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TRANSCRIPT OF
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS
AND THE
ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
FOR

Tuesday 12 December 2006

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD 12 DECEMBER 2006 PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Speaker: The hon. Member from St. Eleanors-Summerside.

LEADERSHIP AWARD FOR BREAKFAST BUDDIES PROGRAM

Ms. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, Summerside's Intermediate School recently held the 10th anniversary celebration of its Breakfast Buddies program. This is the oldest school's breakfast program in the province.

As part of the celebrations, Summerside cyclist, Ken Trenholm, was honoured with the national 2006 Leadership and Inspiration Award from Breakfast for Learning. This award was presented for his work in organizing, in co-operation with the Summerside Cycling Club, the successful annual Biking for Breakfast Challenge. Mr. Speaker, this one day, tip-to-tip ride across the Island raised \$7,000 for breakfast programs throughout Prince Edward Island this year.

This celebration was hosted by the PEI Healthy Eating Alliance and in addition to Ken, the volunteers, sponsors, students, and staff of Summerside Intermediate School were also honoured.

The Breakfast for Learning program helps communities start and maintain school breakfast programs. Current statistics indicate that 31% of elementary students and 62% of secondary students do not start their day with a nutritious breakfast. Research also shows that higher academics, social skills, and punctuality are linked to good nutrition. Currently, 23 of the 73 Prince Edward Island

schools have breakfast programs with the need doubling in the last two years.

Mr. Speaker, I extend a sincere thank-you to all volunteers, sponsors, students and staff at the Summerside Intermediate School for their great work and special congratulations goes to Ken Trenholm for this well-deserved, national recognition of his efforts on behalf of the children of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from West Point-Bloomfield.

WEST PRINCE CARING CUPBOARD

Ms. Rodgeron: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Back in 1989, Dr. Terry Verma through his medical practice saw an opportunity to do something for the needy people in the West Prince area. He called a few individuals and at the first meeting realized that many people were already sharing with their neighbours. This led to the formation of the West Prince Caring Cupboard and its motto, 'Neighbours Helping Neighbours.'

With Dr. Verma, as its first president, the group became a registered charity and later the Canadian Association of Food Banks.

Today there are three main depots in Alberton, Bloomfield, and Tignish. Through these depots, families in need can access food and other forms of assistance. All of this is mainly supported through the generous

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donations and food drives by such groups as Westisle Composite High students and local churches.

In many cases, individuals who have received assistance in the past are now in a position to help others and are willingly returning to do so.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, you cannot find more generous people than Prince Edward Islanders. I take a moment at this time to express thanks to the many volunteers at the West Prince Caring Cupboard who work so hard to ensure that others may have what they need, especially at this time of year. To my West Prince neighbours, I extend a sincere thanks for their generosity and their caring for others.

May the celebration of the birth of Christ bring much peace, joy, and love to all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

LEVY ON ROOM ACCOMMODATIONS

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I rise to voice my discontent again over this government's decision to bring forward legislation enabling municipalities to impose a 2% room tax.

I am completely dismayed by the Minister of Tourism who was unwilling to answer questions last week relative to this issue. This

legislation is not a good news story for government or municipalities or our tourism sector. The lasting effects of such a damaging decision will inevitably further weaken our competitiveness as a Canadian tourism destination.

We presently have the highest taxes in Canada. Now with this enabling legislation, our visitors could be taxed close to 18% to 20% on their accommodations. This is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, we want tourism to grow in a positive light on PEI. The ministry of tourism is pushing off any responsibility for this move onto municipalities based on destination marketing.

Well, back when the former Minister of Tourism, Jeff Lantz, the issue of room tax surfaced. There was a study done and it was an unequivocal no to this imposition. Today the minister is dismissing the voices of many from the industry who are expressing outrage over such legislation. They feel they have not been consulted and due process has not occurred. Shame, Mr. Speaker.

Let's see the Minister of Tourism up the marketing budget adequately funding destination and provincial marketing and give back the voice to operators in this province so we can get back to growing this industry.

In closing, I urge the government to recognize the lack of consultation and remove this bill from the floor.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**L O N G - T E R M C A R E A C T
A M E N D M E N T S**

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

Hopefully, we'll get some answers now. I've got a question now for the minister of health and social services and we're still waiting for the amendments to the *Long-term Care Subsidization Act*. I'm wondering: Will the minister please inform this House if he will be tabling that legislation today?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, yes, I will.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Wonderful! I hope everybody takes that lesson. That is probably the first time I've ever had a correct answer come from this minister.

