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TRANSCRIPT OF
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS
AND THE
ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
FOR

Wednesday 29 November 2006

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD 29 NOVEMBER 2006 PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Speaker (Mooney): The hon. Member from Morell-Fortune Bay.

SOURIS CHRISTMAS PARADE WEEK

Ms. Crane: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As all Islanders know, the residents of eastern Prince Edward Island are noted for their ability to host great celebrations. This week marks the 26th annual Souris Christmas Parade Week and I extend an invitation to my honourable colleagues and all Islanders to pay a visit to eastern Prince Edward Island.

The celebrations have been going on all week and have included numerous contests and activities for the young and old alike. The 13th annual Santa pageant was held on November 25th followed by a dance with music by Phase II. Other events include a family skate, adult trivia, bakery bingo, lots of carolling, children's Christmas stories and crafts, and a pre-teen dance just to name a few.

Last evening the tree lighting ceremony was held with Souris Consolidated Carollers getting everyone into the Christmas spirit. And Mr. Speaker, if you want an excellent meal, be sure to attend the Lions Club roast beef dinner, casino night, and auction on Friday evening, December 1st. Tomorrow will see the start of the Hospice Palliative Care Unit's, 'Let Your Light Shine' campaign and, of course, Santa will be at Main Street Mall throughout the week for picture taking with all the little ones.

Saturday will give way to the 10th annual Turkey Trot and I understand Santa's elves

have been keeping an eye on the Premier's running and I feel it would be a walk in the park for him. This year the run is dedicated to the memory of the late Charlie Campbell who ran the Turkey Trot on numerous occasions.

Saturday everyone will see lots of floats, bands, elves, and, of course, Santa Claus as the 26th annual Christmas Parade winds its way through the streets of Souris. This year's parade marshals will be the residents of MacIntyre House.

So if you're ready for a terrific time and need a big boost to put you in the Christmas mood, please make the trip to Souris.

I extend a special thanks to Ginny Deveau and all the committee members for the great work in organizing and promoting the 26th annual Souris Christmas Parade week and, actually, many people in the eastern part of the province have been trying to find out whether our Speaker of the House is the real Santa Claus or not.

Anyway, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

RESTORATION OF ARSENAULT'S POND

Mr. Arsenault: Monsieur, le président.

Recently, I had the privilege of touring the restoration site of Arsenault's Pond in Egmont Bay with my honourable colleague, the

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Minister of Environment, Energy, and Forestry and including a number of community representatives.

This \$140,000 restoration project by our government is the first major project completed under the new capital budget for management of ponds and impoundments. The total five-year budget will amount to \$615,000 and will make great enhancements to such areas throughout Prince Edward Island.

Monsieur le président, l'étang Arsenault est un important point d'intérêt dans notre région et grâce à ces améliorations importantes, les résidents pourront profiter de l'étang et de ses environs pendant de nombreuses années à venir. L'habitat des poissons et de la laune de l'étang a été grandement mis en valeur et le public pourra en profiter afin d'y pratiquer toute une gamme d'activités récréatives et éducationnelles, telles que le canotage et l'observation d'oiseaux.

Je tiens à féliciter notre ministère de l'Environnement, de l'Énergie et des Forêts ainsi que les gens de la région pour leur beau travail. Monsieur le président, je voudrais remercier tout particulièrement David Richard et son père, René Richard, pour leur travail appliqué et bienveillant au fil des ans.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make mention of Mr. David Richard and his father, René Richard, who have worked diligently on this pond enhancement project and I certainly want to give them the proper recognition for all their hard efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Crapaud-Hazel Grove.

HUNTER RIVER HERITAGE MILL PROJECT

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If you enter the village of Hunter River, these days you're seeing development in the central area of the village where the old mill, the 1830 grist mill has been ongoing being renovated by an individual by the name of Dwight Parkman and along with his wife, Deborah Parkman, and their family have been continually working hard over the last four years to develop this into an historical location. And I think it's - today I'd just like to congratulate them for their ongoing commitment. Their hope is over the course of the next few years is to - they have last week hoisted a water wheel into place and their hope is to - they're counting on the wheel and the generator to create environmentally friendly energy. And their hope in the future is to restore the mill complex, have an interpretive center, gift shop, walking trails, and many other opportunities. I think it's been a true commitment on their part. It's been a struggle and a challenge for them to do this.

