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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 24 MAY 2018

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Questions continue to swirl about the future of health care here on PEI following the mass resignation of the Health PEI board.

One of the biggest unanswered questions continues to be the involvement and the independence of the Health PEI board.

Political interference of Health PEI board

Question to the minister of health: What safeguards are in place to preserve the independence of the Health PEI board and prevent political interference?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Certainly, I stressed yesterday that I was deeply disappointed in the actions of the entire board. And even more disappointing, the actions of the former board chair yesterday as he talked to media outlets in Charlottetown.

Obviously, comments, and I want to make some points of clarity in regards to some of the statements. One of the statements was that the minister stopped the management plan. I did see a management plan for certain, and a management plan that indicated to me there was a primary focus on getting sick Islanders out of the hospital beds three days early, closing those beds, and then laying off staff. That is not a path that I, as minister, would have any interest in moving down today. I don't think it was the mandate that the Islanders of our wonderful province gave us the mandate to do in the last previous election.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

In media interviews yesterday, the former board chair mentioned the potential of political interference as a factor in the board's mass resignation.

Question to the minister of health: Why would the board members your government recruited, and your government appointed, be so concerned about political interference that they all felt compelled to resign?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, comments yesterday were often nature of that kind; another comment that was made that the minister politically interfered with the selection of the CEO.

I want to assure this House that I met with representatives from Boyden, who was the recruiting agencies, the day prior to final interviews. That individual was apologetic to me that the across Canada search only provided one individual. It was apologetic and it was underwhelming. I asked what, in this case, for a recommendation for you: What would you recommendation I do? He said: Continue the search.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the minister said that a new board will be recruited through Engage PEI and appointed by Cabinet sometime over the next few months.

The board that just resigned en masse after they lost their confidence in this government was also recruited through Engage PEI and appointed by your Cabinet.

Board members recruited through Engage PEI

Question to the minister of health: How do you expect the same process to give you a different result?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My involvement, thus far, with the board in regards to their management plan and suggesting to them to look at other options; do not look at this option of closing beds, laying off staff and putting Islanders out of facilities across PEI sooner than they need to be.

That, coupled with the result on continuing the search for the CEO, under a recommendation, then which I did, are all responsibilities of the minister under the former – or under the existing act, the old act, that clearly indicates that those are the roles as minister as involvement.

I know that I, as minister, everything I do is with the best interest of all Islanders. I know that across Prince Edward Island there are likeminded Islanders who will step up to the plate, put their names forward for a new board and we can do some collaborative, cooperative work together to bring the best possible health care to Islanders, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Let's look at the track record of this government over just the last two years with the health file. We've had three ministers of health; four CEOs, and now a mass resignation by the very Health PEI board that this government recruited and appointed.

Confidence in leadership of health care system

Question to the minister of health: How is this revolving door of executive upheaval instilling public confidence in the leadership and direction of the Island's health care system?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Certainly, I've indicated in the past that I want to work collectively, collaboratively with the board. I want to work collectively and collaboratively with the CEO of Health PEI.

Those sentiments haven't changed for me. I'm sincere in that. I think there is some great work that can be done. Obviously, under the new legislation that we expect to get passed in the very near future, mandating and operational plan is something that does not exist today within the premise of Health PEI will give a full roadmap of how we should move forward.

Up until this time, Health PEI and the board of Health PEI have been running cost overruns in the vicinity of \$20 million to \$24 million over the last several cycles.

It's time; Islanders expect accountability. They expect transparency and myself, with a collaborative board will get there. I know we have the ability. I know we can do it. I'm looking very excitedly to having that happen, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Certainly, the public has been asking for accountability and transparency, something this government has promised day in and day out, but continue to fail to deliver.

There are many complex and important projects underway at Health PEI. One of those that we've been championing on this side of the floor for a very long time now is the creation of a new mental health campus to improve access to inpatient and community mental health services.

