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**TRANSCRIPT OF
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS
AND THE
ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
FOR**

Wednesday 13 December 2006

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD 13 DECEMBER 2006 PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

NEW BOOK - CHINESE ISLANDERS

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

Dr. McKenna: Mr. Speaker, Prince Edward Island's Chinese community has roots that go back 150 years and thanks to Hung-Min Chiang, retired psychology professor from UPEI, the history of these brave and proud people will be preserved in his book, *Chinese Islanders: Making a Home in the New World*.

The story of these first Chinese settlers to come to Prince Edward Island is a harsh one. They were subjected to the infamous head tax as well as the more severe *Chinese Immigration Act*. Through it all, they persevered and their descendants have adapted to and succeeded in mainstream Island society. They are true Islanders today.

Hung-Min Chiang's motivation to write this history was his belief that no one else would do it. It was a daunting task as there is very little documentation of any kind and for obvious reasons, these Chinese settlers prefer to remain anonymous leading quiet inconspicuous lives.

Mr. Speaker, what Min has accomplished has been called a series of minor miracles in order to publish this book, *Chinese Islanders: Making a Home in the New World*. He tells the story of the realities of one of Prince Edward Island's smallest immigrant communities with great compassion. Actually, the first Chinese immigrant came in 1850 and her name was Louisa Maria Hooper and her husband was a Member of the Legislative

Assembly here for the Liberal party actually, from Morell area.

Min, himself, arrived in Canada with his family in 1967. His wife, Mae Chi, ran an extremely successful kindergarten for 25 years, apparently quite successful. Along the way, she opened the minds of hundreds of island children to China's history and customs.

I congratulate Hung-Min Chiang on his great accomplishment and thank him sincerely for adding to the wonderful tapestry that makes Prince Edward Island such a great place to live and work. I certainly would recommend many Islanders to probably go out and purchase the book and it will make a great Christmas gift for this year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

MCKENNAS TAKE EYEGLASSES TO AFRICA

Mr. McCardle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Can you imagine not having any sight for 10 years and then all of a sudden, you can see? In a small village in Kenya for an adult in need, it is a miracle to be able to count his sheep or for a small child to be able to read a blackboard, it must be amazing.

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For potato farmers Karen and Greg McKenna of Newton, their recent trip to Africa was just that - amazing!

They are familiar with eyes but these were not of the spud variety. Karen and Greg volunteered for the vision clinic conducted by the Mikinduri Children of Hope Foundation.

Before leaving for Africa, these volunteers received training to assess a person's approximate vision needs and sorted and packed 1700 pairs of glasses. After arriving in Africa, they and other Islanders assisted in distributing eyeglasses from the Canadian Lions Eyeglass Recycling Centre. To date, this recycling centre has distributed more than two million eyeglasses to those in need throughout the world.

I extend congratulations to Karen and Greg and all the volunteers who worked so hard to make this project such a success. It is Islanders like who make us proud to call Prince Edward Island home.

To all Islanders, especially the residents of District 19, Borden-Kinkora, and on behalf of my wife, Rose, and I and our family, I'd like to take an opportunity to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

CHRISTMAS GIFTS FOR CHILDREN

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

I want to take a moment to thank all the

workers and volunteers who are out there during this month of December putting gift packages together, collecting turkeys, and putting packages together for people in need. I really want to commend them for their work, especially this time of year because they do great work. Although I'm saddened that we have to do it in such a rich country but anyway it's necessary, I guess.

I also want to take some time for the people who are on social assistance in the Charlottetown area to call the Church of the Nazarene if they need gifts for their children. I was saddened to learn that the Department of Health and Social Services did not put the notices in this year in order for these people, for the people on social assistance to know that this service is available. So I encourage anybody in the Charlottetown area that needs gifts for their children to call the department and their social worker in order to set up an appointment with the Church of the Nazarene and I pray that next year the department has the ability to put it in.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. R. Brown: Not many answers.