Certainly, you know, the mill holds great importance for the village as it was the grist mill in the 1800s. Bagnalls Mills took over, the building supply store was there, and then the Parkmans took over a few years ago and they have a building supply store along with the development. And I think it's going to be a wonderful development for the village and I think everyone who has driven through the

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village comments on the beauty of it and on behalf of all members here, I wish the Parkmans well into the future on this project and thanking them for true heritage protection for the central region of PEI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Questions by Members starting with Responses to Questions Taken as Notice.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

POLAR FOODS

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

And like many Islanders, I was surprised and appalled when I read the Premier defending and justifying his actions surrounding Polar Foods on the occasion of his 10th anniversary in power. The Premier said he had no regrets and everything had turned out fine - the loss of \$31 million, the secret loans of \$14 million in the weeks that preceded the election, the loss of jobs and the damage to Island communities.

Has the Premier managed to recover a single dime from this collapse and why didn't he insist on personal guarantees to cover the government's enormous risk?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member misrepresents what I've said consistently over the years. I said it's unfortunate that money was lost. What I've also said is that our fishing industry seemed to have to go through a restructuring. What was

taking place for as long as I can remember in the fishing industry is that the industry, the processing side of it was supported heavily through write-offs or direct grants. And his party when they were in government provided every bit as much money in either write-offs or grants to the fish processing sector as we did in the money that was lost or written off regarding Polar Foods. The one difference is that they never fixed the problem and we did.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

That was expensive to fix but I have a direction question for the Premier and I'm wondering: Has the Premier recovered a single dime from the collapse from many of the shareholders and why didn't he insist on personal guarantees to cover the government's enormous risk in this endeavour?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, that question has been addressed many, many times. It's well documented in Hansard. It was discussed in committee. It's been discussed in other locations. The reality was that the fish processing sector did make an investment towards Polar in terms of assets and so on. They were not prepared to bring personal guarantees into the mix and that's why it didn't happen. No one predicted that this venture would not succeed at the time that Polar came together and, you know, in hindsight it's easy to look back and say this was a failure. It's easy for the Opposition to do that but I point out again that his party when in government had just as much trouble.

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They certainly put just as much money as our government did over the same period of time in terms of write-offs and direct grants and they didn't fix the problem. They had a plan to have, you know, I think two fish processors on PEI. They invested heavily against many of the small independents which drove this problem to where it had to be dealt with and so we tried to find a solution. The solution appeared to work at first but we know the outcome.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Again, more defense for the indefensible but I know this government did not require personal guarantees but with so much money at stake, did the Premier examine the personal worth of the shareholders and look for guarantees before you handed these millions of taxpayers' dollars away? Did this government perform any level of due diligence?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. There was a lot of time spent as the Polar group came together. There was considerable documentation, understanding, time spent on putting together the assets that these people had, both in terms of physical buildings, equipment, in terms of inventory. Those things were all taken into account when the company was structured.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very

much, Mr. Speaker.

And it was the Auditor General who really pointed out the lack of due diligence but I'm wondering: Was there any attempt to get a look at the shareholders' bank statements, lists of stock holdings, or anything else of that nature?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, I don't have all of the details at my fingertips but as I said earlier, the people who owned these companies, many of them were in financial difficulty. Some were doing better than others. Some - and the reason why Polar really came into existence there were a number of these companies that could not get any further credit at the banks. The banks had shut them off. They said: We will not give you operating funds for another year. And so, you know, that represented a big problem at that time. This fish processing industry is one of the most important sectors to Prince Edward Island and, you know, we saw an opportunity to try to restructure the industry and to help these people out. Personal guarantees were not even an option for some of them, given the financial situation at the time but I'm sure those conversations were held and it's interesting. You know, here we go again. The Leader of the Opposition, now he's so opposed to government having invested in Polar and yet at the public meetings that were held across the province when Polar collapsed, he was in every community, you know. Government should keep your plant open and he'd run back to Charlottetown and take a different position. Government, you know, get out of this business, shouldn't be supporting these guys. Back to the community

