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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

TUESDAY, 5 JUNE 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.

Obscene gesture on video from CLE minister

Question to the Premier: Premier, have you seen the video posted this weekend of your Minister of Communities, Land and Environment making an obscene gesture to a member of the public while you and your caucus watched?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: No, Mr. Speaker, I have not seen the video.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

To the Premier again: Last week, when I asked you about this, you said that you didn't know all the circumstances of the event. The video of the incident shows right there, that you, the rest of your caucus were all gathered together.

So, I guess I ask you: What circumstances are you not aware of?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the main circumstances that we were gathered for; our annual photograph to prepare for our Christmas card, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Again to the Premier: Premier, last week, when I asked you about this incident, you

described the minister's action as honourable and forthright. The minister still hasn't apologized for his actions.

What's honourable about that?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I believe the minister was taken to have taken ownership of the circumstances. It was, as far as I understood, considered to be an apology; an acknowledgement that it was something that he shouldn't have done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Video a disrespect to Islanders

Question again to the Premier: Premier, thousands of Islanders, who watched this video felt insulted that you and your caucus have such disrespect for Islanders.

Do you consider that acceptable conduct for a minister of the Crown?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the minister spoke about this on the floor last week. The minister was clear in saying that it was something that he regrets and should not have done. In another way, I'm sure, he's saying that he does not, in retrospect, see it as acceptable. What I said here, on the floor last week, is that we now, together, have an opportunity to put in place the framework and the ability and the moment for Prince Edward Islanders to offer, let me say, a considered, discerning and serene response to the question of our electoral future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Consequences for actions of two ministers

Again to the Premier: Premier, the Attorney General and the chair of the democratic renewal committee actually celebrated in the video after the minister's rude gesture.

Why are there no consequences for the actions of these two ministers?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: (Indistinct)

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

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

Certainly, I would acknowledge that I laughed at the interaction that occurred between the minister at the time. There was an exchange between the two of them. Certainly, I'd recognize that it's not appropriate any time you're, you know, making that kind of a salute to a constituent, and would apologize for any part that I played in that, and certainly recognize it as something that would be out of character for myself and something that I would recognize as not something I would intend to do again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, this government is running radio ads about their drug program.

Cost of radio ads to Islanders

Premier: Can you tell Islanders how much these radio ads are costing Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that information at hand. I'm certainly happy to bring it back to the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Premier, I'll let you know. Executive Council spends \$130,000 on radio ads. One hundred and thirty thousand dollars, while there is a mother of three children fighting for her life; bravely fighting for her life, Premier.

Drug coverage for cancer drug Vectibix

Question to the health minister: Why doesn't the province cover the cancer drug Vectibix?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, I, as many Islanders saw a Facebook post last night from the young lady that the hon. member refers to.

Obviously, I had a lot of reposts send to me last night, as well. In regards to Vectibix and its access on Prince Edward Island, currently, it is not on our provincial formulary. There are a number of drugs that we are looking at to be part of the formulary.

We will be investing upwards – between 1.3 and \$1.5 million on our formulary this very year. It's not myself that says what goes on formulary. I have no clinical experience. I am not a physician. We do have a PEI Provincial Drugs and Therapeutics Committee that review the process; prioritize what drugs should be on there; what are new drugs that can replace old drugs and that's the work that they do.

I'm sure they will be doing that work further this year. Vectibix will probably be one that they will be looking at, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If the minister saw that post, he would see that this is the only mother that is looking for this drug. She is fighting for her life. For those, that don't know, Vectibix is a drug used when chemo treatments are no long effective.

This drug cost \$6,000 a month. What value do we put on a life, Mr. Speaker? What value do we put on a life?

Coverage through Catastrophic Drug Program

Why isn't this drug covered through the Catastrophic Drug Program, minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, making life changing and lifesaving medications available and affordable for all Islanders is certainly a government priority.

As I said, we remain committed to increasing a number of drugs that are on the formulary. We do have the PEI Provincial Drugs and Therapeutics Committee looking at that formulary currently. This is a process that they do continuously.

Obviously, the concern of Ms. Fraser is quite important to all of us on the government side of the House. We will continue to work to see if Vectibix can be something that we can look at, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This mother of three is going through a process, too. But her process is coming to an end without this drug, a mother of three.

How could anyone afford a drug for \$6,000? What kind of a message are we sending to Islanders?

I went through this before with the last minister of health with a gentleman. He didn't make it. This is a mother of three. How can we not help this mother? She's the only one looking for this drug on PEI. If the minister read her post, he would know what I'm talking about.