FUNDING TO IMPROVE PATIENT WAIT TIMES

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

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As everyone knows, we had an interesting discussion yesterday so I thought I'd try and continue on with the Minister of Health again today.

On December 22, 2005, the minister's department released an extensive document on reducing wait times. That was almost one year ago. The federal government pledged \$41 billion in new health care funding to address wait times. I'm wondering: What has happened to wait times on PEI and what have you done with all the money?

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

Mr. Gillan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And it is a timely question because since last year, we have definitely been attempting to improve wait times. We have been able to shore up some staff. We have been able to change some operating procedures. We have been able to train some staff in various sections of the hospital so all of this does keep us in the forefront of where our benchmarks are and I'm sure that the hon. Leader opposite realizes that these benchmarks are targets of performance. They are Canada wide and we are attempting in five different areas to be able to measure up to wait times for patient surgeries and care in comparison to the rest of Canada.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

WAIT TIMES ALLIANCE

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

And in November of 2006, a national organization, of which I'm sure the minister I hope is well aware of, called the Wait Times Alliance issued a report card on the performance of governments in reducing wait times. This group consisted of seven national medical associations that cover the various surgical areas included in the wait times' assessments. You make no mention of that report, Mr. Minister, prepared by that group. I'm wondering: Could you please tell this House and Islanders how PEI's wait times were rated by this independent body?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, I am vaguely aware. I do not have that document at hand to be able to quote from it nor do I have it obviously committed to memory but I think from my recollection that it gives us a ranking or standard in about the middle to the bottom third in certain categories.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

PATIENT WAIT TIMES - PUBLIC INFORMATION

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

It's little wonder why the minister has really up until this point made no mention of the report. PEI was given an F, a failing grade, in two of the five areas. These areas were access to diagnostic imaging and sight restoration surgery. We're the only province in the country to be given two Fs. Why, Mr. Minister, would you not bring this important information to the House to make Islanders

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more informed?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, like always, the Opposition would take it upon themselves to paint as dismal a picture as is possible. And even though there are areas that are not up to the standards that we would want. They would not give the credibility over to the areas where we tend to do better and they would like to indicate that our health care system is not working here on Prince Edward Island, which is not the case. Yes, this is a new way of reporting and we have a distance to go for sure but I was at a banquet last night at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and it was the auxiliary, the volunteers, who help out in so many different ways as do the foundation members who were in attendance as well. And the tempo, the tenor is very, very high. The satisfaction level is good. People are working hard to make health care accessible and timely for everyone here in Prince Edward Island. There are some certain areas that we have to improve on but, generally, the health care on PEI is quite good.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

And that's nothing new. We all know that our health care professionals work very hard in this province and, in fact, what we're trying to do on this side of the House is try and help the minister so that he can get more support from his Premier and from his colleagues from around the Cabinet table and the Caucus table to help make sure that this government is

more aware of what needs to be improved in our health care system.

And it's interesting that the Wait Times Alliance was established in part because it thought Canadians needed access to unbiased information on medically accepted wait times yet this minister's refusal to make benchmark assessments public demonstrates just how important the work of the Wait Times Alliance is in getting objective information to Islanders.

Mr. Minister, why did you not make this assessment public?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, just the opposite. It is the intention of this government and, in fact, it is a requirement right across the country on a yearly basis to make our information on benchmarks public. We did that last year for the first time. We will be doing it again this year. It is not an attempt at all to avoid making the progress or the slippage. If that is the case, that is what we will owe up to as well but we are preparing a report now that will be released fairly soon and in conjunction with other provinces, then we will see where we line up.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Another question though for the minister. The Wait Times' Alliance's interim report also pointed out that some provinces chose not to make information on wait times available on

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line. In fact, according to the report, PEI is one of only two provinces that does not make wait time information available on the web. Why is this information not made available, Mr. Minister?