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- government should keep this fish plant going, did it all across the province, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Millions of dollars, no personal guarantees. When you risk millions of taxpayers' dollars, you'd think a responsible government would look for those guarantees. I'm wondering: Before loaning out millions of taxpayers' dollars, did the Premier even ask the shareholders to divulge the contents of their safety deposit boxes?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Well, I'm not surprised (indistinct) because, you know, he knows that he's been on both sides of this issue; one in the rural communities, another one in Charlottetown and it's another one of these things where he can't decide which side of the fence he's on. Was he for these people or not? We took the position that we were for trying to keep this industry going and when we saw that it wouldn't continue under one scenario, then we changed course. We weren't afraid to do that but the good news is we have not had to reinvest money in the last number of years, first time that I can remember in my history in provincial politics in some 30 years that we have not had to put new money in the fish processing sector in the lobster industry and this is a truly significant turnaround.

The other thing is that we have as much or more employment now in this sector than we had previously and you know what? Some of

the little plants that have gone down have come back up pretty nicely. We have plants like Howards Cove that are going most of the year, more employees than they ever had. We have plants like Gaspereaux which have come back up in our mussel processing industry and so the job base has expanded and it's expanded without government having to prop it up time after time as they did through the Liberal years and through the early years of our government.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I wish the Premier would listen to what the questions are before answering. I'm wondering: Before loaning out millions - I'll just wait here so the Premier can hear the question for a change. I'm wondering: Before loaning out millions of taxpayers' dollars, did the Premier even ask the shareholders to divulge the contents of their safety deposit boxes?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Development and Technology.

Mr. Currie: Mr. Speaker, I think what was actually divulged at the time was their assets for their corporations and that's what government accepted.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

And, you know, here I have a couple of Conservative members behind me saying: Oh

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my God! Asking about safety deposit boxes. I have a Premier that won't even get up and I got a minister that says no, no, they didn't do that.

The Premier handed out \$14 million in secret. You lost \$31 million and you didn't check their safety deposit boxes but as recently as this August, your government was sending letters to senior citizens demanding - and I quote - written documentation of safety deposit boxes' contents. You were willing to pry that deeply into the affairs of senior citizens seeking long-term care but you considered it inappropriate with a group of individuals who were getting millions and millions and millions of taxpayers' dollars. Will the Premier please explain this contradiction?

Ms. Bertram: Good question.

Mr. R. Brown: Seniors got to give all their contents over.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, there is no connection.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, here we have a Premier who loans out millions of dollars, \$14 million in secret, preferred loans of \$7 million, another line in credit of \$7.5 million, cost taxpayers \$35 million in the long run yet doesn't ask for any personal guarantees, doesn't ask to look at safety deposit boxes. But yet when one of our seniors has to go in for long-term care, this Premier is willing to go after any contents that

they might have in a safety deposit box. Does this Premier see any contradiction whatsoever?

Mr. R. Brown: Shame!

SENIORS' ASSETS

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Well, Mr. Speaker, he forgot to finish the story and the story is that after looking at this matter for several years, our government decided that we were in a position to change direction. We will not take the seniors' assets into account in future and so we have no need to know all of their assets. We will simply look at income and those details are being worked out now but it's a major shift and it recognizes that we wanted to improve this program. It's going to mean more tax money directed towards this program. In fact, it will cost us about \$10 million but we feel that it's affordable and that we can do it and so we're moving ahead.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

But until we see any legislation or any changes to regulations, I'm not sure if we can really believe this government. I will table a letter received by a senior a few weeks ago after Question Period today but this individual, like thousands of other Island families, was deeply upset that this Premier's government was so intrusive, so cold, so grasping for their hard-earned dollars.

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These people watched this Premier waste \$31 million in Polar Foods and it was hard for them to understand why the Premier didn't use the same level of scrutiny for those Polar shareholders when this Premier formed Polar foods. Instead, this Premier used the resources of government to examine the finances of individual seniors to an incredible degree. For example, the Premier - you were also making seniors provide bank statements for two years prior. Before handing over millions, did you make the Polar shareholders hand over those kinds of personal bank statements as well, Mr. Premier?