Impact on mental health campus progress

Question to the minister of health: How will the mass resignation and the complete upheaval within the health department of your own health board, again, resigning, impact progress on the mental health

campus that we so desperately need here on PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I am also very excited about the new mental health campus, as I am about all the work that we are currently doing.

This work does not change. This work does continue. I can assure you that as minister of Health PEI that has over 5,000 employees, I value the work. I value the work of each and every frontline member of staff that is there. I am not on a path of laying people off. I am not on a path of closing beds in any facility on Prince Edward Island. I will continue to enhance access to medical care for each and every one of our Islanders. I will work diligently on that in the future, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's good to hear the minister is going to stop these closures because we certainly all know about the ER in Montague, what has been going on the last couple of months. Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition spoke about the important core functions of the Health PEI board. One of those functions is the development of Health PEI's strategic plan.

Development of strategic plan for Health PEI

How will public engagement with the board on that strategic plan work now that the minister of health's entire board has resigned?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Currently, as I mentioned, referenced many times, we do have a couple of great community engagement committees going, east and west on Prince Edward Island. They will have a strong part and a strong influence on how the future of health care on Prince Edward Island will look.

Other Islanders have already expressed interest that they would like to have their input, as well. I look forward to that. I think there's great things that we can do in the very near future here on Prince Edward Island. I don't expect that it will take too long for a new board to get up, running, dedicated to providing and enhancing health care service for all Islanders of Prince Edward Island and I will stand firmly behind them on that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have no doubt he'll stand firmly behind because now he will be able to tell them what to do because he has the final say.

Another important role, and this is one that I worked hard on, is the public engagement of Health PEI.

Public board meetings

Question to the minister of health: How will the public board meetings work now that there's no longer a board to meet?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As with any change, that will be something that will be coming out in the very near future. We expect those public portions in the meetings will be enhanced as the new act indicates in its entirety and I look forward to having public pick parts of that and being available to have those discussions with Islanders because in my travels over the last four months, health care is the foremost concern of Islanders on Prince Edward Island and I, as minister, want to do the absolute best job to ensure that health care needs are being met by all Islanders. I'll continue to work on that, Mr. Speaker. The transition will be short. We expect to have the board up and running very soon.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These all sound like recycled speaking notes from the school reorganization process. According to media interviews, one of the sticking points was a multi-year budget plan that government rejected.

Board's budget plan rejected

Question to the minister of health: What was in the board's budget plan that you found objectionable?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I do appreciate the opportunity to indicate again that the budget management plan for the board of Health PEI included transferring patients three days out of beds early, ultimately closing those beds, and ultimately laying off staff. This is not a path that I, as minister, or we, as government, were given a mandate to do. I had a lot of concerns about that.

I, as minister, am looking at enhancing access; I'm looking at improving access; and this is not a path that I was comfortable going down and I asked the board of Health PEI to look at other options, see where you can improve and obviously there are a lot of other options – close to 700 million of them.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly would like to know what some of these types of efficiencies that perhaps that the board might have come up with might have been.

Health PEI recently secured accreditation for its facilities, but proper oversight is important criteria in maintaining that accreditation status.

Accreditation standards of Health PEI

A question to the minister of health: How will the board maintain accreditation standards if the board no longer exists?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

All those parts of an existing board will be in transition as we move to a new board. But I think it's important to understand that the \$710 million budget that this board was in charge of administering and running our deficits in the vicinity of \$20 million has seen increases over the last two years of 5 and 6%, so it is imperative that we take action towards controls there and I believe there are lots of credible individuals across Prince Edward Island with lots of great background that will come forward and help to achieve this.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Mr. MacEwen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is very interesting. Yesterday, the Health PEI board threw the minister under the bus. Today, the minister's throwing Health PEI under the bus. We're not really sure what's going on.