I would have read it in my statement today, but it was too long of a statement. But, I will be tabling it because it's a heartfelt letter that she wrote.

Why can't your government help this mother of three with the cost of this drug, minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, I guess, the first time I became aware of this was last evening as a result of those Facebook posts. I know the young lady contacted my office back in mid-May. She was transferred up to our provincial pharmacist for a discussion there.

Certainly, I would commit to asking this young lady to come into my office so that we could have a further chat on this at any time.

Obviously, we work very hard at providing the best formulary that we can provide. Currently, we have 27 public drug programs that we work with everyday. We have assisted over 50,000 Islanders on this. Certainly, drug coverage for Islanders is a paramount priority to the department. It is a paramount priority to me, as minister and I would be willing to sit down and talk to this young lady at any time, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Mr. Speaker, this just shows how out of touch this government is. You spend \$130,000 on radio ads to promote your drugs. This mother of three is bravely fighting for her life. Bravely fighting for her life, over \$6,000, and that's not right. This mother is fighting for her life.

Why are you making her fight your government for this drug, minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, as I said earlier, this is not a process that I, as minister, would normally be involved in. We have a committee that looks at these drugs; they prioritize what needs to be on; they prioritize what new technologies are out that need to be looked at in regards to all types of illness.

Currently we have a number of programs that are in place: our catastrophic program, our low-cost drug program, our seniors' programs that are all working very well. We will continue to work on all of those programs. We will continue to add drugs to our formulary where they've been prioritized by the provincial drug committee and we'll continue to work on that.

Obviously, to ensure that Islanders have the best access to the drugs they need for the health care services they need is a priority of our government.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now there's no Health PEI, you're in full control, minister of health. You're in full control. There's no Health PEI – nobody to bail you out.

Drug coverage for cancer drug Vectibix (further)

Will you commit today to paying \$6,000 for that mother of three so she can live on and see her children grow?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I will commit to today is to work with any Islander that needs further health care services, whether it be physician services; whether it be pharmaceutical services; that's the role that I signed up for as minister – or the Premier allowed me to do as minister of health. I receive calls every day of similar natures and I take it to heart and I try to do the absolute best I can do as minister of health to ensure that Islanders are receiving the best quality health care they can on Prince Edward Island. That includes all facets of health, whether it's physician care; whether it's drugs; whatever their needs may be and that's what I'm committed to do as minister.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the health minister: Yesterday was the 14th closure at the Kings County Memorial Hospital ER in the last several months.

Closures at KCMH emergency room (further)

Minister: How many closures does it take for you to realize that you have a crisis on your hands?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, the recent ER closures in Kings County Memorial are definitely unfortunate. As of last week, one of our physicians went out on mat leave as of Friday and we have another physician who is out on now extended sick leave. That created some vacancies in the upcoming rotation. We are working with the existing physicians to see who can cover any of those positions, as well as reaching out to other physicians across the Island to see if we can fill the needs there.

Obviously, maintaining a sustainable, functioning ER in the Kings County region to provide health care for all residents of that area is another priority of ours. We will work and have conversations with the doctors in such things as what other solutions are possible. Should it be a walk in clinic? Nurse practitioners, or even an ER doctor if we can figure out something there. So we are working on it very diligently.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've raised this question now I think it's six months. Leader of the Opposition has raised questions about the ER at Kings County Memorial Hospital. It's good to hear you're working on it. It's not the fault of the physicians or the nurses there. They're doing their very best – doing their very best and it's going to lead to burnout.

Minister: Why do these concerns seem to have fallen on deaf ears at Health PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to health care in Kings County, our primary care services are extremely healthy. We have – for a first time in a long time – a full complement of doctors in the area. We now have three nurse practitioners that are working out of the Kings County region. Our primary care is working well. It's just our ER closures that we're experiencing these times due to vacancies in the rotation list, but we are looking for ways to overcome those to find permanent solutions moving forward.

As I said, all options are up in the air and we'll be having continued discussion with those, with physicians and people from the area to find out what would best serve the needs and how can we best do that, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On Friday, the Member from Morell-Mermaid pointed out and revealed that the ER Kings County would be close for 13 days in June – 13 days, starting this past weekend. In response, the health minister said: but those are out the road, down into the future.