Mr. R. Brown: Good question. Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows that this policy was established by the, probably by the Liberal government of the day but it was operated by them for years and years and years. They never changed the policy. It was fine for them when they were in office. Only when we began to look at this option did they start to get excited about it and, you know, we've recognized an opportunity to change here. I want to tell Islanders this will be a place for January 1st. There's nothing dishonest. The hon. member wants to suggest now our motives are somehow dishonest. We put it in the Throne speech. We will have legislation in this session of the House. It will be in place for January 1st.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I find it odd that the Premier for all those years sat there and took these seniors' assets, asked for personal bank statements, asked for safety deposit boxes but then yet when he wanted to do a deal with Polar Foods, (indistinct) all the money that was loaned out, didn't ask for a single thing. This was the head of our province, the Premier of our province. You would think someone in that position would see the contradiction in what he was doing. Seniors were required to provide government with copies of cheques, receipts, and proof of all major bank withdraws for the preceding two years. Were the shareholders of Polar Foods asked to do the same thing?

Mr. R. Brown: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. R. Brown: No.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member wants to live in the past. He's not looking ahead to what we're doing today. We have made changes. We have - you know, he wants to talk about the loss of Polar Foods. I remind him again. His party went in office, lost every bit and I could find more money if I dug back hard enough on the fish processing business in terms of write-offs year after year after year. Polar was no more money but now the last three years the situation has changed. We have not had to reinvest more money in that sector so it's a good - it's a good news story. Actually, it has more jobs today than it had at that time. And the hon. member should know all about waste. I mean he spent a lot of

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time in the Prime Minister's office up in Ottawa supposedly representing us here in Atlantic Canada. He knows all about how to waste money.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I guess good news for the Premier is taking assets away from seniors, looking at their safety deposit boxes, being intrusive yet when it comes to loaning out millions of dollars to the Polar shareholders, it's all okay. Mr. Speaker, it says an awful lot about this government. This Premier presided over a system that put seniors through the mill and this same Premier also failed to protect Island taxpayers. Again, Mr. Speaker, why the double standard? When government was loaning out millions, why didn't you seek the same level of detail? As the Auditor General wrote: In a case like this, a prudent investor would have exercised a far greater degree of due diligence. So why the failure to exercise this due diligence while you were forcing Island seniors to release vast amounts of personal, technical information?

Mr. R. Brown: Come clean, come on. Come clean.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, I can see why he's upset. Our government changes the policy as issued by the Liberal government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I don't know where he gets this upset from, Mr. Speaker. We're upset that there was a double standard here. On one part, the Premier wanted all of this personal information from seniors who were only looking for long-term care but at the same time, he was loaning out millions upon millions upon millions of dollars without looking for any personal guarantee. I'm wondering. The other day the minister of health said that government does not take registered education savings plan money from Island seniors. Often this is money that seniors have saved to help out their grandchildren or great grandchildren, as the case may be. But according to the regulations, you count RESPs as income. Mr. Speaker, why does the Premier have a minister who is unaware of his own regulations?

Mr. R. Brown: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure of the context in which the hon. member said it nor do I have the exact words he said. The minister will be back in Question Period tomorrow. He would have been here today. Apparently, the flight he was to take from Halifax back to the Island was somehow or other cancelled so he's en route by car to PEI now so he will be here tomorrow and he can answer that question. He knows the context in which it was answered.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

It's amazing how the Premier went on about

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this Throne speech about announcing seniors, protection of seniors' assets. You'd figure the Premier would be more up-to-speed on this file if he's been working on it for such a long time.

But I took some Hansard with me the other day. You were here the other day, last Friday when the minister of health was answering questions and I asked him if RESPs were being taken from seniors and the minister of health said: No, Mr. Speaker. So I'm wondering: Does the Premier agree that RESPs have not been taken from seniors in this province?

Mr. R. Brown: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is referring to the policy that existed all through the Liberal years - they probably started it - the policy that we are changing and so I believe the reference is to what will take place in the future as opposed to what took place in the past.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

No, unfortunately, the Premier should really get up-to-speed on this file. Here we have a minister of health when I asked him the other day about taking RESPs, he said no. The Premier knows absolutely nothing about it but yet they're going out talking about how they're going to be protecting seniors' assets. You figure they'd be a little bit more up-to-speed.