Mr. R. Brown: It's our bill.

Leader of the Opposition: It is our bill exactly. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm wondering. In the amendments that will be introduced today, will the minister please inform this House whether or not those amendments will be retroactive for two years?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social

Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, I think it really would be better if I do wait and make the bill and table the bill and then the comments certainly can come afterwards. But to the question that is on the floor now, we have indicated that January 1st will be the implementation date and anything prior to that would not be considered.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

And I think it's important for us to ask questions today because then it will hopefully make this legislation easier to go through so I'm going to continue to ask these questions. The minister just happened to answer that question.

The minister is not willing, I guess, to make these amendments retroactive two years. I'm wondering will he consider making them retroactive for one year.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: No, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Well, let's try another question for the minister now. Since the announcement was made, I believe a few weeks ago when this House opened up or perhaps a month ago, I'm

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wondering, it would be a good idea if the minister could make the legislation or the amendments to the legislation effective the day that your government announced the changes when the Throne speech was delivered. Will the minister please consider that?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader opposite does bring up some interesting questions. As questions that whenever a pending date is categorically arrived at, there are always those on the side of - well, if I do not meet the date, then is something going to be retroactive? I've had this in education. I know that other legislation that has come to the floor of this House that when the date, the posted date is arrived upon, there are always those individuals and groups who have very valid arguments, mostly financial but they could be in other areas as well, that would like to be able to see a retroactive activity to it. But we have given that somewhat a consideration here and at this time, there certainly is not any notice or any indication that we would be so inclined.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

And through that ramble, there were a few points in there that I did agree with. And I believe retroactivity in this case is important because there are a number of seniors out there right now who are waiting for the new law before they make a move into a long-term care facility. This is adding pressure to those

individuals and families who are already at a difficult time in their lives. Why is the minister refusing to make the new rules apply to the date that the Throne speech was read in this House and provide at least some level of comfort to those who are now waiting for places?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Well, Mr. Speaker, the real big difficulty is which date is the important date? Which date is going to favour individuals? And when you start to shop around for a date of retroactivity, it usually doesn't work out so that basically is the reason why that we are sticking at this time with the implementation date of January 1, 2007.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

But I hope the minister understands what my point is here. An announcement made a month ago when the Throne speech was announced, seniors who were waiting to go in the long-term care facilities at that point said: Well, I'd better not go in now. Why don't I wait for this to happen? So there's actually, I believe, some seniors out there right now, families out there right now, holding back on moving into some of these long-term care facilities because they're waiting for this to happen. To ease some of that burden, can you please make this legislation retroactive to when the Throne speech was read and the announcement was first made? It only seems reasonable and fair.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social

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Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the answer is what I had given. There is a short period of time between now and the first of January. And notwithstanding that we did make this announcement three or four weeks ago, as I said, there is a real subjectivity as to what is the correct date. In order to try to be as professional as we possibly can, we will be going with the implementation date.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

SENIORS' ASSETS FOR NURSING CARE(FURTHER)

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

And that's really quite unfortunate because, as we know, there are many seniors in this province who have been waiting for this change in families for a long time. For a decade, seniors have been forced to liquidate their assets under this government to pay for their health care. Mr. Speaker, I recently had the opportunity to meet with a gentleman. He's acting on behalf of his 99 year old uncle who lives in a nursing home. He showed me his uncle's nursing home bill for two years. After his pensions were exhausted, he was left with a bill of \$64,387.50. I actually saw the cheque for the \$64,387.50 that this gentleman had to write for health care for his uncle.

Mr. Speaker, in the 10 years your government has been in power, how many millions have you taken from the pockets of seniors to pay for health care in this province?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social

Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, we have been over this ground before. What the hon. member must realize and I think that most of the residents of Prince Edward Island also is that this is basically their housing, their shelter for the remainder of their lives. If the person has the ability to offer up a portion of that or all of that, then they are required by, just like all the other residents, to be able to pay.

