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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 31 MAY 2018

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Christmas card photo pose

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

A question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: Minister, is it true while posing for a Christmas card photo in 2016 that you gave the finger to a member of the public who shouted ‘honour the vote!’?

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

Mr. R. Brown: Yes Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I did it and I shouldn’t have done it. It is regrettable and I know it is an important topic we’re debating in this House, and I look forward to continuing the debate.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Fairness of referendum bill and Islanders

A question to the Premier: Premier, do you still believe that your referendum bill is fair to all when a senior Cabinet minister holds the views of ordinary Islanders with such disdain?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, our commitment in the fall of 2016, and our commitment today, was to provide a moment and an occasion and a fair playing field with a clear question for Islanders to determine this very important question about our electoral future. I do indeed take all of this in the greatest seriousness and respect, and I believe that’s exactly why we are spending the time we are to get this

referendum bill correct, so that Islanders will have that opportunity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Disciplinary action for minister

Question to the Premier: Premier, what disciplinary action will you be taking with this minister for this incident?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I don’t know all the circumstances of this event, but let me say, I believe we are together here, and I hope it’s with discipline and with collaboration and with real sense of responsibility to the bill that we have before us, the referendum that lies ahead of us, and the opportunity for Prince Edward Islanders to signal, to reach a conclusion, as a number of people have said on all sides of this House, on this important question and to get to a result that will be clear and free from ambiguity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Apparently, there are no consequences.

Question to the Premier: Premier, do you consider it acceptable behaviour to have that minister’s action cheered on by the rest of your Cabinet?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I think the minister has already spoken for himself on this matter and let me go back to what I said about the purpose that we have here together on all sides of this House to consider and to work together and to be sure that we’re putting before Islanders an opportunity to deal with this question.

I don't believe that going back a couple of years to come back with the questions that are being asked here are helping in terms of going forward before Islanders to give them the opportunity, and there are a lot of serious questions that are being raised here and we take them seriously.

I think this is something that we need to keep working on and that we need Islanders to have confidence in and that they will know that when we have that referendum, that we will have decided this question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Premier doesn't want to answer my questions, nor does he want to go back two years to address a very serious incident that happened on the very steps of this Legislative Assembly.

Unfortunately, the reason I want to go back to it is because it's become a pattern of this government.

Opponents and forced amalgamation

A question to the Premier: Can the opponents of forced amalgamation expect the same treatment from this minister?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, as I've said, the minister has spoken in response and very directly in response to the question that was asked, and the question of municipal restructuring, the question of our electoral future – these are all questions that require us in this Legislature to make sure that the people are having the opportunity to be engaged, to be clear, to understand where we're going with our future, and that is exactly where that matter now lies before the regulatory appeals commission. I believe that's exactly how it will move forward.

But, I want to say, back on the question that was being raised previously, I encourage the official opposition to ask questions about this referendum bill that we've got on the

floor, and will have on the floor again likely before too long, because it's important that all sides of the House engage and collaborate and ensure that they've got the best possible product that we can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. –

Mr. Myers: I asked (Indistinct)

Leader of the Opposition: (Indistinct)

Premier MacLauchlan: You did (Indistinct)

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) stay in your seat (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: You asked good questions.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Relieving of CLE minister re: actions

A question to the Premier: Premier, will you relieve the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment from his duties for showing such disrespect to Islanders with his actions?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the minister is a man of passion, as we've seen here on this floor, and he's also a man of honour. He's forthright, and he already responded to the question today.

I think it's important for us to realize that we're here in the spring, well into heading to summer of 2018 and it's really the point of being here in this House is to put forward, to consider, to do what we can to move forward and perfect an opportunity for Prince Edward Islanders to engage on a very fundamental and central question for our future, and that's exactly what I want to have our team and everybody in this House focused on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

To the Premier's comments, this minister has had well over a year and a half to apologize for his actions and he's failed to do so until I raised the issue here in the Legislative Assembly today. I wouldn't call those actions very honourable.

As Theo Fleury told us when he was on the floor of this very Legislature, true leadership doesn't come from a place of ego. It comes from a place of humility.