Issues of Health PEI board

Minister: If you were really sticking up for Islanders, why didn't you just come out and say it at the first – all the issues with the Health PEI board? What other issues of the Health PEI board are we going to find out today?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I am simply making matter of fact statements. Obviously, as I said, health concerns of Islanders is my top priority as minister and I will continue to work on that. It is our top priority as a government on Prince Edward Island. There's no topic that we hear more about at doorsteps, coffee shops, no matter, functions where we go. We will continue to provide the best supports for Islanders when it comes to their health care system right from one end of our Island to the other. I, as minister, will lead

that with a very dedicated new board on Prince Edward Island to make sure that our health care system is the best it can be, the most efficient it could be, and provide the best services for all Islanders.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the summer of 2015, government held a meeting at the Bedeque United Church hall. At this meeting, government staff showed a video called: reasons why to amalgamate.

Amalgamation efforts in PEI

Question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: Why do you continue to tell Islanders that amalgamation efforts are a grassroots effort when your own staff – as far back as 2015 – were out across PEI selling your plan with a cheap propaganda video?

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

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

It's a good question from the chief. I have two letters in front of me today, again: rural municipalities; the municipalities of Ellerslie, Bideford, and Lady Slipper have applied to amalgamate. The municipalities of the north shore: Pleasant Grove and Grand Tracadie sent letters to IRAC wanting to amalgamate.

Mr. Myers: Did they see your video?

Mr. R. Brown: I can't understand why the opposition cannot see the success in this program.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Amalgamation promo video

Minister: Why is your amalgamation promo video not publicly available on the government website today?

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

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

It's probably on bradtrivers.com.

Mr. Myers: There is one there.

Mr. R. Brown: We are open to public discussions. IRAC has currently got five amalgamations in front of it. Island communities want to work together and want to make their communities better and that's something this government wants to see across Prince Edward Island because if Prince Edward Island's doing good, Islanders are doing good.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This video confirms that government has been behind amalgamation efforts right from the start.

Dollars spent on promo video

Question to the minister: How many staff hours, how many consultants, and how much public money did this government spend on your amalgamation promo video?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

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

This Legislature's behind the *Municipal Government Act*. It was passed in this Legislature – passed by some of the members of the opposition.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: We want to see communities on Prince Edward Island survive – go forward. We want a better Prince Edward Island and that's what we're doing here with this amalgamation issue and as it's already shown: five municipalities are looking to get together and work together.

That's what makes Prince Edward Island great, Islanders want to work together and that's what makes PEI the great place and the great place many new newcomers to Prince Edward Island honour and cherish.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear: the official opposition voted against the amalgamation bill. The Liberal Party and the Green Party voted for the bill. In Bedeque, local residents found out that this government created a scheme called champion residents. Its purpose was to identify and undermine neighbors who were coming together against amalgamation.

Efforts against citizens and communities

Question to the minister: How in this day in age can this government be so organized in its efforts against the citizens and communities of Prince Edward Island?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: I'm not – I'm extremely disappointed in the member's accusations there. What he is saying – the people that came together in Three Rivers – the committee that came together, they worked very hard. They see a vision for their area. They want to see their area improve and they came together and worked together.

For this member to get up and to accuse those people that want better communities in Prince Edward Island of doing something sinister is not the way I want to be heard in this Legislature. Good people come forward; good people want good things done and that should be the role of this Legislature, not to demine or put down the people that want to make their communities better on Prince Edward Island. I'm ashamed of it. I don't feel that way and if people want to come together and discuss the issues on Prince Edward Island, they should be allowed to – and not with being accused of being sinister.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Let's be very clear, Mr. Speaker, thousands of people are against the amalgamation in Three Rivers. Thousands of people have put in letters of opposition to IRAC.

Mr. Myers: Thousands.

Mr. Fox: The minister admitted that he has spent over \$140,000 in public dollars in Three Rivers alone.

Given that government has spent so much money to push their agenda, here's another question: What did you use to pay the champion residents to do your bidding? Was it money or was it special favours?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Mr. R. Brown: None of the above, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Biggar: Got a leak over there, by the way. You've got a leak.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct) over there?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) or what?