Over the past 10 years, it has probably cost the Government of Prince Edward Island or the better way to look at this is that the taxpayers of Prince Edward Island have contributed approximately \$300 million towards the upkeep of these individuals. Now throughout our lives and throughout their lives, of course, they have been saving and planning for the days when they're going to have to be able to take care of themselves. So that is the reason why we have done this. That is the reason why previous governments have across Canada - and it was no different in this province that the previous government had the very same legislation, had the very same policy and programs as we had. But that has gradually changed across the provinces and we are recognizing that now here on Prince Edward Island as well.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I've got a new question. And many Island seniors thought their homes were exempt when the government comes looking for money to cover the cost of nursing care. Was that, in fact, the case, Mr. Minister?

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Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, there is a list, an assessment process whereby an individual, a husband and/or wife together they go through this assessment and there is a finality that finally has to be reached. But in most instances, I'm not aware of any departure from this, although there may be, is that the home is exempt and also the land on which the house is sitting.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. The minister tried to leave himself some wiggle room there. I'm wondering: Why would there be any exemptions to not protecting a home?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: I'm not aware of any but, again, it is an assessment process. In an assessment process, what you're attempting to do is work on incomes and assets and all of that. It's a fair process. It's a fairly lengthy process and usually the family members are involved as well. So in order to finally to arrive at a determination, some things may change but those are one of things that is constant and that is the protection of your home.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The gentleman I met with shared his uncle's documents with me. His documents show that his savings from the sale of his home virtually

all went to cover his costs of nursing home care. How can this be? Are you saying as long as you keep your home but don't live in it, the government won't take it?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Well, see Mr. Speaker, right there is a departure. I'm not sure of the case, obviously, the hon. member is talking about. Was the home liquidated before? Were those savings in a bank account? Did he in fact have title to the house at that particular time? This is what the assessment process is all about. It's very difficult for me to stand here and to say that in this situation something applies and in another situation something else may but it is one of fairness. If there is the opportunity for an individual to be able to pay all or a portion of their bill in a subsidized nursing home, they are by law up to this time expected to do so. If there are those circumstances where some of that may be taken down or erased, that is also the case. So I point to the assessment process. We think that it is fair and it does apply to all.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

The minister started off so strongly today in answering questions and he's just gotten worse and worse and worse as Question Period has gone on.

Here we are, a gentleman goes into a seniors' home, sells his primary residence and yet you take that money that he garnered from the sale of his primary residence that is supposed to be

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protected. Is that your understanding of how the law works?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, I don't know when this particular house was sold. I don't know where the proceeds went. I don't know whether they were shared among his family. I don't know whether they were in RRSPs. I really don't know the case at all so that's why I say that in most instances when the home is there and it is exempt and one acre of land underneath it.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

This was a primary residence sold after the gentleman was in nursing home care and yet you took those assets. Are you saying that according to the information I'm giving you today that he should have been able to keep that money from the sale of his primary residence?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, once again, if the hon. member opposite indicates that maybe my answers are not as inclusive as he would like, I would suggest now that each time he asks me a question a little bit more information keeps coming out. I don't know why he wouldn't give me all the information at once. I would reply to the best of my ability. If I didn't have all the information, then I could go back and get it. Now Mr.

Speaker, it's not a house. It is cash or some sort of equities built in. So once again I go back to what I said originally is that an individual's home and the property are exempt.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much.

So this was the gentleman's home and his property. He sold it. He should be able to keep it, should he not if it's protected?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Well, Mr. Speaker, their operative word in there is 'was'. I don't know at what point the house was sold. I would have to know the particulars in this case to be able to respond accordingly.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: No, no, no, Mr. Speaker. What I'm hearing now from this minister is, basically, if you go into a seniors' home or nursing home care, you say it's okay for the senior to keep their principal residence on one acre of land but if they're in the home, why would they need their principal residence anyway. That is the cash that they have. Why would you take that cash from those seniors?

Mr. R. Brown: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, I suppose that the

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hon. member is really interested in this individual's case at the departure of any others that he could give me after Question Period, the particulars of it, and I could share that with my staff to find out exactly what it is. Other than that, it's quite simple is that if your assets, if there's other areas of income, then they have to be adjudicated in the assessment process. The exemption goes back to the principal residence and that's what we had.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

WEST PRINCE NEW HOSPITAL BEDS

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

And I will talk to the minister about this after because it's quite unfortunate. Here was a gentleman who was trying to use this money. He's given part of it to charity. He was using it for his will and what you're basically telling me is he would have been better off leaving the house there and selling it after he passed away, which I believe is the wrong way to go about things, but I'll talk to the minister after Question Period about that.