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

Mr. Gillan: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a difficulty that we do have in the Department of Health and the Social Services and Seniors as well. Due to our restructuring and I think the members here in the Legislature are certainly very knowledgeable in this. There are certain areas where we do not have the person power to be able to respond to every report that comes out. Even though it's very easy for the Leader of the Opposition or any of the Opposition members to say, well, you just make sure that you reply to these reports. Almost on a daily basis reports come in through the mail and over the Internet into social services and health, and I'm sure other portfolios as well, of a report that was done by a group and what is your response and how do you report to. We cannot possibly report to everything. I have indicated that we did agree to an annual report which compares us and our province to the other jurisdictions, health jurisdictions across the country. We will be doing that. We do also, have filled out surveys for many of these reports to the best of our ability but we just possibly can't meet everybody's need.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

And we all know that this government's

political spin machine is probably the largest we've ever seen in the history of this province. They can put out press releases practically on the opening of a garage door but it's really quite unfortunate that when it comes to something as important as wait times in this province, information that should be getting out to Islanders, this minister is unable to get that information out and I really wish he would improve.

PER CAPITA SPENDING IN PEI ON HEALTH CARE

I also want to ask the minister about information that the Canadian Institute of Health Information released, it's assessment on provincial spending on health care. I'm wondering could the minister tell this House how PEI fared in terms of per capita spending on health care for 2006.

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, if my memory serves me correctly - and I did see that information not that long ago - I believe our per capita is slightly over 4,000. I think it's \$4200 per patient and the national average is \$4500.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

PATIENT-DOCTOR RATIO

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

Put that in perspective. We are the second lowest in the country in terms of per capita spending, which is truly a shame. Here is a

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government that thinks nothing of losing \$250,000 on a celebrity golf match with the Premier playing golf with some of his buddies and yet health care funding lags behind the rest of the country.

But I have a new question now for the Minister of Health. The Canadian Institute of Health Information also released recent data on physician supply and demand. Now the interesting thing about this organization is that they measure and count full-time doctors. If a province recruits 20 locums for a two-month period, they don't count those as new full-time doctors coming to a province. In short, they don't buy the government's claim of all these new doctors. Is the minister aware of which province ranks last in terms of the number of physicians for 100,000 population for 2005?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, once again, the hon. Leader opposite is trying to pick and choose as disastrous a statistic as he possibly can. He is completely distorting the overall health picture of Prince Edward Island. As I've indicated just recently as last evening, I had an opportunity to talk to the consumers, to the residents of Prince Edward Island and we know to a person that anybody who gets sick, the health care system is able to attend to their needs and that they're very, very satisfied. It is so easy for him to pick and choose. A study came across my desk recently on the nurses and the physicians' satisfaction level and I could quote extensively from that.

But also I point out to the capital budget and the recent announcements of what about the

dollars that are going into the Queen Elizabeth Hospital capital requirements? What about the renovations that are going to happen prior to phase one? What about the dollars that are going into the West Prince Hospital? What about the dollars that are going into the renovations for the manors that we are making? Yesterday here in the House, we talked about the Infoway partnership with Prince Edward Island. We are going to be the leading province in technology. All of these dollars are being well spent. They're going to support, they're going to broaden, they're going to further the health care envelope that is available to residents of the province.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I asked the minister: Is he aware of which province ranked last in terms of number of physicians per 100,000 population for the year 2005?

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

Mr. R. Brown: He's got his book open.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, I know that Prince Edward Island has done tremendously in the last 10 years of recruiting and retaining physicians to this province. I'm sure that the Leader opposite would love just to drop now a number on us that we do not have sufficient physicians for everybody in this province. I remind him that we now have a total of 189 physicians, more than any other time. We have been able to add incrementally each year since the year 2000 when we had the

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Physician Recruitment and Retention Strategy. It has rewarded us here on Prince Edward Island admirably and, in fact, as far as family physicians are concerned, we are short slightly over four, 4.2 family physicians for the province. And I also want to comment my staff and everybody, the doctors, the nurses, all the health care workers who help out in the recruitment. It's not just the responsibility of the Department of Health.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