Disrespect for Islanders

Question to the Premier: Why are you so comfortable with showing such disrespect to the people who elected you?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me pursue the point about humility because it gets to a point about where I am as Premier and where I believe we all need to be on this important question of preparing a referendum that will enable Islanders to make a sovereign choice about an important point about their future. While there may be other political parties in the province that have a party line on this, our Liberal party is aiming and committed to providing Prince Edward Islanders with an opportunity to make a sovereign choice, on a clear question, and one where we, as a Liberal party, and those who I hope are throughout this House and intending to come back here and act on this after an election, will indeed respect the sovereign will of Prince Edward Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday in this House, the immigration minister said that your government appointed 12 intermediaries and that they were going to be doing lots of immigration. Prior to this RFP process, there were seven.

The RFP was going to bring it up to 10, but this government chose to make it 12. Based on that logic, we must have all kinds of people coming in.

Appointment of intermediaries and immigration numbers

A question to the minister: Did appointing the two extra intermediaries in the fall increase our immigration numbers by much?

Mr. MacEwen: That's a good question.

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll tell you what the additional agents have done; it's created some hustle amongst them. We're now working to get the very best immigrants here to PEI and we do that through community engagement –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – and we have a scoring system that the agents all work within in the expression of interest model and we have agents working right across PEI to continue to grow the population, and bring new ideas and new skills to PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Through your RFP process you were projecting to bring in 300 PNP immigrants through the business stream. We're a third of the way through the year and there's only been 33 so far approved, which means you're actually on track for 100.

Expression of interest model re: immigrants

Question to the minister: Is your new expression of interest model really working if you're only on pace to get one-third of the intended immigrants in a year processed?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our immigration program continues to evolve. We're getting better at it all the time. We have agents engaged right across PEI to give us the very best newcomers coming to PEI that we can get.

It's not the same as the old model. It's not first-in-first-out; we're taking the very best that want to come to PEI, and will settle on PEI and will settle in rural PEI so they can continue to help with the economy right across the province.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an interesting answer because the website indicates that no immigrants were approved under the business impact stream of PNP in May.

It's kind of ironic that that's the exact month that we learn that 566 immigrants were using the Sherwood motel as their address to get into this country and then nine days later there's a freeze on approving these files.

Business PNP files in May

Question to the minister: Why were there no business impact PNP files drawn in the month of May?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We don't have a quota system that we will continue to invite newcomers to the province if they don't meet our high expectations.

As new applicants come into the system, we will evaluate those and we will pick the very best. We have, actually, 74% of our newcomers last year, or immigrants to this program, were employer driven to fill gaps in our labour, in PEI.

We're very glad to continue to have the very best come here. Whether they're coming through the business impact category or one of the other categories, we'll continue to

invite the very best of newcomers here to PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I recall very well that you did have a quota because the RFP said you wanted to bring in 300 people through the business stream.

The website also states that the range of scores of the 33 immigrants that you've selected so far this year in the business stream under the new program scored in a range of 117 to 140. The immigrants, who have been – these are immigrants, who have been nominated under your new program.

Question to the minister: Were there no files in the immigration pool in May that had a score of 117 or above that could have been approved?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The quota I talked about is not a monthly quota. We didn't say we need to have this many come into the system right now. We continue to have intake in through the agents to identify the very best that can come into PEI.

We'll draw those as time allows and as the opportunities exist through the agents and through our staff time.

We continue to drive through the employer-driven side of the business; we continue to invite quite a number of newcomers. I don't have the number with me now, but I think it's well over 200 or 300.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It seems really odd that the immigration process was really just flowing along

smooth and then, all of a sudden, we find out that there's a whole bunch of people staying at the Sherwood Motel that aren't actually staying there and bam, the whole thing goes to a crawling halt. It seems like this program may have been shut down.

Shut down in May of PNP program

Question to the minister: Who shut the program down in May, you or the federal government?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can't tell if the member opposite likes the program or doesn't like the program. A couple of days ago he thought it was terrible and what are we doing with it –

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – now, he's complaining because we didn't bring enough people in. I really don't know where he's going with that, but that really doesn't matter. We don't manage the business on what he seems to think. We manage the business on what happens here on PEI; the agents that have really good immigrants that are in the system and we continue to do that.

The business impact piece is a smaller part of our overall immigration program and we continue to invite those that can fill key labour gaps here on PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's too bad that the minister spends more time worrying about what my position is on PNP and doesn't spend that time actually managing the PNP file because it's the management of the PNP file that is the issue and has always been the issue.

If this program hasn't been shut down by the feds, we're all wondering what has happened to it.