But I've got a new question for the minister now. Now that the government has decided to spend \$23.7 million on a new facility in West Prince to replace the two that are closing, will the minister please tell the House how many beds will be going into the new facility?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was waiting for a question of that type because when he

asked me a few days ago as to what was going to be the dollar amount and how many beds were going to be there, I was evasive because we didn't have the determination. Now of course, as he now knows, a capital program has been announced and we have to be able to put in a realistic sum as to what we expect that the construction of this hospital is going to be. I still, however, in the main refer back to my statements. They were not intended to be misleading. There was not any false information there but we certainly are not going to be asking the Opposition to tell us how much money should go forth, the type of services, how many beds, etc. So based on the best determination that we have at this particular time, we were able to put forth those dollars. That's going to be the approximation as to how much money is going to be spent. We still have to put a committee in place. We still have to go through the master planning, the functional planning, all of those stages. We don't have a final announcement today or any time in the close future as to exactly how many beds and what type of service this is going to be but we will get to that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Even the Speaker looks a little dizzy after that answer.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Speaker: You're on touchy ground, hon. member. How the Speaker looks is immaterial to the members. Thank you, hon. member. Proceed with your question.

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

That answer was really the runaround if I've ever seen one. But I'm wondering: How can the minister not know any details but yet he knows how much he's going to spend?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do need a sum of money with which to start to operate to work within. As far as we can estimate - and this certainly has not been a secret in the past at all - is that it is going to be roughly the size of the hospitals that are there now. It's going to take roughly the same services. There will be the same type of equipment offered so based on that, we try to come to a figure which we could put in a capital program because as we go forth now, we are interested that this is going to become a reality and that's probably the most important message coming from the capital program that the Minister of Finance made public last week. We have consulted with the residents of West Prince. There is going to be an amalgamation of those two hospitals and the West Prince concept is going to happen.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

COST OF LAND FOR NEW HOSPITAL

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

Again, very few details coming out of this minister. I'm wondering, let's see if we can ask some different types of questions on this hospital and see if - some little, easy

questions.

How much of the \$23.7 million is devoted to the purchase of land?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would probably suggest but again I may be off on this but I would tend to think that that would be outside of the \$23.7 or roughly \$24 million. The land has been purchased now. We made that perfectly clear prior to the announcement so that would not be included in that \$24 million.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Again, another vague answer but I will give the minister credit for at least being a little faster on that answer.

I'm wondering: Has the land for the facility already been bought and if so, how much did it cost and from whom was it bought?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: It is my understanding that that deal has gone through, yes.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: How much was it purchased for?

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

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Ms. Shea: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Transportation and Public Works is looking after the land transaction. I'm not 100% sure if all the final documents have been signed off yet so I can't really give the details.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: At least someone's got somewhat of an answer over there. Perhaps the Minister of Health could take some lessons from the Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

WASTE COSTS FOR NEW HOSPITAL

I've got another question now for the Minister of Health. I'm wondering - or perhaps the Minister of Transportation and Public Works will end up helping him out again on this one. I'm wondering: Are the sewerage and wastewater costs included in the \$23.7 million?

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

Ms. Shea: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That would be the estimate for the entire facility.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

COST OF ACCESS TO NEW HOSPITAL

Leader of the Opposition: So it is, Mr. Speaker, I presume. What about the road access facility?

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

Ms. Shea: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That is the estimated budget for the entire facility, roads, buildings, the entire - except for the land.

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

REDUCTION OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I may say you're looking good today.

A question to the Premier. On March 17, 2005, your government officially announced a program designed to reduce the size of the public service. I assume the goal at the time was to reduce spending. Did you succeed, Mr. Premier?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, the goal of government was really to stabilize spending. One of the realities was that spending was increasing faster than revenues and it was important for us to do a couple of things. One was to look at programs across government and their efficiencies and do a better job of that where possible and to overall reduce the size of the public service. I'm not sure we ever felt that this would necessarily save money but it would keep expenditures in check on the salary accounts across government.

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

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

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I have a copy of the press release that announced the Workforce Renewal Program and I quote the Premier and it says: We have no choice but to reduce government expenditures. Did the Premier participate in these reductions of government expenditures?

