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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 7 JUNE 2018

Reponses 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.

Question to the education minister: On May the 25th, I asked you to engage the chief public health office to investigate the student health issues at Three Oaks.

Chief public health office investigate health issues at TOSH (further)

Minister: In light of this week's revelations about air quality issues at Three Oaks, I again ask: Will you have the chief public health office look into these student health issues?

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

The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As we've been discussing this, there's a lot of information out there that, you know, it's unfortunate that the opposition want to put incorrect information out there –

Mr. MacKay: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – Mr. Speaker –

Mr. MacKay: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – actually, I did just get information back that the June 6th test from Workers Compensation Board and occupational health and safety have reported a positive report on the construction site. The construction is accelerated. It will be 75% done by September.

Contrary to what some people have reported in the news media, it will be complete. Actually, we are on schedule, and, in fact, ahead of schedule and we expect that completion of that project by winter of 2019.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The minister of transportation, unfortunately, can't get her facts straight because she's not on schedule and she's not on budget.

Question again, to the education minister: When I first asked you to do this, more than two dozen students had come forward with health issues. Now, that number is 50 and climbing on a daily basis.

Health symptoms related to project at TOSH (further)

Again, to the minister of education: Do these students, staff and parents not deserve to know if the school construction is making them sick?

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

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

I have addressed this very question in this House before. What I said, at that time, and I'll reiterate here, again, is that going back to April of this year, a committee was struck in relation to officials from the school; from the Public Schools Branch; from the parent group; from the community. Ms. MacDonald in the gallery here today, who has been at those meetings where they met with officials from ALL-TECH who is the environmental consultant that's monitoring air quality in the school, and in the construction site, which are two separate spots.

There's been additional security that has been retained, as a result of that. There's been additional air quality testing retained as a result of that.

It would be my understanding that there was a consultation with, as I think I had indicated, at that point in time, the Chief Public Health Office, as to the kinds of testing that might be done in this circumstance.

As I indicated, I'm not sure of the level of that correspondence and I wouldn't want to say that with any degree of certainty here.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Again, to the education minister: On May 25th, you said, "...all of the results have come back as being positive and meeting Health Canada standards through the month of April."

Testing results of TOSH

To the minister: We now know that wasn't true. Did you know it wasn't true when you said it?

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have been continuously doing air tests in the school in the areas that students may be in. I was very shocked, last night, to see a video that was posted by the Leader of the Opposition by a student, who took that video before any construction in the school even began –

Mr. MacKay: (Indistinct)

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – and it was confirmed on Facebook, by that student, that that video, that that person did, that was posted by the Leader of the Opposition was long before any construction in the school ever began –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – it's a continuous misrepresentation of the –

Mr. MacKay: Fifty sick kids. Shame on you.

Ms. Biggar: – of the facts –

Mr. MacKay: (Indistinct) 50 sick (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – that are happening around this construction –

Mr. J. Brown: You didn't even ask permission to post it.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. MacKay: Shame.

Ms. Biggar: – and the opposition leader might want to check his own –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – Facebook posts –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct) are you still (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – that are on there confirming that that was before construction ever began.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

My question was quite simple to the minister of education. We know now that that wasn't true with regards to your statement back on May 25th. I asked: did you know it wasn't true when you said it?

But unfortunately, the minister wasn't able to get up on his feet and defend his statement –

Mr. Myers: Hiding from (Indistinct)

Leader of the Opposition: – whether it's true or not.

Question again to the education minister –

Ms. Biggar: (Indistinct)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

Question to the education minister: Do you still believe that the air quality tests at Three Oaks have come back okay?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, again, I want to reiterate for everyone that is listening in regard to air quality testing that is going on. We have engaged, actually, since March, an independent environmental assessment firm who does, it's ALL-TECH Environmental. They do – we're doing additional air quality tests that are conducted in locations.

We're reporting back. We have an ad hoc committee that's been put together. If the Leader of the Opposition likes to look at videos so good and the website, he might want to check the school website that was posted, where the principal reported out to the parents and staff and students that they have reviewed the air quality tests and all have agreed that they are in compliance and in agreement with what has been reported back to them.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Again, question to the education minister, if he can find his feet: On May 25th, you also said, "All of that testing has come back fine. What I will say here is we are open to any input as to what might be done."