And see, here the minister can get up and put out any numbers he wants because they are his government's numbers and we all know that this government is famous for political spin. Unfortunately for the minister, I'm quoting from independent organizations. I'm quoting from CHIH. I'm reporting on the real numbers that we now have. I'm sure the minister can guess the answer to what my question was since he's not willing to answer. Among the provinces, CHIH found that we have the fewest number of doctors per 100,000 residents and I want to ask the minister this question: How many Islanders does he believe do not have a family doctor in this province? He's been quoted before as saying only 3% of Islanders do not have a family physician. Does he still stand by that number?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, it is a fleeting number and as the physicians and I've just indicated that we do have a vacancy of

slightly over four physicians in family practice for the province. As best we are able to determine, it's somewhere between 3500 and 4,000 who are on the registry who do not have a family doctor and that is very inexact. It's not a number that we can say with any degree of certainty but it is a number which prompts us to do even better than what we have been. There are also those who do not put their name on the registry and the number could be even double that, again which is the urgency that we in health care need to keep on recruiting and retaining the physicians for the province.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

And I'm glad to see that the minister is starting to realize that the numbers that he spews out are in fact correct and that there are more Islanders without a family doctor than that which is on our registry in this province. For the minister to say we're short four doctors, well, you can just look in Alberton and O'Leary alone and Souris and some of the other hospitals. We're short way more than that many doctors and that's what the complement that I still believe is too low in the Province of Prince Edward Island. I'm wondering: Does the minister believe that the complement for family physicians is too low?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, I don't think so. I think that we're just about the number. I know that there is, of course, a program and a committee of doctors and experts who keep us

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advised as to if they think that in certain areas, be it one of the specialties or in-family medicine that there is a need but I think that we have the number just about right and I have mentioned many times that the recruitment strategy attempts to get to the numbers of the complement we are short presently but we are very close. And I think if we are able to keep the strategy going as it is that the number itself, the complement is quite good.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

NEW RESIDENT DOCTORS IN 2007

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

I'm wondering: Can the minister please inform the House how many residents will be starting work here on July 1st of next year?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, I don't have that number at the moment but I do have names of individuals that we have been talking with. We are making some advances on a fairly regular basis. We have had very successful opportunities to meet with the residents lately and as you probably are aware, we do have a fairly active recruiting team which keeps in contact with the medical students on a very, very regular basis. We have just finished a round of visiting residents in the various locations where they're training, primarily of course in Halifax at Dalhousie. They have been in Ottawa and they have been in Toronto and the attendance at those has been very good by the medical students. They're

showing a lot of interest in coming back here. We do give them stipends and honorariums for medical textbooks. They do have some diagnostic equipment as well and I think that we have very good contact with them.

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

ASSESSMENT OF PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT IN PARKS

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just would like to begin today with maybe some housecleaning items. Yesterday the Minister of Tourism during capital budget, he was discussing that there was an assessment done on the playground equipment for the provincial parks. I'm wondering if the minister can bring that information back today because it was asked for yesterday. Mr. Minister, can you table that today?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism.

Mr. P. Brown: No, Mr. Speaker, I didn't say I would yesterday but we do an annual inspection of all the parks and I'm not sure if there's a report that exists from that but we do have qualified inspectors that go around to each park before the opening each spring.

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

Ms. Bertram: Mr. Speaker, the playground equipment is a safety issue and we were looking for a tabled report here today to assess the playground equipment in the provincial parks and we need to see significant infrastructure dollars put towards that. So it's

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disappointing the minister doesn't have that information here today.

CUTBACKS TO STATUS OF WOMEN

My next question is for the minister responsible for the Status of Women. Can you table in the Legislature the correspondence that you wrote that you sent to the federal minister, Bev Oda, in regards to the cutbacks to the women's programs?

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

Ms. Shea: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will table it either today or tomorrow.