Leader of the Opposition: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows, Cabinet reviewed its expenditures by department, by agency, asked most to participate fully in this regard. Because some services are more essential than others, particularly in health and education, those areas were perhaps treated a little bit differently but, overall, government was asked to contribute. Cabinet, including myself, made those decisions.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. Mooney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, on this Friday past, the Premier and the Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry announced the launch of the PEI bond issue. In his response to the minister's statement, the hon. Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square implied that this bond is nothing more than just an election ploy so I'd like the minister maybe to clarify (indistinct) points.

Mr. R. Brown: Dead on.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry.

Mr. Ballem: Mr. Speaker -

WIND PROJECT OPEN FOR INVESTMENT

Speaker: All right, hon. member.

Mr. Ballem: I do have to admit when the comments were made the other day in the Legislature, I was quite surprised that something this important would be considered an election ploy. I think the Member from Souris-Elmira and I had the town hall meeting and open house almost two years ago in the area and at that time, we announced that we were going to be endeavouring to have a project. We were going to make it so that Islanders could invest in it and for someone to degrade this kind of an announcement and opportunity I think is kind of surprising.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. Mooney: Well, you know, I have community groups, seniors, parents, people from all walks of life in my district and across this province extremely excited with the possibility of buying bonds in a project that they consider theirs. Once again, the Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square suggested that the energy corporation would have been farther ahead and should have gone to Toronto and could have got a cheaper rate. So I'd like the minister to maybe clarify some of this.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry.

Mr. Ballem: Well, Mr. Speaker, actually, the Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square

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was right. We could have gone to Toronto and put it on to Bay Street and we could have gotten a lower interest rate. But this is a \$20 million bond issue and we could pay 5% because the project can support it. That's a million dollars a year that will stay here on PEI for Islanders. It's not going to Ontario pension fund. It's not going to big business in Ontario. I know that's the way that they would do it but we want Islanders to benefit from this. The second part of his question: Can community groups or local groups invest? Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, it's their project.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Leader of the Opposition: Save Islanders money.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Glen Stewart-Bellevue Cove. All right, hon. member.

DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Dr. McKenna: My question is to the Minister of Social Services and Seniors.

And I read in *The Guardian* - I think it was yesterday - that the advocacy group, the PEI Disability Alert indicated that the government has cut funding to the disability support program. Could the minister indicate to the House if this is so?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, the quick response to that is no. There is no cut from a budget year, from last budget year to this budget year. I do know that of the disability support program that is out there, while it does serve quite a few individuals, over 1,000, there are more Islanders with disabilities that do undergo a process of assessment and evaluation and not everybody is able to get the level of satisfaction as far as remuneration is concerned but there has been no cut from budget year to budget year.

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

Dr. McKenna: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One supplemental question. Could the minister indicate to the House how much money is put into the disability support program each year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Once again, it's in excess of \$8 million; it's \$8.1 million. Again, I indicate that it's a budget year to budget year. Last year there was an over-expenditure and I think that there may be a misunderstanding in this particular case. The over-expenditure was \$651,000 and many in the disability community feel that that should be added to the budget of this year but that is not so. We are going with roughly the same amount that we had budgeted last year. I think we may be short about \$85,000 or \$87,000.

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

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TOUR OF EUROPEAN ENERGY SOURCES

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

I gather the Premier must have needed a break after that press release. How long after the announcement, the program renewal announcement, did the Premier wait before he headed off for his European tour?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants me to be able to give him exact dates for any events, I would be happy to do that but I wouldn't have that information at my fingertips. He seems to be alluding to the visit that the minister of energy and I made to Europe in regard to new projects that we might mount for PEI in the renewable energy sector. I can get those dates for him if he likes.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I know the Premier must have been under a lot of stress after telling people to cut back but the very next day the Premier and his Chief of Staff went to Europe on a 10-day trip. Does the Premier recall how much this European tour cost taxpayers of Prince Edward Island?

Mr. R. Brown: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, this trip was all about looking at renewable energy opportunities and, of course, countries like Germany are

leaders in the world in wind energy. Germany, in fact, has more installed, wind capacity than anywhere else in the world and their leadership in this area is very important. We wanted to know what that was. We also had an opportunity to tour some ethanol plants that are producing, supporting local farmers. We toured bio-diesel plants which are operating; some using conventional crops, others using things like used cooking oil. We toured a number of businesses which are benefitting from renewable energy. We toured a solar school which adapts solar energy to various technologies, some of which we continue to look at here on Prince Edward Island. So that investment and the information gained was very important for the projects that we have been involved in in the last few years.