Ms. Biggar: Yeah, he's got a leak over there.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister of health was running the amalgamation-mowing machine when this took place in Bedeque.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Apologies to residents re: amalgamation

Mr. Fox: Will the now Minister of Communities, Land and Environment apologize to the residents of PEI for this government acting against the public will like a communist country rather than a democracy here in Canada?

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

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

Now he's accusing IRAC and the people that are in front of IRAC of being communists or Russians. I want no part of that discussion.

Thank you.

Mr. Myers: Of course you don't (Indistinct)

Speaker: Next question will be from the hon. —

Mr. Myers: Racketeering, bribery, you've got it all over there.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Ms. Casey: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Get outside the rail.

Mr. Myers: Call me on it big guy.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Order! Stop acting like kids.

The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was pleased to see government table *An Act to Amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. However, at first glance it would seem the amendments do the bare minimum.

Considering this is the first major update to the act since it was proclaimed 15 years ago, I was somewhat disappointed, especially in light of the amount of hype government put into promoting this as a major modernization of the act.

Amendments to FOIPP act

A question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: Can you name a single amendment included in your bill that was not the result of your five-year-old internal

review of the FOIPP commissioner's recommendations?

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

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

What I will do is explain the process that we did go through. There was a review from the commissioner and beyond that, our government did commit to a fulsome review of this legislation. In fact, we went out to a consultation process. We had a great number of consultations and they were some very in-depth consultations with the community at large in respect of the legislation that we do have.

We have to remember what the purpose of this legislation is and there's a lot of concentration, when we're talking about this legislation on freedom of information. The political panel this morning was another great example of it, but, almost none on protection of privacy. This is something that we need to be very aware of in this province and through all the work that we do, whether it be in our municipalities and our post-secondary institutions, or in the way government conducts itself, including here. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In response to government's request for input, the Office of the Third Party actually submitted a 20-page document with 21 recommendations, but it's practically impossible to see our input reflected in the bill.

Submissions re: FOIPP act

To the same minister: How many submissions did you receive as a result of your public consultations on modernizing the FOIPP act?

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

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

The direct answer to that question was over 40 submissions and my recollection is that the good portion of them were similar or greater in length to the submission that was received by the third party. They were received from a broad specter of community actors that would have an interaction with this legislation, and we were very happy to receive that level of thought and engagement from the community.

Yes, I will say that we did not holus-bolus adopt the recommendations of the third party. We looked at the recommendations of all of those that made submissions through our consultation process and that's something that we're proud of. We, as government, need to listen to the community and balance the interest of all Prince Edward Islanders, not just the third party's interests.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Tabling of submitted recommendations

Ms. Bell: Well, it's great to hear that there were so many submissions, including ours, and to that same minister then: Will you table all of those submissions that you received during your public consultation so we can all see what other recommendations you chose to include, or ignore?

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

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

I will say the very legislation that we're talking about here today might prevail over whether or not we can table those submissions, but we will look at what we can do and we'll bring back what we can.

Again, what I will say is that the public will be there to judge the input that they gave and what we see here on the floor and I expect that every member of this House will be speaking to their constituents and the constituent organizations that are impacted and affected by this legislation, and we'll

have a debate right here on the floor. If we think that there are some amendments that are required, as the hon. Leader of the Third Party has pointed out previously, that's what we're here to do and we look forward to that opportunity when we get that opportunity here on the floor.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier this session when I asked about the destruction of government records that are contained in Blackberry instant messages, the Minister of Justice and Public Safety informed the House that it would be too expensive to implement a technical solution that would archive those messages on government servers.

Although I can appreciate the minister's budgetary concerns, doing nothing does not resolve the issue that government records are not being retained as required under archives and records management act.

Removal of Blackberry messaging from government devices

A question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: In light of the fact that you are unable or unwilling to archive these records with technical means, have you considered simply removing Blackberry messaging capability from government devices?