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

NORTHUMBERLAND DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS PLAN

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

My third question is to the minister of development. Yesterday again during the capital budget, we were to discuss the Northumberland Development Corporation. I'm wondering if the minister can table the business plan that the Northumberland Development Corporation has put on the table to your department, Mr. Minister.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Development and Technology.

Mr. Currie: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe I was asked for a business plan but our

government is very pleased that we're going to build an artifactory in the village of Murray River and, certainly, I did bring the conceptual drawings and I will table them later on.

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

Ms. Bertram: Another question to the same minister. Drawings is one thing but will you table the business plan put forward to your department, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Development and Technology.

Mr. Currie: As I already indicated, if there - I don't believe that I was asked for a business plan but I'll go back and see what documentation we have but, certainly, it's been a highlight of our government to support communities all across PEI and we're very proud that the artifactory is going to Murray River.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

TRANSITION HOUSE BOARD

Ms. Bertram: Mr. Speaker, I bring this issue forward because people want clarity out there. They want to see fairness and we want to see a business proposal from this organization.

I'd like to go back to a new issue and this again is going to the minister for the Council on the Status of Women responsible. It's been brought to my attention that Transition House,

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the board is having some challenges with the full functioning of the board and I'm wondering if you could approach the board and work with them to, I guess, support them. They're having some challenges at the moment. Madam Minister, could you look into this?

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

Ms. Shea: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Transition House Association is having some challenges I guess with the operation of the board and the governance of the organization and our director of the administrative secretariat, Fay Martin, is currently working with the board to get it on level footing and so it can operate better and produce better results.

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

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not underestimating Mrs. Martin's capabilities but I'm just asking the minister responsible: Will you work along with Miss Martin and the Transition House board and see that due process is given to them for the full functions of their board.

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

Ms. Shea: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Miss Martin does report to me as minister responsible and she's a very capable lady and she does report to me on a regular basis on the

Transition House Association. The province through the Department of Health has a significant investment in Transition House Association to provide services to women across the province and we will ensure that we will get the best value for our money.

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

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to those issues because it was brought to my attention and they would like to see the minister look into this as well.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

My next question goes to the minister of education. Madam Minister, who in the personnel in education is supporting and assisting students with special needs?

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a number of people in the department but the head person would be the director of public education, Linda Lowther.

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

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And front-line services in the school, who is working along with special needs children in our schools?

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

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Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, I would have to check my notes and see which person we have. We've had a lot of people hired on in the department and I haven't gotten into my head all the names of people who have come on. We hired cultural specialists. We hired diversity specialists and so I would bring that name back to the hon. member.

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

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I'm going to go to the minister in regards to the school board, employed through school board who is working in front-line services to deliver services to children with students with special needs.

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

Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, that name would be available to the hon. member through the school boards.

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

Ms. Bertram: Mr. Speaker, I raise these issues today. It's because there is a new pilot project taking place. There are two positions this year, Southern Kings and at Glen Stewart. They are student attendant positions. We have been approached by EA, the union, who are in opposition to this because the student attendants are taking over positions and the work description of an EA, an educational assistant. I'm wondering why the department is supporting the board in this pilot project.

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are within our school system people with varying disabilities and it was, became quite obvious that the educational assistants form a very significant role but there are other times when a student might need to go to the exercise room to be lifted out of the wheelchair and exercise his or her legs. There are times when there is assistance needed with feeding some of these individuals in the school system. There are times when these students have to be brought to a washroom to use the facilities there and be watched and cared for. And so because the educational assistants are really, really busy trying to deal with the students that they work with, we felt that there was an opportunity to add to the system, people who could care for the personal needs of some students so that the educational assistants could be freed to do work with other students at that time. So I personally think it's a good idea. It allows the educational assistants to use their expertise where it's best needed and certainly required and then there are these other personal attendants who can work with the students at other times in the day.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

TRADE MISSION TO ALBERTA

Mr. Arsenault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Development and Technology. Recently, our Premier and this minister led a group of Island companies on a trade mission to Alberta to explore opportunities in the oil patch, work

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that can be outsourced from Alberta to Prince Edward Island. I believe this is a very proactive approach by this government and I was wondering if the minister could provide this House with some statistics from this trade mission.