POLAR FOODS(FURTHER)

This Premier has presided over a very intrusive system when it comes to seniors. The Premier was also in Cabinet while millions were being lost at Polar Foods. Didn't the Premier see the double standard? Didn't you point out that it was unfair to simply hand out millions while you were forcing seniors to provide a level of due diligence that you did not require from Polar shareholders?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, I already answered that question.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

VETERANS' ALLOWANCES FOR NURSING CARE

Leader of the Opposition: Hard to believe, Mr. Speaker, that this Premier could preside over a government that would take the assets from seniors and yet still give out loans without doing the due diligence for millions and millions of dollars. Right now, this Premier's government is taking war veterans' allowances from seniors to pay for long-term care. Will that change? Will that continue into the future?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: I missed part of that question. Could you repeat it, Mr. Speaker?

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition, repeat the question.

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

Right now, the Premier's government is taking away war veterans' allowances from seniors to pay for long-term care. Will that continue?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, I have to ask that he bring that question back tomorrow. I - in terms of the seniors' income, I expect that includes any current income they would receive at the present time as part of that consideration but I'll ask the minister to deal with that question tomorrow.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

You figure the Premier would know the answer to some of these questions since it was in the Throne speech unless they had to throw it in at the last moment.

Mr. R. Brown: That's when they did it.

Leader of the Opposition: I'm wondering, Mr. Speaker. A lot of what the province takes away from seniors when they go into long-term care is in regulations. Have those regulations been changed yet, which I know you can do on any Cabinet day?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Well, Mr. Speaker, again the plan is to have everything in place by the First of January. The program will become

effective moving from assets to income on that date and the considerations around legislation, both in terms of any changes to the act or regulation are under consideration.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

RESPs INCLUDED IN SENIORS' ASSETS

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

For the last 10 years, this Premier has led this province and for the last 10 years registered educational savings plans were included as part of seniors' assets. Does the Premier think that was fair for the last 10 years?

Mr. R. Brown: Shame!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, this program or policy was brought into effect by the previous government. The problem and, you know, the way of carrying this out was the practice in the province as they have all the answers now. We are changing the program as we have indicated so why he wants to stick on the pass is beyond me. I guess it's to - I don't know - divert attention from the good stuff that's happening. He can't seem to accept that there's a lot good happening in the province. We are changing this program for the benefit of our senior citizens. We are reducing the amount of contribution to seniors who live in senior citizens' homes have been making from 30% of their income to 25%. These are significant changes which will make seniors' living more affordable and we'll continue to introduce

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new initiatives that we can afford. We're introducing more drugs to our formulary to help with seniors. We've been aggressive in recruitment of doctors and nurses, all designed to assist our seniors in the province.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Unlike this Premier, I don't mind standing up and saying, I don't care which government was in power. What they were doing was wrong. But unfortunately, this Premier thinks that he can stand up and defend what he did for the last 10 years because others have done it before him. If all leaders went on that mentality, we wouldn't get too far in society, now would we. Now this is a regulation of the Government of Prince Edward Island that RESPs are counted as assets for seniors. The Premier can change that at any Cabinet meeting. Will he be changing that at the next Cabinet meeting?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, the plan, as I've outlined to him several times already today, will come into effect for January 1st.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square.

COST OF HUMAN RIGHTS' HEARINGS

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you.

A question to the Premier. Mr. Premier, last week I asked you about how much money we spent on the Human Rights Commission

hearings in 1997-1998. You indicated it was \$1.6 million. I tabled the public accounts for that year and it showed over \$2 million. Now that you've had some time to look at it, have you come back with which figure is right, you or the public accounts?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, again I don't have that information in front of me either. As I recall, the hon. member said there was one human rights' case in 1986. Actually, there were 61. I think the settlement there was about \$600,000 and that was paid out to the people who brought cases forward. In the 1996-1997 period, the payout to individuals, as I recall, was about \$1.6 million. I also explained to him the other day that the difference was probably due to things like legal costs that were paid out.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square.

Mr. R. Brown: Funny how the Premier can always remember in the Liberal days but he can't remember his days. It's pretty funny because he can make up Liberal things. Mr. Premier, it was a simple question. You know, the public accounts showed over \$2 million paid out in these claims, okay. It said settlements, human rights' settlements. Didn't say legal costs or anything like that. You told this House there was \$1.6 million paid out. I've talked to some people and no way did any lawyers get \$400,000 of payments in this instance. So can you go back and check those figures and bring them to the House? Was it over \$2 million in payments or was it something else in that file?