Question to the health minister: We've had two closures in the last four days. Does that seem out the road and into the future for you?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

As I said, it's regrettable that one of our physicians went on extended leave just as of last week and the other went on maternity leave as of Friday – created some vacancies in those – in the rotation, but we do now have a locum located to come and work in

place of the doctor that's on maternity leave and we do hope that the other physician will be back from their leave very shortly.

We are working with all physicians in the area to try to fill those vacancies in the ER roles. Obviously, some of those will be out for some time because when you're in the rotation that follows through over several weeks and into months. So yes, there are some holes there from the two docs that are out. We'll continuously work to find other physicians to fill those and the locum will play a big role in that as well.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to hear we have a full complement of doctors, but the problem is how many patients are still without a doctor in the area? I raised the question, I think six weeks ago, about a health clinic in Murray River. We're paying for a facility there. We've been renting the space for seven years.

Commitment to open clinic in Murray River (further)

Question to the health minister: What progress has been made in getting the service up and running to help alleviate the pressure at the ER at Kings County Memorial?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very pleased to say that the patient registry list from people from the Kings County region is in the 300 range and that should be tidied up by the summer. The locum coming will take some of the patients; Dr. Thomson is taking some of the patients; the new nurse practitioner will have some of the patients, so at just over 300 list will be cleaned up by the summer period.

In regard to – the hon. member spoke about the Murray River and that possible clinic there, currently our focus is on maintaining sustainable ER coverage out of Kings County. We are working with doctors to provide that service. If, down the road, when

things go well there – and then there’s other areas to look at – certainly I’d be able to look at clinics in Murray River, Crapaud, Alberton, Tignish – anywhere that they’re required.

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

Ms. Compton: Obviously if your focus is on maintaining the ER at the Kings County Memorial, you’re failing at that. Thirteen days, I think, in June, we’ve got no ER. Family doctor’s access is spotty – no health clinic in Murray River. There are no walk in clinics in Montague, no evening clinics in Kings County at all.

Mr. LaVie: That’s a shame. (Indistinct)

Pressure on doctors and nurses at KCMH (further)

Ms. Compton: Question to the health minister: Why has there been no progress from your government on addressing the gaps in walk in clinic access that are adding pressure to the ER?

Mr. LaVie: You’re in charge now.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It’s just about two weeks ago that I attended a meeting at the residence of Kings County area and a couple of the local physicians who were at the meeting to lay out how a new process would be out of the Kings County ER room. June 1st of this year there was a new program put in place where they would triage patients for the severity of their illness. There were also going to be changes in the split shift of two seven hour shifts. There was an indication that this would prove to solve most of the problems. Obviously we’re four days in and we already had two closures, so this is going to need more conversation, more discussion, more thought on how we can resolve this and part of that discussion at that meeting was about walk in clinics, was about nurse practitioners, was about designated ER docs coverage. These are all things that we are currently looking at as options and we will find a sustainable solution for Montague ER.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Extending scope of practice for pharmacists and RNs

Throughout this session, we have called for a greater scope of practice for pharmacists and nurses to help alleviate the pressure at Kings County and all other facilities.

Question to the health minister: What work, if any, has been done on that?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have had discussions with pharmacists and nurses about extending the scope of work, or least having them work to their full scope of practice. Conversations are early-day conversations, but I am hopeful that we can come up to something that works for everybody, and those conversations will continue as soon as possible and see if we can find anything there that will help any kind of a health situation across PEI.

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

Ms. Compton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, we know the doctors and nurses are working very hard at the ER, going above and beyond to try and sustain the service that Islanders expect. They’re pulling double shifts and are risking burnout. Unfortunately, they aren’t getting much support.

Government has been too busy purging the Health PEI board it appointed and ceasing power. You’re ceasing the power, minister.

ER shortage crisis

Question to the health minister: When can Islanders expect you to work as hard to fix this crisis as doctors pulling double shifts to try and keep the ER open?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

As minister, I am trying to work very closely with physicians so that they're not reaching burnout. A lot of cases that present today are very complex cases. It takes a physician quite some time to see somebody in the ER these days with the complex needs. I'm trying to work with doctors to find out what reasonable solutions could we put in place.

These are ongoing conversations. They've been going since I've taken the chair some four, five, four-and-a-half months ago and they will continue well into the future until we can figure out exactly what's the best solution, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, we saw an escalation of the trade dispute between our country and the United States with a whole range of new tariffs being applied on both sides. This is in the middle of protracted and seemingly intractable disagreements and negotiations on the North American Free Trade Agreement. This government has, for many years, been devoting quite a bit of emphasis and public financing towards encouraging Island companies to grow their exports. Data from the Government of Canada shows that 73.6% of PEI exports went to the United States last year.