Mr. R. Brown: (indistinct) He'd have to be a genius.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Development and Technology.

All right, hon. members.

Mr. Currie: Well, if he'd listen, he will hear. Mr. Speaker, we've had two trade missions already to Alberta and, certainly, we value the working relationship we have with the private sector in this province and they've done a fantastic job in being aggressive on these trade missions. And the 21 companies that went out there so far, they've sealed deals for \$4.1 million and they are awaiting contracts on another \$4.8 million and a large number of those companies have already been in contact with us to head up another trade mission in January and we're working towards that because it brings a lot of employment to PEI and certainly shows our companies are competitive in the marketplace.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

CONSULTATION ON NEW POLICE ACT

Dr. McKenna: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have a question for the Attorney General. There has been some recent media coverage suggesting little or no consultation with the police association on *The Police Act*. Can the Attorney General provide some clarification on this?

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, I did bring along with me today a series of e-mails which I intend to table later on and I can provide to the House some information about the number of consultations that have occurred. The e-mails that were sent to the people who were invited, those who actually did attend, those who could have attended but didn't, and as I said, I did intend to table that this afternoon. But for example, just to read into the record a little bit - March 3, Allan Kelly and John Flood from the PEI Police Association and Tim Keizer from CUPE; March 17, John Flood, Tim Keizer, and David Fisher from CUPE; and obviously, the names of the people who were invited are also there and I will be tabling those later on. But it certainly shows that there people invited who chose not to attend even though the issue was supposedly quite important to these people.

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

Dr. McKenna: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have two supplementals. In today's *Guardian*, Sergeant Wendy Adams - I think she's described as the president of the UPEI Police Association - said the new act will limit their powers. For example, at present police who work on campus are allowed by law to

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carry sidearms even though the university administration does not permit it. Under this act, Adams says officers would not be allowed by law to arm themselves. What is the Attorney General's response to this?

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's another one of the sheets that I was going to table because I was questioned about that myself and I expected, actually, the Opposition would be bringing those questions forward and so I did bring along some sheets in order to today's media coverage. But Mr. Speaker, the terms under which Miss Adams was hired in 1995 - I have that sheet here - it will clearly show that Miss Adams was hired under a special appointment provision of *The Police Act* and although the media report seemed today to indicate that Miss Adams had said that she didn't carry firearms only because the UPEI wouldn't let her but that she was able to under the current *Police Act*. That is absolutely false. The sheet that I will table will show that Miss Adams I not allowed to carry firearms under the current *Police Act*. She is allowed to carry pepper spray but that's a provision of her appointment, not an agreement with UPEI. That sheet will show that there's no difference in her ability or her authority under the new *Police Act* than there is under the current *Police Act*. She'll have exactly the same abilities that she currently has.

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

Dr. McKenna: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again also in today's *Guardian* along with the CBC Radio and its website, there's a quote from David Fisher, who is the lawyer representing the unionized police officers in Charlottetown. He used some very strong language: underhanded, sneakiness, and misleading in describing the role of the Attorney General of the province. What is your response to the criticism?

An Hon. Member: We're used to it.

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, that language is totally inappropriate and unacceptable. Mr. Fisher is, I understand, a lawyer. He operates under the Canadian Bar Association's code of professional conduct and the code says, and I do have it with me, and I quote: ...must do nothing to lessen the respect and confidence of the public in the legal system of which he is a part. He should take care not to weaken or destroy public confidence in legal institutions by broad, irresponsible allegations of corruption or partiality. End of quotation. So Mr. Speaker, that language, I would suggest, is a breach of the hon. member's or Mr. Fisher's own professional code of conduct. I think the rhetoric has to lessen because it is often misrepresentative of the situation. It doesn't help to carry negotiations forward and I do want to say that I have the utmost confidence in our police officers across the province. They do a really good job and I don't think that kind of rhetoric helps the situation and, as I said, is a breach it seems to me of Mr. Fisher's own code of ethics.