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Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Well, I already did that last week. I informed him that the payout or the offers that were settled were approximately \$1.6 million and so the difference, as I have indicated to him, would be other costs such as legal services.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square.

NEW POLICE ACT

Mr. R. Brown: He's going to stick to that story until the end, Mr. Speaker, which is coming very fast.

Anyway, I've got a question for the Attorney General. Yesterday, you tabled in the House an act called the new *Police Act*, Madam Minister. How long have you been working on this piece of legislation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Attorney General.

Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, it has been in the works from before I became Attorney General but once I saw that the act, the current or the former act - I should say the current act - was as outdated as it was, my staff were instructed to begin work and they've had a number of consultations. They've met with a number of police commissioners across the province and, as I said yesterday, I think it's the 41st draft that we have in front of us. So it's been quite awhile that it's been in the works but it's this government that has brought it forward.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square.

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

Another question to the Attorney General. Attorney General, have you consulted with municipalities. Municipalities are the ones that run the police departments. Have you consulted with the police committees or the mayors of the municipalities that are going to be affected by this piece of legislation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Attorney General.

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that there was consultation certainly at the municipal level but we will be taking the bill onto the floor, it's my understanding, later on this afternoon and the lady who was involved in the consultations will be able to more specifically answer the question for the hon. member.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square.

Mr. R. Brown: That's not a good enough answer, Mr. Speaker.

You're the minister. You're responsible. You should have known who was consulted. Now were the mayors of the four municipalities that are affected by this piece of legislation, were they brought into your office? Did you consult with them, politician to politician, because after all, they have to pay the bills for this act? Have you consulted with the mayors of the four municipalities that are drastically affected by this piece of legislation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Attorney General.

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Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is asking did I call the mayors into my office and did we have a sit down face-to-face meeting about this, my answer would be no but I do have reliable staff. It's my understanding that they met with the police commissioners, with the different organizations that are involved. I don't know whether they met with the mayors. It would be my anticipation that they probably did not but, as I said, for the hon. member to question me about every action that takes place in my department, especially in this regard, I think it's certainly incumbent upon the hon. member to realize that I do have competent staff. I rely on them to do a lot of work for me and they do it conscientiously. My staff lady, Ellie Reddin, will be here this afternoon and she'll be able to more substantially answer that question but I know that there was extensive consultation. Who each person was that was consulted, I can't give that answer right now.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square.

Mr. R. Brown: Madam Minister, did you meet with the police association and representatives of the police union over this piece of legislation?

Leader of the Opposition: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Attorney General.

Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, both the Premier and I met with the police union heads. They came in to see both of us quite awhile ago, yes.

Mr. R. Brown: Okay, go ahead. Go ahead.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Glen Stewart-Bellevue Cove.

FULLERTON MARSH BRIDGE

Dr. McKenna: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I've been getting a number of calls the last few weeks about the status of the Fullerton Marsh bridge. Could the minister update the House on the status of that bridge?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Ms. Shea: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are in the midst of replacing Fullerton's Marsh bridge and the work began on September 5th is my understanding. Given the weather, it's been progressing nicely. We are doing some improvements to the road in the approach to the bridge. We have widened the asphalt and we are raising the bridge by one metre. We're also increasing the channel width and the depth of the waterway there.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Glen Stewart-Bellevue Cove.

Dr. McKenna: Thank you. (Indistinct) supplementals.

When is the project planned to be completed?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Ms. Shea: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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The bridge is closed to traffic right now is my understanding but it will be opened in mid-December when the bulk of the work will be completed. There will be some final finish work to be completed next June but it should be open to traffic by mid-December.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Glen Stewart-Bellevue Cove.

Dr. McKenna: What is the value of this project and who is the contractor for this project?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Ms. Shea: The contractor for this bridge is Highfield Construction. It's a firm that does a lot of work for us and the value of the total project is about \$1.3 million.