You approved two extra intermediaries, so you're up to 12. You were going to do lots and lots of immigration, you told this House. Thirty-three files you processed so far this year, so you're on track for 100. This is all slowed down since the Sherwood motel scandal broke.

You keep saying: new and improved. But, it's your government that keeps mismanaging this file. There is nothing new and improved about you guys over there. The whole bunch of you aren't new and improved; you're old and tired and the mismanagement of this file is embarrassing.

Expression of interest model re: immigrants (further)

Question to the minister: Will you finally admit that your new expression of interest PNP program simply is not working?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our expression of interest model is working. It's working terrific. I saw on the news that Kensington has 55 applications going to come to their community.

Mr. McIsaac: That's right.

Mr. Palmer: We're moving newcomers right across PEI. We're filling key labour gaps and we're continuing to bring new newcomers to PEI –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – and we're very happy to continue with that. I'm very proud of the program and it is working great.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hedgerows have played an important part on Prince Edward Island for many, many decades. A number of people have approached me, and I'm sure other MLAs, about the removal of hedgerows that, in

particular, are causing really, soil erosion to happen more easily; run-off going into plugged ditches, and particularly along government clay roads you can see the water running onto the clay road and then gathering the soil and it's getting into Island waterways

Regulating removal of hedgerows/erosion

Question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: Minister, what are you doing to regulate removal of hedgerows and prevent erosion of soil into Island waterways?

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

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

I thank the member for this question; it is an important question. We are getting a lot of comments from residents, especially around these fields.

Residents are concerned about removal of hedgerows, as the hon. member has said: it causes more erosion and leaching, I guess, into streams. We are working with the potato growers; the Federation of Agriculture.

We prefer to work with the farmers to identify these issues and look for corrective action.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think the minister hit on the key word, here: action. In Mayfield in District 18 at the Houston Road, we've had ditches that have been plugged since mid-April.

Talking to area residents, this has been going on for almost 50 years. It's an annual occurrence. We've engaged the watershed groups; we've engaged the agricultural outreach in the minister's department, but we still haven't seen any action.

We're worried that in the next heavy rain, the soil in these ditches may be released into waterways, yet, once again. It may even go

down into some lots and businesses nearby and ruin their gravel in their lots.

Unplugging of ditches and annual erosion

Question to the minister: Will you commit to getting these ditches unplugged immediately and taking long-term action to prevent this annual erosion?

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

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

The member is right. The watershed area groups across Prince Edward Island do a tremendous job, not only for the areas, but the whole ecosystem here on Prince Edward Island.

We are working with the watershed groups to see what we can do here. That's one of the reasons I've initiated, I asked IRAC to review the land ownership here on Prince Edward Island. That's the beginning here of a discussion we're going to have about rural PEI and PEI in general.

I know farmland, as everybody in this Legislature knows, farmland is crucial to Prince Edward Island and to its agriculture community and to the economy. We want to work with our agriculture community to do the best for our environment and good for the economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Biggar: Tell him to (Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In some parts of the Island, particularly out in Kensington-Malpeque area, we're seeing that really low-capacity wells on properties are being combined together through piping the water to holding ponds or out to fields. This government is actually giving permits to allow these pipes to be put underneath roads and that way they can effectively combine low-capacity wells.

In the new *Water Act*, there's a limit on the daily rate in section 40 of 25 cubic metres a

day and there's also legislation that talks about multiple sources and it says that a combination of multiple wells must not exceed this 25 cubic metre per day limit, of course, if doing so is required by the regulations.

Monitoring of flow rate of low-capacity wells

Question to the minister: Is the combined flow rate of the piped water from these low-capacity wells being monitored to ensure it doesn't exceed 25 cubic metres per day as per the new *Water Act*?

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

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

I thank the member for the question.

As it currently stands, agriculture producers can have one well per PID number. They are unregulated. That's one of the reasons we are working on the regulations as fast as we can. These regulations will be sent back to the communities and lands committee for review and hopefully we can get this issue resolved quicker.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister admits we know it's potentially an issue. We know we've got legislation that's going to monitor it, so I don't know why his department is issuing permits. There should be a moratorium on this sort of activity.

Review of *Water Act* draft regulations

Question to the minister: When will a draft of the *Water Act* regulations be released to the general public for a review?

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

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

I had an update from the department on it and they were working on the regulations and as soon as we have them, we'll be sending them on to the committee for review. Because there was a commitment made by the government that regulations and changes in the *Water Act* will be reviewed by the committee. That is the most and transparent process available.

