerns that the member has raised.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was really disappointed to see there was no money in the budget this year to replace the bridge.

Replacement of North Lake bridge

Question to the transportation minister:
When will you be replacing this bridge?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time, we don't have that in a budget line for replacement. We'll continue to monitor the bridge. We'll continue to look at where the detour is and look at the condition of the road where the detour is, and continue to work with the community.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government has a five-year budget and there is no bridge replacement in North Lake in the next five years.

Why is North Lake bridge not a priority to your government?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, the member over there would have us believe that we're not investing in bridges.

We are investing \$8 million –

Mr. Fox: I've got two (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – in bridge replacement in Kings County. Six different bridges are being replaced in Kings County on roads that are high-traffic for industry, export and we will continue to –

Mr. Myers: Nobody exports their lobster anymore.

Ms. Biggar: – make investments in roads and bridges and investments in counties and in roads right across PEI. But I want to be clear, we are investing in six bridge replacements in Kings County this summer – \$8 million – and no, North Lake is not on that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I already have two bridges shut down in Eastern Kings. Two bridges are already shut down. Just last week, the Premier was tweeting pictures from North Lake bridge and talking about how important the bridge was.

Question to the Premier: Why is North Lake bridge good enough to tweet from, but not good enough to fix?

Mr. Myers: Good question. That's a good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, my vehicle was on the bridge and the bridge worked just fine. I think that's what the minister's been saying.

These are weight restrictions, the bridge is not closed and they're monitoring the condition of the bridge and that is being assessed by the department and I certainly support the department in dealing with the priorities as she's described them; the six bridges that are being done in Kings County. I hope if the member is asking for one of those other bridges not to be done and North Lake done in its place, then perhaps he can talk with some of the folks in Kings County

and see if he can get those priorities changed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Myers: Wouldn't that be great if we could do that? Wouldn't it be great if we had control over that?

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, when the Premier was up tweeting from the North Lake bridge, I wonder, did he speak to any fishers about the bridge when he was up there? You would have got some feedback, but you wouldn't bring up the question about the bridge when you were up there.

Mr. Myers: No, but they were laughing at you.

Repairs to North Lake bridge (further)

Mr. LaVie: So Premier, question to you: Will you commit to fixing the North Lake bridge?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

As I said to the member, the road is open; there is traffic that's able to travel over the bridge.

Different weights must go around. We are continuing to monitor it, we met with the community, we will continue to work on any road improvements that need to be done. We're doing six bridges in Kings County – \$8 million – continuing to invest in rural PEI and we'll continue to do that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, the bridge is open to cars and truck; light weight. First responders can't use it. Fish buyers can't use it; farmers can't use it.

On the alternate route she talks about, there is a bridge where she put the farm equipment; she put the heavy fisher trucks carrying fish.

Bridge monitoring in Kings County

Are you monitoring that bridge also?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, obviously we monitor bridges because we had to restrict the traffic on the North Lake bridge.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: We go right across PEI and we do monitor and inspect our bridges as part of our bridge inspection program. We will continue to do that and keep that policy in place and continue to monitor all bridges across PEI.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The harbour at North Lake, they have 90 boats fish out of there. It's the tuna capital of the world. They have tuna charters out of there; a great tourism attraction all over the world.

Replacement of North Lake bridge (further)

Question to the minister of tourism: Do you think that the bridge at North Lake should be replaced?

Mr. Myers: Good question (Indistinct)

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, you're going to see when I get on the floor what we are investing in bridges. If you look at our capital budget last fall of \$42 million –

Mr. Myers: For Cornwall.

Ms. Biggar: – we’re continuing through investments in partnership – because of our partnership with the federal government, we’re able to invest more dollars in roads and bridges right across PEI that are now on those collector roads, we need to invest in the areas that have high traffic. We’ll continue to work with the community around North Lake bridge. I understand where the member is coming from. There are priorities that are put across, in place, for right across PEI. This year, identified in Kings County were six major bridge replacements that had to keep – be replaced –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – in order to keep traffic flowing in the area.

Ms. Casey: Great minister.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, your final question.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Fishers use it. Farmers use it, and tourism uses it. Great tax base; the taxes they pay. They deserve a bridge. It’s one of your main roads. It’s on your highway. It’s your highway and the bridge is going to collapse –

Ms. Biggar: It’s not going to collapse.

Mr. LaVie: – as fishers told me on the wharf, the wind will blow it down before the government will fix it.

Mr. Myers: Isn’t that the truth?

Mr. LaVie: The wind will blow it down.

The Cornwall bypass popped up. What’s the chance of getting North Lake bridge to pop up? Fix it.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear so residents are not stressed by the comment the member made by the bridge is going to collapse. If the bridge was going to collapse, it wouldn’t be opened, first of all. I want to make that clear.

Mr. Myers: You’re an engineer now.

Ms. Biggar: We are monitoring the bridge. We will continue to work with the community. We will continue to –

Mr. Myers: Start to work with the community you mean?

Ms. Biggar: – monitor the detour if there is an issue with that. We will continue to invest in bridges and roads right across PEI. We can’t just put one in one area and leave the other. There –

Mr. Myers: That’s what you’re doing.

Ms. Biggar: – are six bridges going into Kings County.

Mr. Myers: That’s exactly what you’re doing.

Ms. Biggar: \$8 million in investments. Just in bridges, never mind the roads and everything else.

Murray River, over here, we’re putting a new bridge in there. Do you want me to take that Murray –

Mr. Myers: That’s Murray Harbour.

Ms. Compton: Murray Harbour.

Ms. Biggar: – Harbour. Do you want –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – us to take her bridge and put it in yours?

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: We have to monitor what we’re doing and we’ll continue to do that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]