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

SHORT-TERM LOAN COMPANIES

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

And my question is for the Attorney General. Mr. Speaker, in recent years, there's been an increasing concern for the Canadian public over the operations and the practices of certain loan companies that charge absolutely exorbitant interest rates for very short-term loans. And my question to the minister is this: What consideration is her department giving right now toward developing controls on the activities of these corporations?

Leader of the Opposition: We already got it

taken care of.

Mr. R. Brown: If you vote for our bill, it will be taken care of.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Attorney General.

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, back in January of 2004, the ministers who are responsible for payday lenders, as they're called, met and voiced a lot of concern about this issue. It's currently governed under *The Criminal Code*, which is a federal piece of legislation. And the ministers formed a working committee to try and address this issue because there was so much concern. It moved fairly slowly when we hit the federal government of the day and in March of 2005, we commented on the fact that it was moving slowly. Again nothing happened that was very swift until the current government got into office and they have a bill before the House. It's in second reading. My understanding is that it moved into a committee and they're currently discussing an act which will hand to the provinces responsibility for governing the payday lenders. So we are monitoring that very closely, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Collins: Yes, supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister.

So am I given to understand then - if you could clarify this for me - that before provinces can take action to control the activities of these corporations, we must first have a bill passed on Parliament Hill that federally something has to happen before the

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provinces can act with due authority.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Attorney General.

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, the responsibility for the interest, or in *The Criminal Code* it's called usury, lies currently with the federal government. There's quite a discrepancy among the provinces as to how we should proceed. Quebec says that they shouldn't be able to charge any more than 35%; *The Criminal Code* says 60%. Ontario is not satisfied that the provinces should have a patchwork quilt and so at the present time, we are monitoring what happens in the federal government with the federal bill because that was to pass before the provinces take responsibility for the interest charges. And once that happens, then we will have the green light to proceed to discuss with the provinces whether we go with one single rate, which is what Ontario is suggesting. Nova Scotia, Manitoba - there are a number of different bills that are in progress but you're right. The federal government has the responsibility at the present time for the usury clause of *The Criminal Code*.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square.

NEW POLICE ACT(FURTHER)

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

I'm amazed that a minister can get up and know the tendering cost of the bridge, who's doing the bridge, when the bridge is going to be done and all those details but the minister, the Attorney General doesn't know if she met with municipal leaders or not over an

important piece of bill. I cannot understand it that such details are known by one minister and another minister doesn't know if meetings were being held.

In the meeting you had with the union, Madam Minister, what commitments did you make to the union, you and your Premier, at that meeting? What commitments did you make to the union at that time?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Attorney General.

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to refresh the hon. member. He obviously wasn't listening when I was answering his question beforehand. I told him that I personally did not meet with the municipal leaders. He didn't hear that I guess. In relation to the meeting that the Premier and I had, we certainly told them that we had heard their concerns and we would consider them when the bill was being enacted. That's all we committed to from my memory and we did consider what they had asked for but I think the public is certainly asking for a new police act and certainly also looking for some kind of surveillance or, if you like, oversight. And I know that some of the people are not pleased with an oversight clause but it certainly has been my understanding that it's something that the hon. member himself was looking for. So I'd be surprised if he's not still of that opinion because otherwise that would suggest some kind of a flip-flop.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square.

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Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I remember what I commit to, unlike this minister who doesn't even know if she met with the mayors of the municipalities, didn't even know her staff met with them but the minister of transportation knows how many bolts are on the bridge. Quite a thing, Mr. Speaker.

Now I want to get it clear here. You and the Premier met with the union and with the police association. You're telling this House at that meeting there were no commitments made to that body to those two bodies that legislation would be given to them before it was tabled in this House. You're telling me today - and remember now, these are police officers you met with. They're pretty good at taking notes. Now are you saying you and the Premier did not commit to tabling this legislation with those two unions, with the PANS Union and with the police association of Prince Edward Island before you tabled it in the House?

Ms. Bertram: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Attorney General.

Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of laying a bill on the table is to allow for people to come and read it and see what's there. I know that there's certainly no secret that this bill has been worked on for a long time. It certainly has been available. I know that my staff have made it available to anyone who is looking for input into it or anyone who wanted to see it. It's not as though it was done behind closed doors as a secret. It's been well known and certainly lots of opportunity has been provided for anyone who is interested in the legislation.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square.