Mould and water testing at TOSH

To the minister of education: In light of this week's shocking revelations about asbestos contamination at Three Oaks, will you also have mould and water quality testing done, to the minister of education?

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

Ms. Biggar: Mr. Speaker, this is a technical question and I want to make sure that we're clear on this –

Mr. Myers: You're the perfect person for –

Ms. Biggar: – they want to –

Mr. Myers: – a technical question (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – refer to asbestos. They're trying to tie results that happened back in March, 2017 –

Mr. Myers: Tell us because you're a scientist.

Ms. Biggar: – with what is happening –

Mr. MacKay: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – today. I want to –

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – confirm that on March, 2017, there were tests done. There was results came back because there was a breach of an area that did not show up originally. Work was stopped.

Now, since that time there has been no other breach except in March, there was in March, 2018. The staff were working at night to do construction during the evening to reduce noise during the day. There was an event that took place there that was not advertised to the workers that were on site. That was not asbestos. I want to make that clear.

This opposition are trying to create hysteria by parents, to parents and staff. It is unacceptable. It is erroneous on what they are doing on Facebook, putting a video that was on there that was even done before any construction in that school even started.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: So, if they want to get the facts straight, I'll give them the facts straight: The information that the Leader of the Opposition –

Mr. MacKay: You've got no credibility.

Ms. Biggar: – put on there was done and confirmed –

Mr. MacKay: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – by a student –

Mr. MacKay: (Indistinct) sick. No credibility.

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Ms. Biggar: – in that video that that was done before.

Thank you.

Speaker: I know it's getting late in the season. It's getting late in the season and everybody is getting a little testy, I would say. Maybe, you should just calm down a little bit. Don't take this so serious. I know you don't agree with what, maybe, any minister is saying. Anyway, but just calm down.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Some Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. Myers: It wasn't planned.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: We'll start with a fine example from the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly hope I can bring some calmness back into this Legislature.

Speaker: I'm sure you will.

Mr. Myers: The minister responsible for the PNP program and immigration has been very good at sticking to the script that his staff has given him this session where he says that the program is new and improved.

If he got out of his office once in a while and stopped hiding in behind his computer screen here in Charlottetown, he'd definitely know that that program may be new, but it certainly isn't improved.

New and improved PNP program

Question to the minister: Why have you failed to go out and speak to communities about your new and improved PNP program?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

It sounds like my friend across the floor has actually been out and seen the great results that are happening on PEI, so I think that's wonderful. You keep doing that because that's great news.

We've been talking with a lot of communities through our staff and we connect with them. They have meetings in our office, we've been out to see them, so we're happy to continue doing what we're doing, continue bringing newcomers to PEI that are filling labour gaps, that are starting new businesses, that are creating new culture here in our province.

Mr. R. Brown: Great job.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So maybe the minister doesn't go out to visit the communities out there because he doesn't think he needs to, and maybe it's because the Premier won't approve his travel to go out and see them, but either way, communities are coming forward themselves to speak out against this government and the administrative hurdles that their new and improved PNP program is causing.

Two communities have come out so far and said that they're not getting a return of investment at all in the amount of work that they have to put into your PNP program in order to get applicants selected.

Question to the minister: Why do you think it's fair to make these communities do all your heavy lifting with your new program when they aren't seeing the benefits at all?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Communities are overjoyed to have newcomers come to their community to present business ideas to them – how they can grow in the community and what they can do. Now if some of them are overwhelmed because they have great communities and they have lots of people that want to come to it, well, that's okay.

There's lots of communities around PEI that are also interested in having more people come along.

I think it's a great piece of our population action plan and communities do as well. They're glad to have new people come to their community that are buying houses, that are buying cars, that are spending money in their communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Your new lottery system for PNP seems to be the common thread for your failures in your new and improved PNP program. Communities are dedicating staff members to these community endorsements because the immigrants need extra points in hopes that they may be selected. In the month of May, you actually froze the program and aren't selecting anybody.

Upfront re: shut down of PNP program

Question to the minister: Why haven't you been upfront with communities and told them that you, yourself, have shut down your program?