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

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

As I had indicated previously, there is an expense that's associated with this. We had looked into it. The hon. member had come and said that it was as simple as flipping a switch. We had the folks from ITSS, which is not within my department, but I take them at their word, look into the cost of it and there was a very significant cost attached to that. As I said previously in the House, the implementation costs were 725,000 initially on the software side with annual renewal

costs of 475,000, and the storage costs were 150,000 and annual costs of 75,000.

What we have done is we've invested in new staff in the PARO office that will identify issues, develop policy; and we've hired those staff as of the end of last year, and they are currently working to do that and we're looking to go forward with those policies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would point out to the minister that it costs absolutely nothing to turn off a feature.

In the Office of the Third Party submission on modernizing the FOIPP act, we included a recommendation to legislate an active duty to document decisions made by all public bodies.

Duty to document

To the same minister: Wouldn't a duty to document also help address the issue that we've previously pointed out?

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

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

This is really what we're getting down to here, is that the hon. member first said it would cost nothing to flip the switch, quote on quote; now we're saying it costs nothing to turn off BBM. I don't know one way or another, I'll be honest in saying, what it would or it would not cost.

What I am saying is we're developing policies around the retention of documents, and we're training our staff as to what's required of them in relation to those policies. That's what we've committed to. We've spent a great deal of money doing that already. That's the overall purpose of this legislation and the overall intent of it, and we have committed to that and we've committed to the process of being open and

transparent through those policies and through that staff provision.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Ms. Bell: Oh, Mr. Speaker, is there a second supplementary?

Speaker: Oh, I thought I did – okay, go ahead.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In order to be affective, the duty to document must be accompanied by independent oversight with sanctions for non-compliance. I was disappointed that the duty to document was not included in the act to amend the freedom of information act.

Rejection of recommendations

Question to the same minister: What were the reasons that the recommendation was rejected?

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

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

Again, you know, we got to – we heard the premier of Nova Scotia address this issue previously where we're going to have to start to take verbatim notes from every conversation that we have.

Again, that's clearly, I don't think the expectation that we would have, of our employees and of our elected officials that they document everything that they do in the run of a day.

There are umpteen different social media services in terms of messengers and whatever else that we could spend those same costs putting storage and other services in place in relation to.

What we're doing is we're putting policies in place. We're training our staff as to what is required of them. We've invested tremendously in that already. We think that

we're going to get great value for that investment.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is directed to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

The Kings County Memorial Hospital is a vital part of our provincial health care system, and critical for eastern PEI and certainly the district that I represent.

In recent weeks, we have seen an increase in the number of closures at the ER at Kings County Memorial Hospital, and have seen its affects on those in the surrounding areas.

While we realize we can't fix an issue like this overnight, or work and some adjustments may be required to deal with ER patients.

Closures at KCMH emergency room (further)

Minister: Can you give us an update on the current situation at the emergency room at the Kings County Memorial Hospital?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Leader of the Opposition: Great questions. I've been there several times.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, the emergency department at Kings County Memorial Hospital, it's a cornerstone of providing emergency care for the residents of Kings County.

We are very fortunate, in that region, to have such skilled physicians, frontline nurses, nurse practitioners, and all hospital staff in that region providing this wonderful health care to those individuals from that region.

The reality is with long hours that physicians have to work and stretched into early morning, we run the risk of physician burnout. These are conversations we're

having with the physicians in that area. We're working with them to find a workable solution that we can come up with that will reduce emergency room closures down there.

We want to have good, well-rested staff working in that emergency room in Kings County, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, certainly, the residents in the area do appreciate the efforts that have been made over the last number of months in ensuring that we are up to full staff of doctors in the areas. Now, it's been that way for a little while.

Minister: Can you tell the House what initiatives are being implemented to ensure that the increase in closures at Kings County Memorial Hospital ceases?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

We've, as a department, we've been working very closely with the physicians from that area, as well as representatives from Health PEI.