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

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

According to information filed at the Legislature, the cost of the Premier's trip which began one day after he said - and I quote: We have no choice but to reduce government expenditures. The cost for the Premier's trip was more than \$11,000. After announcing that the public service was being drastically cut, did the Premier think that this was an appropriate expenditure?

Leader of the Opposition: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member obviously wants to try to make some

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sort of political issue out of this. It is important for government to understand what is taking place in other jurisdictions, to have the benefit of the best information that's out there and you can only learn that by going and seeing sometimes what is taking place and make connections with people who are in the business and that's exactly what we did.

We had an opportunity as well on that trip to initiate discussions in regard to immigration. I met with immigration people during the trip which has been useful to us in attracting new people to Prince Edward Island and so we used that particular trip to enhance Prince Edward Island and create more opportunities for Prince Edward Island and to strengthen our economy.

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

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

Right here in Canada in Pincher Creek, Alberta, has a big wind farm out there and there's a lot of ethanol plants right here in Canada that we could have toured. Who else went with the Premier on his European trip? Will he bring back the list of whoever went with him?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right in that there are other wind energy projects in the country and Pincher Creek is one of those. I did in fact visit a wind farm in southern Alberta at Fort MacLeod and that was useful but again their situation is somewhat different than ours and it's

important to understand that too. And so this trip was important, as I've indicated, for various reasons. The Chief of Staff did accompany me on that tour, the minister of energy was there, and he could indicate, I'm sure, others of his department who were in attendance.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, yes. The Premier's Chief of Staff went and documents filed with this Legislature too. His trip cost \$12,000 so now we got the Premier at 11, he at 12. We're up to \$23,000 for this junket. Does the Premier really think that this kind of trip was necessary?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Yes, I do and I would be aware that the hon. member has traveled to an odd parliamentary meeting and if he has questions, perhaps we would want to ask him to report on those.

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

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

The budget was released shortly after the Premier and his Chief of Staff got back from their \$23,000 spree in Europe. This government cut the senior home repair program, Mr. Speaker. Your press release the day before you left for Europe, you talk about redirecting resources to areas where they are needed the most. Was your European trip an area that needed these resources instead of the senior home repair program?

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Leader of the Opposition: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member doesn't want to look at the things that we've been able to make happen on Prince Edward Island. He doesn't want to talk about the fact that our economy has grown that our GDP is at the highest numbers we've ever seen on PEI. We have more people working on PEI today. We've gone from in about 10 years gone from 59,000 to 71,000 people roughly. Next to Alberta, we have the strongest economy at least in terms of growth per capita of any province in the country and these things don't happen if you don't invest, if you don't know what's going on, if you don't look for new opportunities. And so we have done that and I thought this trip was important because we could find out what some of the most advanced thinking in the world was in terms of things like use of renewable opportunities. We looked at a lot of things that we're still exploring. For example, we looked at compost facilities in Europe and what they're doing there. My point is - he doesn't want to hear this - but we looked at compost facilities because guess what? There are ways to take compost and use it in more advantageous ways than we have done so far in Prince Edward Island. Some areas produce methane gas, and Germany does this, from their composting operations. We've looked at whether that technology could be applied here on Prince Edward Island so that in itself, if we did nothing else, might be more than worth the cost of the trip at the end of the day. But I suggest to him that our information gathered in terms of immigration, in terms of bio fuels, ethanol, wind energy, solar developments were all part of this trip.

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

Mr. R. Brown: So the Premier is saying maybe the plant at Brookfield is the wrong plant for Prince Edward Island. He's changing his mind on it now.

A new question for the minister of energy. Two days after the Premier and his Chief of Staff headed to Europe, he went to Europe. How much did this trip cost, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry.

Mr. Ballem: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the exact number, the cost for my deputy and I for that trip but I'll bring that back and table it tomorrow.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I just happen to have it right here and it was \$8345 the minister spent on this trip. Did the minister take anyone else besides his deputy?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry.

Mr. Ballem: No, Mr. Speaker. He was able to look after me by himself.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Okay, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And according to the deputy's report, he spent

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\$8100 on his trip. So here we got the Premier and his Chief of Staff running off to Europe. We got the minister and his old buddy, the deputy, running off to Europe two days later at \$16,500. Do you think this was appropriate when you were in cutback mode in government?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry.