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

Mr. Palmer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The program has not been shut down. I know that's disappointing to the other side because I could tell from the line of questioning they don't want newcomers coming to PEI for some reason. I don't know why they don't want that to be part of our population action. I don't really understand that, but I guess that's not for me to understand. They can figure out what they think is the right thing to do, but we know, on this side, to grow the population, to bring new people to PEI that can fill labour gaps, that can start new businesses, that will help us repopulate PEI – one of the measurements that I think is very important is our population is younger now than it has been in my entire life and I think that's very important.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well I'm sure those 600 youngsters that are out there living in the Sherwood Motel are certainly helping to drag our number down here on Prince Edward Island. Even the minister of workforce in his greetings earlier said that the immigrants come here and stay for a short time. Your own ministers are now understanding what we're trying to say. We're not against immigration. They come here for a short time, however, and that's because you have a flawed system.

This government is putting extra pressure on communities already through their changes to the *Municipalities Act*. They have a litany of requirements now for municipalities to jump through now just because of the changes that they made through the *Municipalities Act*, let alone spending countless hours jumping through hurdles to help grow their population in rural Prince Edward Island which is apparently, according to the Premier, his goal – is to help us grow. But that's not at all what this program is doing. This program is actually doing nothing even close to that.

Refusal of support to rural municipalities

Why are you putting so much pressure on rural municipalities by refusing them any support for this program?

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

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, I just want to make sure that I understand this.

My friend across the way doesn't want us to grow the population in rural PEI and maybe, I think, the point that he's trying to make is there was a couple of communities that had said that they were overwhelmed with newcomers trying to come to their communities and I know Kensington was one of those. So maybe what they're hearing over there is in Kensington, they're not looking for any newcomers.

I met with the mayor and the CAO and they were very happy to grow their community, they're interested in new residential areas, new business areas in their community and they're great stewards of their community and they wanted to continue to grow it and we're happy to help them do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, this minister is starting to become very liberal with his answers. He likes throwing around a bunch of innuendo and things that no one over here has said at all. What we've been saying this whole spring sessions is that we very much support immigration and the program that you're offering is not immigration. You're taking money from people – supposed immigrants – putting it in your own coffers and you don't care if they stay here and you don't care if they settle here and it's not growing the population and you're not helping rural communities.

There's lots of communities who have spoken out against this. Of course Kensington wants immigration, of course Montague wants immigration; they don't want to do all the work for you and that's what you're currently making them do. They do all the work and maybe one in 100 get in the program or zero in May because you shut the program down and you have no program anymore because you shut it down.

Rural communities and new PNP program

Question to the minister: The new program is a complete flop. Can you tell the House how you plan to fix this and actually help rural communities?

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

Mr. Palmer: Mr. Speaker, our program is working. We have communities that are eager to have newcomers come in. They're inviting them; they're hearing presentations; they're talking about business ideas; they're looking at new residential areas.

There's communities in rural PEI that are growing – that are happy to grow and they're thrilled to use this as one of the pieces to allow them to do that. I don't know who it is that they're talking to that say that they don't want to. Some communities are very busy and they're happy with that. Growth is okay. They don't have to be scared of growth, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Thanks, Mr. Speaker

The director of provincial planning told the legislative committee this fall that only seven year-round staff are employed to handle all provincial planning across PEI. Seven qualified staff to review hundreds of applications for development and subdivision each year, answer questions, action information requests, and make sound decisions to protect public health and safety using sound planning principles.

Cut back of staff in provincial planning

Question to the Minister of Communities, Land and Environment: Minister, how does this government expect seven frontline staff to handle such a volume of work absent of reinforcement or resources?

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

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

I thank the member for the question. He's right, the department is extremely busy. Economic growth on Prince Edward Island is phenomenal, especially in rural PEI where the department works the most. We're up over 40% this year and we're up 30% from last year. Rural PEI is on a tear, I must say.

Mr. LaVie: You've been on a tear before, they're not good.