We're looking to maintain that ER room as a stable facility that Kings County residents can expect to show up and be served for their health care needs.

I had the great privilege of going down last Friday night, as minister, to have discussions with a room full of engaged community residents about their concerns to maintain and have sustainable emergency room care there.

The new policy that we've brought forward and introduced to the residents, last week, includes the ability for physicians and the nursing staff to triage patients if it doesn't like they're going to be able to be met within the timeframe of the open hours of the ER, that they can have the ability to

triage those particular patients; indicate to them to come back at another time, so that the doctor can see the patients that are in the room and can end their shift at the proper time.

As well, we are looking at alternating physician shifts rather than a 14 or 16-hour day, we'll look at two shifts for physicians so that it is a reasonable timeframe; they don't get burned out, and people that are showing up can expect safe care when they get there, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, that certainly sounds like that you already have engaged with the community and the medical staff down there, as well as the doctors.

Residents informed of KCMH ER

Minister: Going forward and as this, how you described the way that things are going to take place and the changes that are going to be made, how will you engage the residents of Kings County to ensure that they are informed of the latest development and the work that's being done, going forward, to ensure that the ER at Kings County Memorial Hospital is fully staffed. How are you going to engage in going forward so that they're kept up-to-date?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, as I said, the start was the other night as we engaged a room full of Kings County residents, to inform them of this new policy, which I think was readily accepted.

Obviously, when residents show up with health care concerns, they want to know that the ER is open. We are looking to maintain a sustainable ER system in that area with doctors that, you know, are not burned out; are not working extended long shifts. We will continue to embrace the community.

The roll-out of the new policy won't be until July 1st. There will be postings in the ER.

There will be some kind of public information out through Health PEI, so that Islanders can become informed.

I'm not even sure, but there may even be a piece in the local newspaper, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, minister.

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

Mr. Dumville: Mr. Speaker, when we were kids, we read about rubbing the genie lamp and getting three wishes.

Well, today, I want to take that image and use it on three granted wishes that this Premier and his secretive backroom government gave to Mr. Don MacDougall in the 2017 Mill River deal.

Don MacDougall has been an insider friend of the Premier's since his days at UPEI. Mr. MacDougall gave \$2 million to the university in 2008 and became chancellor in 2014.

The Premier granted him three wishes. For \$500,000 Mr. MacDougall got the following; 400 acres-plus of public land without proper duty to consult with First Nations, not least, but titled ownership; a campground; a hotel; a water park; conference facility, and hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of site equipment.

The treasure chest he gave Mr. MacDougall: Islanders' hard-earned tax dollars. He guaranteed –

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. Dumville: – him a pre-deal in 2016 by giving him \$400,000 operating dollars, slashed unionized employees, and the authority to recoup income from sales.

Then, in 2007 –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) question.

Mr. Dumville: – he approved him for nearly two million –

Speaker: Hon. member, do you have a question?

Mr. Dumville: Yes, I have a question.

Speaker: Well, you'd better ask it.

Mr. Dumville: Thank you.

– that never had to be repaid, and going forward on a zero-risk clause agreement. Business owners and the public know this is a bad deal for the Islanders.

Rewarding of government dollars

Question to the Premier: Why did you reward your rich, UPEI friend with such a deal? A \$500,000 investment to obtain a guarantee of multi-millions?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, for people, who have travelled in the western part of the province lately, you'd have an opportunity to see the investment that the new ownership have made in that facility. Great improvements; big capital investment; great work running the golf course; won the Burger Love last year.

I think if you were to ask –

Mr. Myers: What'd he call that (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – people in that area, they'd say that this was a great investment –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) \$5 million (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – and a commitment by Mr. MacDougall –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: – in rural Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: What'd he call it? The Hambugar?

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have here 86 pages worth of material that I will be tabling that played Islanders as fools. You have the 2016 operating agreement, title of deeds, ownership transfer agreements, and the millions of free money for Mr. McDougall.