Mr. Trivers: When? When is it going to happen?

Mr. R. Brown: We hope we can work with the committee to ensure that regulations meet both the needs of the agriculture of the community –

Mr. Trivers: We need it now.

Mr. R. Brown: – and the needs of the environment.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The current seniors' housing program provides subsidized housing for those whose housing needs may have changed or who no longer have the ability to stay in their own home. Eligible applicants must be over 60 or 55 or older with a disability with eligibility based on need via a rating system that includes income, assets, health, age, and present housing circumstances. The date of application does not relate to the position on the priority list – i.e. it is not a first come, first serve type of arrangement.

Priority of subsidized housing list/emergency cases

A question to the Minister of Family and Human Services: How is priority on that list determined objectively and how are emergency cases handled?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, any time I can get to my feet and talk about housing on Prince Edward Island and

the housing needs and how this government's committed to making sure that Islanders' –

Mr. Trivers: On your feet, provide some answers.

Ms. Mundy: – housing needs are met.

I have actually sat through one of our assessment processes. One of the first things I did was to see how it's done and I'm very happy to stand here and say that just because you've been on there, maybe, for six months or three months, if somebody does come in with an emergency and their needs are more than that person who was sitting there first on the list, their needs will be met.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Wait time for seniors' housing

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question for the Minister of Family and Human Services: Is the minister aware that the current list has a one and a half to two year wait time for non-emergency cases and that there are currently over 300 seniors on that list?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, our staff is in contact with the people both in the family housing list and the seniors' housing list almost on a daily basis, so we are very aware of the number of people that are on that waitlist. That is why this government has committed to over \$17 million in this budget that we will implement over the next two years to ensure that Islanders' housing needs are met. Not only now, but with our housing action plan, we will make sure that those needs are met into the future as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When there's a natural disaster like the flooding recently in New Brunswick, we implement creative and immediate solutions for the people affected through an emergency measurement plan.

Emergency management plan for seniors

A question for the Minister of Family and Human Services: We know that there is a housing strategy and action plan, but given that any new housing arising from that plan will not be available until 2019 at the earliest and that there is a waiting list now of up to two years for community-based housing, what is the emergency management plan for seniors in housing crises right now?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is that each and every day our staff deals with Islanders who are in emergency situations – when it comes to mental health, when it comes to our social programs and we are committed to helping them one-on-one.

As for housing, if you're not mistaken, in addition to the \$17 million that we have committed over the next two years, we have also said that we will create 1,000 new affordable housing units – 275 of those this year alone.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) Charlottetown.

Ms. Mundy: – So we are aware of the need; we are dealing with Islanders as they present themselves to us; and we are trying to help them navigate in any way we can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) Summerside.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: In the newly released provincial action plan for seniors, there's reference to the higher than average percentage of seniors in PEI – currently at 19.4% – and the

expectation that this demographic will only increase over time.

There is a priority for developing and implementing home-first, age-in-place initiatives including home, community, and long-term services and supports. One of the key areas for investment is accessible housing for people with disabilities and an aging population so they can remain healthy, happy, and safe in their community.

Accessible housing for seniors

Question for the Minister of Family and Human Services: How much of the new housing investment announced in the 2018 budget will be allocated specifically for fully accessible, community-based seniors' housing?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, we have a housing action plan. We have engaged community in this conversation; we have engaged seniors in this conversation; we have engaged community partners in this conversation. They are all sitting around the table and are helping government develop our housing action plan, which, as I've said before, will roll out in June.

But let's talk about other seniors' programs that we have initiated, this government. Back in November, we rolled out the Seniors Independence Initiative.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) talk about your wait list.

Ms. Mundy: That program is servicing well over 200 Islanders right now – allowing them to remain in their homes by helping them with practical needs that they need to stay in their homes. That's just one of the many new programs. We have several across government that help seniors remain in their homes –

Mr. LaVie: In Charlottetown.

Ms. Mundy: – and help them with the needs that they need to stay in their homes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) Summerside (Indistinct) that seat too.

Ms. Bell: Mr. Speaker, the provincial action plan for seniors includes three year action plan items to promote the health and well-being of Island seniors. These include, and I quote: Exploring innovative housing options for seniors in the context of Prince Edward Island's housing action plan.