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, we are advertising for more planning officers right away. We are short planning officers. One of the reasons we put through the new planning associations act was to ensure that we have proper planners on Prince Edward

Island with the proper knowledge and skills to do this. We are working hard and we're out there trying to recruit right away. Anyone knows any good planners out there, send me their name.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, people are tearing their hair out trying to get their permits approved. That's right, \$107 million worth of development was permitted in 2016, and the director of provincial planning told the committee: Our (Indistinct) this year – this is back in 2016 – have been about increased complexity in the proposals that people bring forward in addition to a busy construction year overall. The more complex the development, the more errors there are for review. In addition, safety standard officers spend a lot of their time dealing with information requests. They're answering questions from potential land buyers and people trying to do their due diligence. This is what your provincial director said.

The situation of staff shortages and lack of resources is leading to stress leave and huge delays in project development.

Lack of resources for construction season

Minister, you know about the problem. These resourcing challenges have been identified internally for at least over a year, so why are we heading back into another construction season without any solution to support your staff in place?

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

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

I thank the member for the question.

There is a process. We are governed by a union contract and we have to follow those procedures. We have to advertise internally first to see if we have people within the system that can do this. Once we find out, or there's no one in the system that can do it, we go public. That's the process we're in right now; we're gone public.

One of the other things I've asked my staff to do is when applications come in, complex applications come in, meet with the community; have community meetings; meet with their neighbours. I know it's a new thing, but I think developers should be telling their neighbourhoods around them what they're doing and they should be acceptable to public meetings.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, subdivision applications are taking upwards of two years for approvals, and building permits can drag out for two or three months or more.

This government's recent operating budget shows the minister is planning to spend less on provincial planning salaries this year than was spent last year.

Dollars for staff salaries in planning and development

Question to the minister: Minister, why are you spending less on staff salaries this coming year – you're planning to do that, when it appears that this division requires more staff and more salary dollars? At least plan to hire more people.

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

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

I've instructed my department to go get these people as soon as possible. I agree; Prince Edward Island is booming, and there are a lot of projects out there. There are a lot of complicated projects out there.

Mr. LaVie: Booming now, it's not on a tear at all.

Mr. R. Brown: Subdivisions, institutional buildings going out.

Rural PEI is booming. We have to catch up, and we will catch up. The City of Charlottetown has gone out to tender for a new computer system for planning and permitting. We have partnered with the City of Charlottetown to see if we can have one

permitting system for all of Prince Edward Island. I think that would be a great idea –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: – and that people could go in one area, get their permit no matter where on Prince Edward Island.

Cooperation is the game in the game and if we do it right, we do things better, and we make rural PEI better, and all of PEI better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Rustico-Emerald.

Mr. Trivers: Mr. Speaker, the director also told the committee: We've been struggling to fill positions just based on the higher compensation in other jurisdictions.

It could be a matter of money, but the one thing the minister did spend tax dollars on this year was a provincial planning organizational and operational review conducted by Newfoundland planner and consultant, Mary Bishop.

Copy of organizational and operational review

Question to the minister: Minister, will you publicly release a copy of this organizational and operational review?

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

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

And again, I thank the member for his questions because it's an opportunity for us to explain to developers out there what we're trying to do.

We have the Minister of Rural and Regional Development; he is just out there making sure that rural PEI is getting bigger and better all the time. We have the minister of immigration bringing people to rural PEI.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. R. Brown: This is a new phenomenon and we need to catch up. I have ordered for a labour adjustment analysis to be done.

A labour adjustment analysis is when you're in a certain grid and we can't find people in that grid, and people are working above that grid, we have to increase the grid. So, I've asked for labour adjustments to be done there so we can attract people to Prince Edward Island to assist us in growing Prince Edward Island and growing rural PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

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

It's been four weeks since government introduced bill 38, and since then we've been inundated with amendments coming from both my office and from government. It's gotten so bad that we can't even keep track of the various versions of the bill.

For the last few days, government has been claiming that because it adopted a couple of the minor third-party amendments that we brought forward, that the bill now reflects a true and fair collaboration between the two parties. Yet, government has consistently ignored our most important concerns; concerns that this bill infringes on Islanders' fundamental rights of free speech and free association. The idea that government's amendments will create some kind of red/green –

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Dr. Bevan-Baker: – compromise bill is ridiculous.

An Hon. Member: Question?

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Unless, of course, by a red/green bill we're talking about one held together with duct tape.