We now learn that, also making this deal even sweeter, I have a copy of *The Guardian* article of March, 2018 where it makes clear the Premier's Treasury Board members approved an early advance of the millions in the McDougall Mill River Experience treasure chest.

Mr. LaVie: It's coming. The question's coming.

Ms. Biggar: What's your question?

Mr. Dumville: Mr. Speaker, business operators would love those unbelievable terms. They are still waiting for the golden knock on their door. This Premier has created an unfair business environment for all other operators trying to compete.

Confidence in fairness of government

Question to the Premier: Are you not worried that Island business owners and investors from out of province are losing confidence in the fairness of this provincial government?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should have read yesterday's *The Guardian*. They were talking about Island at boom and there are investments coming in from some of the major people that can see what's going on in this province –

Mr. LaVie: PEI on a tear.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – in growth in employment; 4,000 new jobs in two years, 3,500 of them full-time. You go to West Prince, there was a growth in tourism last year and people in that area are very enthusiastic about the investments that are being made, about the business leadership that is being shown, and about the growth

and prosperity in West Prince and throughout the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dumville: Mr. Speaker, Islanders' intelligence is being tested by this Premier. He uses 'tear' a lot. Well, in this context, Premier, I will say Islanders want you to tear up this agreement and get to the bottom of this elite deal. Let's let the real genie of this deal come out of the lamp.

Review of Mill River deal

Premier: Will you immediately call for a full independent audit and investigation into this fiasco by appointing a non-political, retired member of the judiciary to look into this Mill River deal and report back to the Public Accounts committee?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I think I'd invite the hon. member to get on his motorcycle and go up to West Prince where he came from and have a look around and see how well things are going up there. Don't stop at Mill River, go to Tignish, go to Miminegash, go to the Skinners Pond, go out fishing, see what's going on up there because I'll tell you, you're not going to find people in West Prince telling you that they want to tear up that deal. They're going forward, they're prospering, and are looking to grow further on the strength of the investments and the leadership and the promotion of our government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Hon. members, some time ago I set out some rules regarding the length of asking questions, the length of answering questions, and in particular, the supplementary questions. Because a number of members here today have had complete disregard for me and this chair, then I will take the liberty of extending Question Period today so that the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River can ask all of her six or seven questions, whatever you have.

Leader of the Opposition: Actually she had 10.

Mr. LaVie: I have three.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I will be brief, but they're important questions.

Mr. LaVie: Oh, take your time.

Keeping/closing bridge structures

Ms. Compton: There are hundreds of bridge structures across this province – small bridge structures – and I would like to know from the minister of transportation what makes government decide whether those bridge structures are kept open, or are just closed?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we have an air leak across the way there, so, but I'll try and talk over that air leak.

Mr. Myers: We've got lots of leaks, don't we?

Ms. Biggar: For the member's information – I don't know if the rest want to hear it – but our department goes out and we investigate. We review the condition of different bridges. If there's concern about safety of that bridge, that is one factor that goes into it.

We do have a number of bridges – 10, in fact – that are closed in different areas across PEI and we look at the number of traffic that's on that bridge; the detour that is a factor in getting to where you want to go around that area. Those are all played into the decision that we make.

Mr. R. Brown: Great answer.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One of those small bridge structures is close to Murray River. It's the floating bridge and it has been closed for some time. I would like for the minister of transportation to tell us really how long that bridge has been closed.

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, a number of those bridge closures go back before my tenure. As you probably know, we have reviewed and had great discussion with a number of members of the community on that. We have looked at the detour –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – around that area. It's still accessible on that road. Yes, you have to drive around, a short detour –

Mr. LaVie: Who would want (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – but you can still access both sides of that road if you need to go in that area to do something.

Mr. Myers: Where did he go?

Mr. LaVie: Was he fired?

Ms. Biggar: We have looked at the cost associated of replacing those bridges and I'll just leave it at that for now.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The floating bridge, it's on MacLures Pond and it's a beautiful recreation spot for anglers, snowmobilers, walkers. It's a beautiful part of the district and of the province.