Mr. Ballem: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Opposition thinks that money grows on trees and you just go out back and pick it off but what you have to do is try to promote business. And the minister of development and the Premier have done an exceptionally good job of doing that as statistics will prove over the last 10 years but you can't rest on your laurels and you're always looking for new opportunities. And unfortunately, as much as the Opposition would like to paint it, you need to have your top person at these meetings to meet with these businesses. So when the Premier sits down with a business, whether it's in Germany or Austria or Holland, that really gets their attention and people say this province is serious. This province wants our business. They want us to come and locate there and these things are ongoing. Do I think it's worthwhile? Absolutely worth every penny of it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, this government needs a very big tree for the money they're taking off it. There's not a tree big enough in Canada for the amount of money they're

taking off it. But the sad part is it's Islanders' money, Islanders' money you're spending on these junkets.

A question for the Premier. In March, I believe it was, even March break at least four of you decided to head to Europe and spend nearly \$40,000 on this tour. To make it worse, it was a day after Islanders were told, and I quote: We have no choice but to reduce government expenditures. This is what the Premier said. They all head off to Europe and we are seeking fiscal responsibility. Does the Premier explain this \$40,000 trip to hundreds who were forced to leave government and to the seniors who had no home repair program after you came back from Europe?

Leader of the Opposition: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that we've been able to reinvest the money that we've saved with these initiatives in new programs. We have a major expansion, for example, underway at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital which will cost \$47 million. We'll be spending about \$24 million on the new hospital in West Prince. We've been able to do things over the years in terms of building new facilities, whether they've been schools or other required facilities, new school buses for students, that kind of thing. We've been able to invest in job creation and, you know, we have a bioscience industry in the province today. We have an IT communications industry in the province today. We have renewable energy industry in the province today, all because we weren't satisfied with the status quo. We weren't just going to continue to do things the way they've

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always been done in the past. We have to look outside of Prince Edward Island and see what some of the world's best thinking is in some of these areas, where we can go. And you know, the hon. member might suggest that we'll make progress if we just sit and do some navel-gazing. Well, I'm sorry. That doesn't work for us. We are going to be aggressive. Do you think we'd have CGI in the province? Do you think we'd have AIM Trimark in the province if we weren't out promoting these new companies? No, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, this is a \$40,000 junket to Europe after this government introduced a program workforce renewal program, after they were cutting seniors' program, after they were cutting the Best Start program. This is a \$40,000 trip. They head off to Europe. They tell Islanders the day before, no, no, you got to cut back. Senior, you can't get a home repair. Best Start people, your children can't get educated or early learning training but we're off to Europe. Can't you see the irony in this, Mr. Premier?

Speaker: Question in there, hon. member.

Mr. R. Brown: Yeah. Forty thousand dollars this Premier spent on a trip. He and his buddies went to Europe for a week and can't he see what Islanders are saying here - cutting Best Start, cutting home repair program?

Speaker: All right, hon. member thank you.

The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. member should watch his blood pressure and the things he's suggesting are nonsense.

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

REDUCTION TO TUNA QUOTA

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, my blood goes up when we waste money like that and cut programs. My blood pressure goes up when there's a waste of money like that going on. You're off in Europe flying around having a great time and Islanders are asked to cut back.

Now a question to the minister of fisheries. I was shocked last week that Canada is losing a large portion of its tuna quota. Can the minister explain how this happened?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture.

Mr. Bagnall: Mr. Speaker, there's been a lot of science done across the world on tuna habitat and what's happening is that the rest of the country, tuna growth has diminished. So what's taking place is they're doing a re-evaluation of quota all over the world and Canada has been cut back and PEI will be cut back related to that.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Okay, Mr. Speaker, a few months ago there was a UN resolution in the United Nations where they wanted to ban bottom trawling. The United States was on board with this one too but Loyola Hearn, the federal minister, has worked out a deal with

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the United Nations here that this kind of bottom trawling would be allowed. Did the federal minister sell out Island tuna fishermen so he could keep his bottom trawling off Newfoundland?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture.

Mr. Bagnall: Mr. Speaker, that's probably the most ridiculous statement I've ever heard from a member coming related to a fisheries question in government. The answer to that is no, definitely no.

Speaker: End of Question Period.