Sending Bill No. 38 to committee

A question to the Minister of Justice and Public Safety: When will you admit that you have made a total mess of this process and send this bill back to the standing committee on democratic renewal for review and public input?

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

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

When I met with the opposition caucuses, if it's three weeks ago or whatever the date was now, I said to them that we are putting a bill forward. I encouraged them to take their time and to review it, and to come forward with ideas. I also indicated at the time that we were quite prepared to be patient, that we would listen to them, that we would see technically if they could be done and we would come back with proposed solutions or resolutions. That's exactly what we've done.

We have nine substantive amendments –

Mr. LaVie: Is this statement day?

Mr. J. Brown: – a far sight less than the 40-some to the cannabis bill that the Senate has proposed recently, but perfectly in line with what we do here and perfectly in line with what the hon. member was carrying on about when he left here right before Christmas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The public has not been given a voice in this process, and it's clear that government has not properly thought through this bill at all.

Again to the minister of justice: Bill 38 cannot be fixed on this floor, so when will you send it to the committee?

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

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

We're having a great debate here for Prince Edward Islanders, and we're doing so in the Committee of the Whole House. We saw, again, when we were discussing, that our bill does a number of great things for Prince Edward Islanders, including preserving their rights by prohibiting outside money and big money. It allows for a fulsome debate, and what we have established here is that our members are intent on moving forward with

this bill to carry forward Prince Edward Islanders' will into the next mandate.

We've committed to that here, and I seriously am starting to question the resolve of the opposition parties to do just that same thing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I should reassure the member and say that there's no shortage of resolve on this side of the House whatsoever when it comes to getting this bill right.

I cannot see why our justice minister is so determined to pass a deeply, and possibly even unconstitutionally flawed, bill.

Again to the minister of justice: The Premier's ambitions can wait until we clean up this mess. Will you commit to sending this bill back to the standing committee on democratic renewal for public review?

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

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

There's been a lot of fearmongering going on about the constitutionality of this bill.

The third party has had a considerable amount of time now to put forward an opinion that it's not constitutional. We've put forward an opinion saying that it is constitutional, and that was before the amendments that we put forward which only strengthen the process for Prince Edward Islanders; strengthen their ability to educate themselves, to express themselves; strengthen the ability for the media to participate in the process; strengthen the ability for members of the public to associate in the participation in the process.

We think we are putting forward a great process that levels the playing field –

Mr. Trivers: Bad process, bad bill.

Mr. J. Brown: – for Prince Edward Islanders as opposed to the Green Party of Canada and the others that were tilting the scale in one direction or the other to their favour during the last plebiscite.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

Dr. Bevan-Baker: Thank you.

Well, I'm not sure about the fearmongering, but I'll tell you what the fear was and it's clearly demonstrated in the fact that this bill has been amended and then re-amended and then re-amended; is that the original was clearly unconstitutional. That was the fear.

During the 2017 Speech From the Throne, government described its commitment to bringing forward a clear referendum question on democratic renewal. It stated, and I quote: On a topic of such significance, government takes its role very seriously and must do everything within the scope of its responsibility to assure clarity, fairness and the inclusion of all voices – the inclusion of all voices – during this process.

Yet, instead government has brought forward a convoluted bill that presents unnecessary and constitutionally dubious barriers for individuals and groups to participate.

Throne speech promise re: referendum

A question to the Premier: Why did you abandon your throne speech promise to include all voices?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, two points. One, on that convoluted preamble that said we had a convoluted question. This Assembly adopted on second reading, yesterday, a very clear question. I don't think there's anyone in this House that thinks it's not a clear question. On the second part, we did, indeed, set in motion a process for the people to have an opportunity to have their voices heard; to look at what, in fact, the MMP would look like through the work of the Electoral Boundaries Commission. There were

meetings across the province. There was input. There is now a map.

Indeed, from the time that you tabled that map in the latter part of March, we didn't hear a word about it, and still haven't from the third party.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

It's important to note that that throne speech quote I gave was from 2017 after the first plebiscite: the inclusion of all voices; after the first plebiscite.

Premier, there has been enormous controversy over this bill, bill 38. At second reading, I pointed out a number of blatant problems with the bill and recommended that it be sent to the Special Committee on Democratic Renewal.