Options for emergency seniors' housing

As we have a critical shortage of housing right now, what innovative and immediate options has the minister considered – emergency funding, temporary housing, or even motels?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know about the hon. member, but when I speak to seniors in my community, and I speak to seniors across Prince Edward Island, they want to stay in their homes. We, just in this budget, announced an additional \$1 million that we would be investing into our home renovation programs to help seniors that want to stay in their homes.

We have also, in addition to the seniors' independence program; we have across government implemented many programs that help reduce the costs for seniors so that they can stay in their homes, in their communities, where they want to be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, have spoken to a number of seniors and their families in my district who are truly in crisis. They are aging, and some are disabled, but they are not sick. They want to stay in their community, but they are now

homeowners and they cannot afford market rent. Some families are genuinely afraid that their loved ones will die before they find a safe place to live, and that stress is huge.

Minister, we cannot continue to deal with this on a case-by-case basis.

Seniors' housing crisis

What can you and your department do to address this real and immediate crisis?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Family and Human Services.

Ms. Mundy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

June is a mere one day away. We will have a housing action plan rolling out within the month. That may answer some of the questions that the hon. member is asking here today.

Let's talk again about the importance about the Home Renovation Program and that \$1 million that we are investing. That will take every Islander that applied for that program this year and that qualifies; they will get their renovation done.

That could mean life or death for some of these seniors, who want to stay in their communities in their homes. That will allow them to do it. Whereas, they might have had to sell their home and move on and try to find other accommodations.

To say \$1 million into a Home Renovation Program is not dealing with it and cleaning up the backlog of people, who have been applying year after year; they are now going to be receiving –

Speaker: Okay –

Ms. Mundy: – they are now going to be receiving the help that they need and stay in the communities and their homes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Finance: Minister, there are three separate bond raters that are used here on PEI. Bond raters are those, who assess the credit worthiness on PEI and we use their expertise to make sure our finances are up to par.

Bond raters assess-review budget and estimates

How important is it that we use bond raters to assess and review things such as our budget and capital estimates?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Bond rating is a grade that indicates bonds credit equality. I believe it's extremely important to have third parties come in and evaluate the economic value of Prince Edward Island. You can always learn something by these bond raters. They acknowledge many trends across the country that are affecting other provinces, and it allows us to learn and move forward with a good fiscal management plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Determining Prince Edward Island's bond rating

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, minister.

Minister: Can you give us an explanation of what it is that their in-depth reviews are comprised of and analysis exercises that they complete in determining Prince Edward Island's bond rating?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: The evaluation is against a wide range of predetermined economic and financial metrics; historical data projections; data from banks; stats can.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacDonald: They compare them to other jurisdictions.

Today, actually, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business released their numbers for the month. I'm proud to say, the business barometer on Prince Edward Island is leading the country.

There are other ones. The Premier and I actually had the opportunity to meet with the vice president and deputy chief economist of Scotia Bank this morning. Like I said, every time you meet with these people or read an article, you're learning something that you can, maybe, apply to Prince Edward Island and the economy of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Role of bond rating in growing economy

Mr. Roach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, what role does bond rating play in the financial world and especially for a growing economy like ours on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Well, Mr. Speaker, stable bond rating states a good financial management, but it also credits investors that are looking to invest and that shows that Prince Edward Island is a good investment.

But, our economy, and as I have stated before, and I think everybody in this House and across the Island is seeing growth. We've heard Aspin Kemp looking for employees today.

There are jobs in the construction association. Our employment is up 2.6%. Average weekly wages are up 2.6%. Seasonally-adjusted retail sales are up 5.3%. I could go on and on and we should be proud of it.

Again, back to the bond raters; I think it's an integral part of adjusting our forecasts on where we should be spending money and what we should be doing on the Island as far as our exports, our manufacturing, and our investments.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Disposal of used industrial belts

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the minister of transportation: How do we dispose of used industrial belts from the farm industry on Prince Edward Island?

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

Mr. MacKay: It's not like you to now know something.

Ms. Biggar: Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. I didn't hear the exact question. Could you speak –

Mr. LaVie: You heard everything else.

Speaker: I'll get the hon. member to repeat the question.

Mr. Fox: I hope I don't lose any time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the transportation minister –

Ms. Biggar: I heard that.

Mr. Fox: – how do we dispose of used industrial belts, rubber belts –

Ms. Biggar: Oh, belts.

An Hon. Member: Belts.