Disagreements with US re: NAFTA

A question to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: Are you concerned that your government's export development policies are putting all of our export eggs in one US basket?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

US is our largest trading partner and we're very happy to have them as the wonderful

partner they are, and as everybody knows, the situation at NAFTA is very fluid right now.

We continue to work with a lot of our exporters here on PEI. We stay very engaged in the NAFTA discussions and in all relationships with US and all of our trading partners. But, we do have staff that is dedicated towards that and they're working with many of our exporters here on PEI to keep them up to date so that we are able to adjust our tactics as the situation unfolds.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The value of exports going to the United States has been rising from \$804 million in 2015 to just over \$1 billion in 2017. However, in that same time, the value going to other countries has fallen from \$498 million to \$365 million. Our export destinations are getting smaller.

Diversifying PEI's export markets

Could the minister explain why this government's many export diversification policies are failing to actually diversify PEI export markets?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The business is moving along fine. We continue to find new markets; some years that we won't sell quite as much in one particular market, but we're finding other markets in other places, with US being a very important piece of that. We continue to work through trade missions. We work with visiting delegations to help identify opportunities. We actually had a delegation here last week who were here looking at opportunities within our province of products that they could buy, and we're very happy to continue to do that, and we'll continue to work out deals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Bell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our over-reliance on exports to the United States makes PEI economy vulnerable to trade disruptions, especially given the unpredictability of the current leadership there. What if next the Americans decide to put a tariff on potatoes and lobster, both of which compete with our American counterparts?

Government's plan in trade negotiations

Does this government have a plan to deal with further escalations in this trade war?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We continue to evaluate and watch what the US is doing. It would be foolhardy for us to think that we should ignore the US, which is our largest trading partner, who have a lot of wealth and demand our wonderful products that are coming from PEI.

We will continue to work on those; continue to find more opportunities and we will watch that situation as it unfolds, as it is very dynamic and we want to stay on top of that for sure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

Ministers in many departments love to talk about how Prince Edward Island's economy is, as you like to say, on a tear. There seems to be an unspoken belief on that side of the House, and perhaps in some quarters of this side also, that as long as our Island economy is growing, government is achieving its primary objective and that there's nothing but good things will flow from meeting that foremost goal.

PEI annual economic growth rate

A question to the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: Are you confident that if we could achieve an annual growth rate of, let's say, 3% or even 4%, that the tear would continue and that all Islanders would benefit?

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

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, we continue to grow the economy and we know that that helps Islanders. All Islanders are being impacted by great tourist seasons, by increased exports, by job growth. It gives Islanders a lot of pride in the work that they do, that shows that our products are second to none, and we are able to find new markets right around the world that will continue to employ Islanders and give them great satisfaction in the work that they're doing as we export those products.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Mr. LaVie: Get him on the ropes.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Well, it would be lovely if all Islanders were benefitting from this, but as we all know, the wages in Prince Edward Island are stubbornly low. We continue to have the lowest average wage in Canada, and last month things got even worse; the gap between us and the next lowest one grew.

Islanders and GDP growth rate

Minister, if you were to take a random sampling of Islanders, how many of them do you imagine would tell you that the number one goal that they want from their government is to achieve a GDP growth rate of 3%?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In my travels throughout PEI, people are talking about jobs and were able to help

private sector to create jobs. There were over 4,000 jobs created; 3,500 of those are full-time –

Mr. LaVie: Fishing season started.

Mr. Palmer: – and we know that people are interested to get to work, to do the things that they do well, and create new markets for us right across –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – the world.

Our products here, and services, are second to none. We've got excellent workforce that are continuing to respond to needs right around the world and that will continue because of the work ethic of our Islanders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

When Islanders are asked what really matters to them, these are the sorts of things they say: Fairness, community, meaningful relationships, steady employment, a clean environment, democratic engagement, work/life balance, good health; those sorts of things.

Government and matters of Islanders

Minister, do you think your government could help Islanders achieve many of those desires without us being on a tear?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy that the hon. member is actually interested in the economy, because this is the first I've heard of it in this session of maybe nine weeks that we've been here. It's very interesting that it is something that is important in his district, because it certainly is in mine and right across PEI.