Since then, the leader of the official opposition and *The Guardian* editorial have joined me in making this call.

Review and consultation re: bill 38

A question again, to the Premier: In light of this controversy, don't you think the bill requires further review and public consultation, as you first promised?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me point out that the work of the Electoral Boundaries Commission that the Leader of the Third Party declined to participate in – invite him to take place, did take place after the plebiscite and after the 2017 throne speech.

We are now making our way through a bill that's not that lengthy. I think it's 27 sections in all. And in fact, that we have made considerable progress on going through on a clause-by-clause reading of that bill with considerable thought being given; with amendments being put forward from all sides.

I have to say that the amendments that are

now in place go much more than halfway than halfway, I would say, than anything that was proposed, eventually, by the third party, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

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

In the throne speech, government also committed to, and I quote, "...do everything within the scope of its responsibility to assure clarity..." and fairness.

The process has been neither clear nor fair, and the public has lost confidence in this bill's ability to establish any definitive referendum result. I would propose that the only way to re-establish public confidence is to immediately send the bill to committee for review and public input.

Islanders excluded from democratic renewal process

To the Premier: Why are you so determined to exclude Islanders from this process?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, let me speak to the point about clarity and fairness. This House; this House, 27 of us, in committee of the whole have, in fact, voted on second reading in favour of the question.

This House has voted in favour of a threshold. A clear question and a threshold: two items that anyone with any sense, who knows anything about this, which, we didn't have as clear as we might have had in the plebiscite, we are now a big part of the way toward having the very process that was promised.

I think the question is: Why is the third party so determined to stall? Is it because they don't have the same commitment that we do to keep out the outside money and the big money?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. J. Brown: Now, we know. Now, we know.

Ms. Biggar: Now, we know what he's scared of. Now, we know what he's scared of.

Mr. J. Brown: It's not him though. It's Elizabeth May.

Speaker: Next question will be from the hon. Member from Tignish-Palmer Road.

An Hon. Member: Take it out on May.

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is to the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Minister, ensuring our youth succeed is a top priority for Islanders, and has been for a number of years, when they succeed, the whole Island does, too.

We know that your department has made historic investments in post-secondary education in the government's most recent balanced budget. We're thankful for that.

Minister, we need to do all that we can do to get the information out. In fact, there's a session in Career Connect in Tignish tonight, one that I advocated for.

Investments in post-secondary education

Minister: Can you give us an outline of these investments and how Island students can access them?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This year's budget saw investments of \$3.3 million into students, in loans and non-repayable assistance for students; the biggest investments in post-secondary in the history of PEI. Our government's budget means that post-secondary students can access more help to tuition fees.

We have programs like the Island Advantage, George Coles, the Island Advantage low-and-middle income, and expanded debt reduction, which helps them pay back. They can be forgiven up to \$3,500 if they stay here or come back to PEI.

Also, many students are automatically given bursaries when they attend university. I suggest that anyone who wants to learn more can check it out at www.princeedwardisland.ca/studentloans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, that's very important to get that information out to Island students. These investments will certainly help our students for their course of studies. As student numbers grow, more investments will be needed.

Minister: Will we see even more post-secondary investments being made in next year's budget?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) ask the Minister of Finance about it.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll answer that, but I might have to consult with the finance minister.

Keeping young Islanders is very important to us and our success here as a province. Anything we can do to keep them here with their creativity and their willingness to work. We certainly want to do that. Their studies here is important to us. Helping them get a higher education at the lowest cost to them is very important.

We will continue to support these programs as students increase, the programs will have to increase and the funding.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Perry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, as you explained, government has made post-secondary education much more financially accessible than ever before.

However, parental income is still a barrier when students are trying to get a student loan, as their parents' income is taken into account even if their parents aren't giving a nickel towards their child's post-secondary education.

In the past, I have asked, a few times, to allow students to receive EI while attending post-secondary, and eventually it happened.

Now, I'm asking, and I've asked a few times, already, so I'm hoping that this will happen, too, minister.

Mr. MacEwen: (Indistinct)

Parental income re: student loan assessments

Mr. Perry: Will your department consider removing the provincial requirements on parental income on student loan assessments?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Ms. Casey: Good question.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do commend the hon. member for his advocacy for students and helping them with their student loans. We know that it can be a challenge. We know that there's a lot of students that are not required to have parental contributions.