I'll be tabling a petition that some of the residents have put forward because they're concerned that they're not able to access that in the way that they'd like to. They don't like to see a –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: – road closed because of a bridge that needs to be repaired.

Repairs to floating bridge at MacLures Pond

When, minister, will that bridge, the floating bridge, be repaired?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, it is a beautiful area that people can still access along the river and get out there in nature and do fishing and ski-dooing and everything in the winter. That's not preventing people from doing anything of that regard.

Mr. Myers: Pretty well sums –

Ms. Biggar: When you're talking about –

Mr. Myers: – up everything –

Ms. Biggar: – replacing some of these small bridges, compared to the work, also, that we have to invest in our connector highways, you're talking about a \$4 million budget, at least, to replace some of these smaller bridges.

We have to weigh that off –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – with the work. We're investing \$8 million just – and in that member's own community –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) bridge (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – we're doing a brand new bridge –

Speaker: Thank you.

Ms. Biggar: – so we want to make sure that those priorities are maintained.

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

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) bridge.

Ms. Compton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I do appreciate the fact that Murray Harbour bridge is being replaced. But that's one bridge. We have a number of bridges. We have a number of roads across PEI. They all need work. Maybe we should look at the budget and where we are placing those dollars like the bypass in Cornwall and how we're going to –

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct)

Ms. Compton: – maybe reallocate some of the money that we have to roads and bridges that already exist instead of making more roads.

McLures Pond, it's a beautiful spot. It's the largest, fresh water body on Prince Edward Island. It's costing residents time, money and inconvenience to detour around that.

We know the hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford has the Settlement Road bridge in his district and he stood up and asked questions about that: another bridge that needs to be repaired.

Mr. LaVie: North Lake.

Mr. Fox: I have two.

Mr. LaVie: North Lake bridge.

Ms. Compton: There we go. Two and North Lake.

An Hon. Member: Four (Indistinct)

Plans for repairing of bridges

Ms. Compton: What is this government's plan, and minister, your plan –

Mr. LaVie: No plan.

Ms. Compton: – for all of these bridges –

Mr. LaVie: They've got no plan.

Ms. Compton: – that need to be repaired across communities of PEI?

Mr. LaVie: No plan.

An Hon. Member: Minister of (Indistinct)

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

Ms. Biggar: I can tell you one plan for this year –

Mr. Fox: Cornwall.

An Hon. Member: There's no plan –

Ms. Biggar: – in Kings County there's six brand new bridges being done down there.

Mr. R. Brown: Great.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Biggar: Six!

On highways where there's farming and fishing exports; business. We are working on a corridor around Cornwall.

There are 25,000 cars goes through the middle of a small community. That is a safety factor. We are exporting everyday across PEI –

Mr. LaVie: Minister of detours.

Ms. Biggar: – we're investing in that community. We're investing in the member from Malpeque, Kensington –

Mr. LaVie: Minister of detours.

Ms. Biggar: – we're investing in Souris. We're going down to Souris! Tomorrow!

Mr. Fox: I've got two –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: There's a brand new school!

Mr. Fox: (Indistinct) bridges (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: So we will continue to –

Speaker: Thank you.

Ms. Biggar: – make investments.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from –

Ms. Biggar: You not getting nothing in (Indistinct)

Speaker: – Belfast-Murray River, your final question.

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to hear. We always here the investments that are happening in the opposition so that's great. We like to hear that. You can also share the investments that you're providing for government members, as well.

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: None in my district.

Ms. Compton: I have one final question.

Investigation at Sherwood Motel

Can you tell me how the investigation is going with the Sherwood Motel?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This was a federal offence. It's being investigated by the federal government and if we are called upon to provide any evidence –

Mr. Myers: Testify in court (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – or do anything to help with that investigation by the federal government, we'll be happy to do it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]