Mr. R. Brown: I'm getting back to that meeting you had in July with the PANS association, with the police association and with the police union, okay. You and the Premier, they gave a presentation to you. You made a commitment. They're telling me you made a commitment, you and the Premier, that you would give them this bill before it was tabled in the House. So are you telling me that those two bodies had a copy of this bill? And also, did the police chief have a copy of the bill before it was presented to this House?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Attorney General.

Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, the final bill as it was presented to the House, I'm not sure if they saw that specific piece of legislation because even at the last minute, there were some minor grammatical changes. There were some minor changes to it. So did they see the final bill? As I said, my assistant, Ellie Reddin, will be here later on this afternoon. She'll be able to make a comment on just who was consulted but as I said, it was not a secret. It's certainly been in the works for a long time, even during the years before I became Attorney General so everybody had, as far as I know, a chance to provide input into it and, certainly, their comments were taken into consideration for the most part.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square.

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

You and the Premier met. I'm just going to

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make it a simple question. You made a commitment. Up to that point in time, PANS and the police association did not have access to the bill. You're saying today they had access to the bill and they had full input into the bill and they knew what each and every draft was going by. You're telling this House today that they had that input. Now I know the police chiefs' association had it but I'm asking about the police association and the police union which made a presentation to you and the Premier. And you and the Premier made a commitment, not your staff, but you and the Premier made a commitment that nothing would come forward until they would be further consulted and before the final draft of the bill would be presented in this Legislature that you would be giving it to them. Did you give - and it's your commitment, not your staff's commitment. It was you and the Premier's commitment to these organizations. So did you follow through on that commitment that you and the Premier made and give them a final draft of the bill before it was presented in this House?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Attorney General.

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, the idea that every person read every section of this bill would be rather difficult to comment on. The bill has 50-some pages, it seems to me, Mr. Speaker. But as I said, there was certainly lots of opportunity for input. The bill is currently on the table. It will be debated on this floor. There'll certainly be opportunity continuing for input as there was previous to this but we have been committed to this bill. Our government has been committed to it. It's my understanding that the hon. member has been looking for this bill for a long time so it

certainly is something that has been asked for. We've been pushed as a government to bring it forward and I'm very pleased and most people are very pleased that the bill is here and it's surprising that the hon. member would try and somehow stain the work that has been presented and seem to object or oppose to what he's been looking for all along.

Speaker: Final question, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square.

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, as I said to the media yesterday, I'm in support of the bill. I'm in support of the bill. I'm in support of the concept but I talked to the police association and policemen since this bill has been tabled. They have a lot of good questions they've been asking about this bill and they haven't even seen it. Like they're saying: Is there a standard training procedure? Are officers going to have training available for them to keep up to the requirements of this bill, Mr. Speaker? That's a good question. I didn't read it yet. Right now, this government, before this government came into operation, police officers on Prince Edward Island could get free training and upgrading at the academy. Now they have to pay \$500 a course and, you know, they have a lot of concerns here. I want to see this act go through but I want to see the best act go through, both for the police officers of this province and both for the public because it's a two-way street here. What I understand, this minister has brought this bill forward, hasn't consulted with the police association on a bill by bill basis. She made commitments to them that she didn't follow up. They're just asking me: How can we trust this minister if she and the Premier can make statements at meetings and not

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follow through? So I'm asking the minister. Has she taken all of their concerns in? How many bills has she given back to the police association and to the police union since her meeting in July? How many bills have they received back and forth?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Attorney General.

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to comment on the fact that the charges that Holland College places on courses related to the police academy, I don't dictate. That's their responsibility and as I said, I believe this is draft no. 41. We can't satisfy everybody in relation to what is put in the bill. I know that there is some concern about the oversight clause but, Mr. Speaker, the general public I think will be very satisfied to know that we have placed into the bill an oversight clause. As I said, not everybody is pleased with that section of it but this is something that our government is, has the courage to put forward, has the intestinal stamina to put forward. We recognize what the public is looking for and the police associations and all the people who were consulted, when you consider 41 drafts, have been pleased for the most part with the bill. And I think that it's something that will go a long time to the credit of this government for bringing that bill forward.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

End of Question Period.