I just may say that and explain it. The federal government sets the students loans. We mirror their program. That's not to say they're looking at it. Maybe, they could be more generous in the future. But, anything we can do to help students get a post-secondary education to the least financial burden to them, such as the programs I'd indicated earlier, we'll continue to do as a province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On May the 24th, during Question Period, I asked the Premier to appoint a non-political, retired member of the judiciary to investigate the Mill River deal. He invited me to get on my motorcycle and go up to West Prince where I came from and see how well things are going on up there.

Well, Premier, I did drive up three days prior on the 21st to Northport, and it is prospering.

Prosperity in West Prince

Question to the Premier: Considering this new operation is yet to be ramped up for the 2008 season, to this point, what does this regenerated property in West Prince have anything to do with the existing prosperity?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. J. Brown: (Indistinct) question.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there was a reference to ‘this property’ and I’m not sure, if he’s referring to Northport or Mill River or some other. Maybe, I could ask for a clarification.

Mr. Dumville: The Mill River property, Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Premier.

Speaker: Go ahead, hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, the Mill River resort operated this year all year-round and last year, under that new management, they won Burger Love at a time of year when there wasn’t that much – at other times, other seasons – going on at Mill River.

We’ve had it said in this House – and I believe anyone who’s been by and knows that area would have shared the concern about, really, the longevity and the survival of that property without the investments that we’re seeing. Indeed, it is fully operating and there’ve been major investments made in improvements and I think everyone should be celebrating that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Premier, Islanders could condone the giving away of millions of taxpayers’ assets if it was given to a local community.

Mill River property asset

Premier, instead of enriching your Ontario friend, did you ever consider giving this asset and funding to the three towns: O’Leary, Alberton, and Tignish with First Nation participation, giving them the responsibility to use these resorts as to develop the prosperity of the entire region?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, there was an RFP issued in 2012 – requests for proposals in 2012 – an open and transparent process with stated criteria as to what was to be achieved. The company and the business leader who are now making a go of it, building the quality, investing, building the offerings in the resort and in the quality of tourism all through West Prince, in fact, responded and were the most successful respondent to that RFP.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Myers: (Indistinct)

Mr. Dumville: Mr. Speaker, my understanding of a 2012 RFP was the fact that they property and the golf course were separate, but this latest deal put them together which made it more valuable.

Premier, the guarantees provided to this out-of-province (Indistinct) created a no-risk undertaking. Any Island citizen could have banked this deal.

Premier, I have no idea how giving a \$10 million public asset to a friend in Ontario fits into your reelection plans. Why not leave it with the Rodds or deal it to another Island company in the entertainment and tourism industry?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the next time the hon. member is on his motorcycle in West Prince, he might want to go over by Ebbsfleet and see where Don McDougall has a home and might go by Bloomfield and see where Don McDougall was born, or you might go by the Mill River resort and see where Don McDougall and his family –

Mr. Myers: You guys (Indistinct) –

Premier MacLauchlan: – have been putting in their time and efforts in business leadership for many years. The people and the tourists –

Mr. Myers: – where he lives (Indistinct) entire golf course.

Speaker: Go ahead, Premier.

Premier MacLauchlan: We have here a business leader who brings expertise, who brings a commitment to the region, who brings knowledge of the tourism; and resort that he's leading and his family and his daughter.

We continually hear from across the floor – now from the fourth dimension. We've heard it before regularly from the official opposition a program of economic theory; I'd call it that is nothing but envy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Speaker: Hon. members, Question Period was over three minutes ago, but in all fairness to the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira, because of the length of the questions and some of the answers, we're going to allow you to ask a few questions. Go ahead.

Mr. LaVie: I appreciate that very much, Mr. Speaker. That's nice of you. I'm going to keep it simple and right to the point and I won't have any statements in my questions.

Importance of Island fishery

My question is to the fisheries minister: How important do you think the fishery is to the economy of Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Thanks for that question.