There are opportunities for us to continue to grow the economy, to put more money back into circulation, which will help people. It

gives them a focus as they continue to make new products and new services, and as we continue to find new opportunities right around the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Minister, M.E. Callaghan school is used by many in West Prince obviously as a school, but also as a community centre. I had recently been approached by several constituents to have something done with the parking lot. The parking lot, they say, is a hazard and actually an embarrassment to them because of the disrepair that it's in. The administration has been told by the Public Schools Branch that there are more urgent repairs required at other schools.

Repairs to parking lot at M.E. Callaghan school

Minister, I will ask what they have already asked: Is there any chance of funding to fix the parking lot at their school?

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

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

As I have indicated previously in this House, and in particularly in this session, the Public Schools Branch determines its capital priorities and moves them forward to us. We make an envelope available to deal with those capital priorities. Then, they indicate which priorities move forward, in terms of, the expenditure of the resources.

I'm advised by the Public Schools Branch that this summer in West Prince; M.E. Callaghan will be getting a water filtration and plumbing system, which is estimated to cost \$75,000. St. Louis will be getting an oil tank, which is estimated to cost \$55,000. Bloomfield will be getting an oil tank, which is estimated to cost \$65,000. Hernewood

will be getting a roof replacement, which is estimated to cost \$115,000.

Depending on how those things go, if there is additional resources, they continue to look at the next project down the line.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very happy to hear that the schools in West Prince will be receiving some much needed updates and renovations. Minister, the pavement on the tennis court/basketball court at M.E. Callaghan is also in disrepair. It's 40-years-old, along with the parking lot. It has only had Band-Aid fixes over the years. It has aged very poorly. In the past the courts have been used by students in the daytime and in the evening, if weather is permitting. Now, they're unusable.

Repairs to recreation courts at M.E. Callaghan school

Minister, will there be any chance for the tennis courts of the basketball courts to be paved, also?

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

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

I have asked the Public Schools Branch if they get those projects done, what will the next, kind of, projects on the list as they have it right now.

As I have indicated previously, that's always subject to change. They have indicated M.E. Callaghan and Westisle roofs are the next two that they have on their list.

Just in the way that the hon. member has put the question, I would certainly encourage the hon. member to encourage members of his community to go see the Minister of Rural and Regional Development –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct) elected school board (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – and perhaps the minister –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: – could coordinate that and a project proposal could be put in under the regional development fund, Mr. Speaker, for those tennis courts.

Thank you very much.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) past the buck (Indistinct)

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess he just threw the Minister of Rural and Regional Development underneath the school bus –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Perry: – but anyway, he did answer my question partially; my next question, which was the Public Schools Branch, has stated that it's a non-urgent repair.

I wanted to know if there's any other options that the school may tap into to help with those parking lot or tennis court repairs.

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct) soapbox (Indistinct)

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

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) soapbox.

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

As I have indicated, yes, I believe there to be other options. I identified one just a minute ago.

Let me just say, that again, the Public Schools Branch is through our great capital priorities plan, \$50 million over the next five years. An increase to \$2 million a year looking at what we can do with that additional money to start to get beating these projects down and to get ahead of them. When we get the priority things like roofs and boilers and oil tanks replaced, then we'll

start looking at pavement from that point forward.

For now, things like tennis courts, I think there are other avenues that may be available.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. LaVie: Answer your question.

Mr. Dumville: Mr. Speaker, in 2013 Executive Council minute 572 authorized \$8.094 million loan to Pan American Properties for the initial redevelopment of the Welsh Owen property on Queen Street.

Welsh Owen property on Queen Street

To the Minister of Economic Development and Tourism: Were there any restrictive financial conditions placed on this property in regards to a future resale?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any loans that we have are assigned some collateral, whether it would be the property itself, or some kind of other security that will secure the loans that we do provide to various businesses across PEI. Those businesses that we charge, we charge interest on those and we make money on those loans.

This is another example of a great opportunity that the government provides that allow businesses to have another option as they continue to grow their business and drive more money into the economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

IIDI mandates

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, is it IIDI's mandate to only support new development in the manufacturing and tourism sectors?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our loan portfolio goes right across PEI and we have about 60% of our loan portfolio is in rural PEI. We have about 1,000 loans out right now. That relates to 14,000 Islanders that are working.

On those loans that we have out, which is about \$350 million, we charge interest on those and we're making money. That will continue to go into the fund and there's no new money that comes into the fund. That's self-sustaining. It comes from the interest profits that we make each year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Government support of commercial real estate re: IIDI loans

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, why would Executive Council support a commercial real estate development by advancing a second loan to purchase an existing business against IIDI policy, when it authorized IIDI to advance a five-year term loan of \$6,480,000 to a Liberal-friendly company, Stamper Inc. to purchase this property?