Mr. Fox: – used in the farming industry in the Province of Prince Edward Island?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll go back to Island waste watch management and get that answer and bring it back to the member.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Industrial belts are widely used across PEI and also in the fishing industry.

Recycling used industrial rubber belts

Question to the transportation minister: Do we recycle these used industrial belts?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have a great Island waste watch management system here on PEI. We lead the country in it. We're very conscientious of how we dispose of a number of different types of waste.

As I indicated, I'll go back to Island waste watch management and see what the process is that they have in place for handling those types of disposable products.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad to hear the minister say we have a very conscientious waste watch system and it's a great system. But, I have, minister, a local shop in my district that brought forth an issue to my attention this morning.

They want to do right –

Ms. Biggar: You should have called me.

Mr. Fox: – by the environment and dispose of –

Mr. LaVie: You won't answer the phone.

Mr. Fox: – reuse these belts properly –

Mr. LaVie: You don't answer your phone.

Mr. Fox: IWMC currently doesn't have a recyclable used industrial belt, so the solution for companies in PEI is to pay to have these belts trucked to Wellington and, wait for it, buried –

Some Hon. Members: Oh!

Leader of the Opposition: Oh my God.

Mr. Fox: – in the ground at a cost of \$100 a tonne.

Leader of the Opposition: Wow.

Mr. LaVie: No.

Industrial rubber belts buried in landfill

Mr. Fox: Question to the transportation minister: Creating more carbon emissions to truck used belts to bury them in a landfill –

Mr. LaVie: No.

Mr. Fox: – does that seem like an environmentally progressive approach to you?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I noted, we do have a lot of products that we are able to recycle through our program through Island waste watch management. However, there is some waste. If you drive by there, I'm sure you will see that there are a number of different types of products that are put into the landfill site. That's why we have a number of different cells there.

Those particular cells are protected with membranes so that nothing leaches out into the groundwater. Then, they are covered up to protect any other dispersal of items.

We are very conscious of the fact that there are new innovative ways that we need to look at disposal of other products. We are always looking for those kinds of opportunities.

Again, I will go back and see what other options that there might be available through the Island waste watch management.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. Fox: Thank, Mr. Speaker.

I have some lovely photographs here that I'll table after.

I'm against the bearing of any industrial waste that we can recycle.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: The government talks about their climate plan to reduce emissions, but here we are trucking used industrial belts all over the Island to have them buried at a landfill. I understand that they're all (Indistinct) to this unfriendly environmental approach.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Fox: There are companies on the mainland that recycle this product, the same as they do tires that are being shipped off.

Recycling industrial rubber belts

Question to the transportation minister: Will you commit today to having IWMC find a more environmentally-responsible method to handle these waste items, and specifically, industrial belts, rubber belts, used in the fishing and in the farming industry?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, as you will note, I mentioned before that Island waste watch has a partnership with the – what do you call it? Over on – the recycling and the burning of materials. We burned a lot of those materials here at energy from waste around plastic. I have certainly directed – actually I just had a meeting with Island waste watch management director and asked him to go out and look at what other innovative, environmental practices are out there so that we can, again, continue to reduce, and reduce, and reduce those kinds of materials. It's always something I'm very conscientious of as minister and we will continue to work towards that.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora, your final question.

Mr. Fox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm actually quite shocked to hear that we're burning industrial waste and then carbons are emitting – they're going up into the atmosphere. To me, that's not right.

Disposal of hazard materials/asbestos (further)

Question to the minister: Last week we talked about industrial waste from TOSH being stockpiled and buried up in Miscouche. Within hours of us asking questions in this House, bulldozers were on the ground burying it and covering up. Can you confirm that there were no particles of asbestos or any other hazardous material bulldozed and put in the ground when that was taking place last week?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you.

Just to correct the member over there, we don't burn industrial waste at the energy from waste. I was referring to the compile of plastic that we were not able to transport off PEI. So, I want to clarify that.

Also, in regard to the site on the Kinsman Road in Miscouche, last week, actually, before the member even asked me that question, we had environmental officers out there inspecting the site.

Again, to reiterate, anything that is on site at the Three Oaks project that has any kind of contamination is bagged, put separately, and hauled away to Island waste watch management. Those particular products that were put on the field in Miscouche are clear and clean, brick and blocks, and yes, they are cleaned up. Again, department of environment was out there and inspected the site before any work was allowed to be done.

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

[End of Question Period]