The fishery is actually extremely important to the Province of Prince Edward Island. It is one of our major developers of product. We have a sea, an ocean, water all around us. We have a variety of sectors within the fisheries industry, whether that's our aquaculture industry and the oyster industry, our lobster industry, snow crab, the list goes on.

I know I, as minister, am very honoured to work with that particular industry and make sure that we're growing this industry now for the development of Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This government is just like one of those Jack-in-the-boxes you bought as a kid. You wind it up and wait for a surprise, except there was no surprise.

Price of lobster

Question to the fishery minister: The prices for lobster were as low as \$5 and \$5.50. Do you consider that a good price for lobsters?

Mr. Myers: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: When it comes to lobster prices, as they're set here in Prince Edward Island – as well as they are across Atlantic Canada – PEI represents about 20% of the Canadian lobster industry and we've seen record catches last year.

I'm very pleased with the catches as they're coming in at this point in time and I think it's very important that when we deal with lobster prices and we're taking into account all of the factors and that comes from supply, demand, marketing, cost of production, Canadian dollar. There are a lot of factors that implement that and we look forward to working with the industry to

make sure we're getting the maximum return for our fishers here in Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's not a good surprise either. The fishers have done their share to improve the fishery. They've reduced their traps; they've increased the carapace size. The fishermen are doing their part in the fisheries.

Compensation for improving fishery

Question to the fisheries minister: Shouldn't the fishers be fairly compensated for their efforts to improving their own fishery?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I do agree with the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

The fishermen have done great work with making sure that conservation is at the paramount and they are starting to see the dividends from that. We're seeing catches have continued to increase over the years. I'm well-pleased that we're on par with record-breaking season when it comes to catches and landings here in Prince Edward Island.

I also feel really honoured that this government has worked with the fishing industry and worked with the PEI Fishermen's Association when it comes to our Atlantic Fisheries Fund in making sure we're improving the quality of lobsters they're landing because that also impacts the price of fish. We'll continue to work with the PEIFA and the fishers in this province to make sure we're getting the maximum return for their investment.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The fishers are even putting canopies on their boat to cover the sun from the fish. They're putting bigger tanks on their boat so they'll fit the (Indistinct) to put the lobsters in the (Indistinct)

Minister of fisheries: How is it that the fishers seem to be ones making all the sacrifices?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, I would hope that our lobster industry and seafood industry is actually a partnership. It's a partnership of our processors; it's a partnership of their marketers out there; it's a partnership with the government and that's why we have implemented the Atlantic Fisheries Fund and work with the PEIFA to improve our lobster handling supplies and making sure that those lobsters that are landed on our ports are in the highest of quality so that they can get the maximum return on that.

I'll continue to work with that industry to try to see what we can do to market that. But in general terms, I'm hearing the catches are good and fishers are pleased, but they obviously would like to see more out of the investment, but I'm confident that there's the potential of rebates and all of those things that may be impacted making an end-price for our lobster fishers in the province.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Funny how it goes, Mr. Speaker.

When the lobster prices are good, the government pats themselves on the back. When the prices were up to \$7.50, pat yourself on the back. Here we are, the mighty Island. We're on a tear.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Mr. LaVie: When the lobster prices aren't good, they go quieter than the front desk clerk at the Sherwood Motel.

[Laughter]

Improving of lobster prices on PEI

Question to the fisheries minister: What are you and your government doing to improve the lobster prices for the fishers on Prince Edward Island?

Mr. Myers: Yea. Good question.

Mr. R. Brown: Need a labour market
(Indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture
and Fisheries.

Mr. Henderson: Mr. Speaker, yes, I agree
that the fishers do work hard. Once again,
lobster prices aren't directly influenced by
the provincial government or any other
government in the province.

I think, what we are doing, is making sure
we are doing the marketing. We put the
legislation in place to have our lobster
processors, as well as our lobster council to
make sure that they're investing in
marketing opportunities.

We're going to have to some promotions
around Love our Lobster. Once again, we're
also investing in improving the quality of
lobster landing on our ports. From what I'm
hearing out there, fishers are pleased with
their catches. We certainly will work and –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: – see what we can do –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: – with the prices to make
sure that the prices reflect –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct) prices (Indistinct)

Mr. Henderson: – a positive investment for
those fishers into their industry, Mr.
Speaker.

[End of Question Period]