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

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, there are lots of businesses across PEI that will look to the province for loans. As I said, we have about 14,000 employees that are working today because of loans that are provided by the province and those that we charge interest on.

We will always look at opportunities. It doesn't matter to us the political leaning of any of these companies.

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: We know that there are some that have Green Party affiliation –

Mr. Trivers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Palmer: – that have Tory affiliation and that have Liberal affiliation. We are happy to support good ideas that can pay the loans back, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today is the final day for Islanders to apply for a lucrative job working at government pot stores. The job posting states, quote, “Preference will be given to candidates who have successfully completed an employer recognized cannabis training program” end quote.

Cannabis training programs

Question to the Minister of Finance: Minister, as the employer, what cannabis training programs does this government recognize as giving candidates preferential status?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The cannabis file is an evolving file, right from Ottawa right to Prince Edward Island and right to the BC coast. We’re continuing to advance this cannabis file. It’s legislation that’s coming from, possibly, from Ottawa if it ever gets past through the senate. We’ll be ready for it.

We’re putting the RFP out there last, I think it was two weeks ago, that we put an RFP out for an education, excuse me, component. We’re advertising for those positions. We’re recognizing the fact that there are programs out there that are training programs for cannabis, whether it be online or whether it be right here on PEI.

We’re accepting those as an experience – excuse me.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

When I first saw this preferential qualification, it seemed odd to me. Cannabis hasn’t even been legalized yet. These government pot store jobs have only been posted for a few weeks. How many Islanders could possibly have completed recognized cannabis training programs? Then it was brought to my attention that apparently training has been quietly occurring in the province recently.

Secret cannabis training sessions

Question to the Minister of Finance: Minister, why are you running secret cannabis training sessions and how come they are not publicly advertised?

Mr. Fox: Yes.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I’m unaware of any secret cannabis training sessions, but I will go back to the first part of his question that online training courses – we’re having all kinds of inquiries. Right here, there’s actually a business right out of the zone, down on lower Queen and Water Street that’s actually looking forward to doing, possibly, some training in this regard. Holland College is actually looking forward to doing some training in this regard and some of those courses can be online up to eight hours or more. But there’s all kinds of places around the world – if you look at San Francisco; if you look through other states, there’s many training programs that are available to anyone that’s interested in working in one of these retail outlets.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the minister says, the only training options most people were given by the Minister of Finance and this government were links to online courses that would not start, most of them, until after the job postings are closed.

Mr. MacEwen: Clever.

Mr. Trivers: After they're closed. This government has also indicated that they plan to provide in-house cannabis training – that's what the minister just talked about – to successful applicants.

Preference given to candidates with cannabis training

A question to the Minister of Finance: Minister, why would you give preference to candidates with cannabis training when you plan to train them in-house anyhow?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think that goes without saying. I think when you're building a retail model, no matter where your training come, or when your experience is, you want to adapt that individual or that business model towards what you're trying to do on your Island. Whether they come from Vancouver or Ontario, we're trying to adapt them to what we want to do as a business model here on Prince Edward Island. I don't see anything wrong with that. I don't see anything wrong with giving preference to someone that's aggressive enough to go and take a cannabis course. I think that's appropriate for an individual. I think that's awesome that they're that interested in doing something like that.

But let me remind the hon. member that this will be run through the Public Service Commission first, so there's guidelines in that and collective bargaining that we will be utilizing, as well, through these hires.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald, this is your final question.

Mr. Trivers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're hearing that recently there has been cannabis training happening in PEI that only a select few people seem to know about. This training gives applicants preference and bumps them to the front of the line. This government plans to train successful candidates in-house anyhow. The postings

for pot store jobs close today, but the stores won't open for at least another few months.

Question to the Minister of Finance: Minister, why does it appear that this government is manipulating the process to give certain applicants an unfair advantage, once again running an unfair and slanted hiring practice?

Mr. Fox: Yes.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, you know what? We've gone through this through my estimates, through passing the bill and I can remember a conversation with the hon. member, talking about: Why don't we just open this up to everybody and let everybody sell cannabis on Prince Edward Island, but in the next breath, he stood up and he said: I want this noted in the House that I don't agree with this. I know it's not flip-flop season on PEI yet, but I'm telling you, we're all over the map on this cannabis file from the opposition and the hon. member and there's nothing – we're not doing anything. In reference to hiring, we're following the process of the Public Service Commission and collective bargaining and we'll continue to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]