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**JUSTICE: FOIPOP OFFICER - APPOINT**

MR. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, Darce Fardy, a longstanding, highly-respected public servant, retired in January of this year from his position as Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Review Officer. A review officer is an extremely important position for the people of Nova Scotia, to help ensure accountability, transparency and fairness in government. However, the government clearly doesn't see any of these goals as a priority, because they have yet to reappoint a full-time person to this position. Currently the position is being filled by our Ombudsman. Both the review officer and the Ombudsman position - each deserve a dedicated individual due to the caseload and importance of the position. Therefore my question to the Minister of Justice, when do you intend to appoint a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Review Officer and giving the people of Nova Scotia, once again, a full-time review officer?

HON. MURRAY SCOTT: The question from the honourable member opposite - I can tell him, soon.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, we heard the answer soon, I believe, a couple of weeks so, so I'm not quite sure, maybe the Minister of Justice will be able to clarify exactly what "soon" means when he gets back up. Obviously it wasn't very soon, because two weeks later he's still saying soon. We're obviously very concerned about what message the government is sending out about accountability and transparency. In 2002, it was this Tory Government that raised the fees for FOIPOP applications, forcing the public to pay more, which effectively decreased the number of applications by almost 30 per cent. Time and time again we see the government refuse requests, apply excessively high fees, and now are prolonging the reappointment of a FOIPOP review officer.

Nova Scotians clearly demand better from the government. Therefore, my question, again to the Minister of Justice, when are you going to place accountability and transparency at the top of your department's and this government's agenda?

MR. SCOTT: Mr. Speaker, again I thank the member for the question. As he mentioned, certainly the position is being filled very capably these days by the Ombudsman. Since it's closer to the time now, since the last time the member asked, I can tell him it's very, very soon.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, well, I guess we'll all have to wait to see what the definition of very, very soon is going to be in this case. I know under the former Premier, it wasn't very quick. So we'll see what it is under this Minister of Justice. One of the interesting comments that was made by the Minister of Justice, as well, was that he was

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interested in reviewing the current fee structure that has been put in place for FOIPOP applications. He has acknowledged that there has been a decrease in the requests, and a concern that Nova Scotia was given an award as one of the most secretive governments in all of Canada. Based on the fact that the minister has publicly mused about reviewing these fees, I'm wondering if he would take this opportunity now to advise the House as to what the status of that review is?

MR. SCOTT: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. I can tell you that I am reviewing those fees now.