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

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**EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS -
PILOT PROJECT**

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To go back to my line of questioning, I think it just flows with the same theme, you know. We've seen the 2% levy, lack of consultation. (indistinct) *The Police Act* - lack of consultation. This brings me to my issue that I've been bringing up and that's relative to the student attendance. I have the presentation here from CUPE Local 3260 that states that they were not consulted by the minister in regards to the changes for the student attendants that educational assistants would be - their position is - their description of their jobs is what you are saying a student attendant is doing. They were never consulted and how can you justify that, Madam Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Shame, shame!

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we have this year initiated into the school system is a pilot project to see whether or not these attendants form a useful role and I'm surprised that the hon. member would object to the addition of extra staff to help with to care for these special children. These are people who are trained in the personal care of individuals and we are trying it as an experiment in the Eastern School District. We've added two extra people to care for these individuals who have challenges and it seems to me that it does free the educational assistants to do work that they're better trained to do so I'd be surprised that people would be objecting to that. It seems to me

they serve quite a useful purpose.

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

Ms. Bertram: People object to it. I've been approached. There's over 350 EAs in this province and they're opposed to this decision by government to pilot this project. And not only that, don't tell me that there's FEAs, lots of EAs in the system. There's 3.8 less full-time equivalent positions in our education system today this school year, Madam Minister. How can you justify a pilot project when in fact our EAs haven't been supported this year in terms of equaling the time necessary?

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously, the hon. member hasn't been paying attention to the declining enrollment that has been going on in our school systems. Yes, we have a declining enrollment and so, yes, we have changes in the numbers of students who would be needing help. I never said that there were all kinds of educational assistants in the system. We could always use more educational assistants, more specialists of all natures but the province does a good job with hiring educational assistants. We're now experimenting with these personal care attendants. I don't see that there's anything wrong with trying to pilot in that regard and we are very concerned about the cares, the needs of these special students. And it seems to me that trying to accommodate them into our school system is what we are always striving to do to their betterment.

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

Ms. Bertram: Mr. Speaker, the minister better not talk about declining enrollment and how many children are lacking the services that they need in our system. We have priority one students who are being reached with EAs. They're not getting proper hours allotted to them. Our priority two students are not getting the services that they need so for this minister to say that because of declining enrollment that we shouldn't have the necessary EA hours is ludicrous. And I would like the minister to tell me this: How much are you paying the student attendant versus the EA? What are the wages that you're paying out in comparison to both of these positions, Madam Minister?

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

Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, that's not something that a member would expect me to know right off the top of my head so I will bring that information back to the hon. member.

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

Ms. Bertram: Mr. Speaker, the union is very concerned over that and they're stating that this is because of the minister wanting to save money. Basically, what the student attendant is making is about \$15.90 for six hours a day for these two positions. Now they're looking at this as a cost-cutting measure from this government to pilot this year and who knows? The 350 plus positions, EAs, might be in jeopardy for your upcoming budget, Madam Minister. Answer that please.

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

Leader of the Opposition: Good question.

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member might not be accused of - could well be accused of fear-mongering. It seems to me that we have 238 education assistants in our province for 2006-2007. We have 155 EAs in the Eastern School District, 74.57 in the Western School Board, and 7.73 in the French School Board. We added five youth positions this year. We have over 500 fewer students in the school system than we had last year and so I think with the total of 238 educational assistants plus five more youth positions, youth workers, you know, I think the province and the taxpayers of this province are doing quite well in trying to care for the needs of our students.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Bertram: Mr. Speaker, I am ashamed. Members of this Legislature clapping. You're doing everything that you can; no, you're not. There's many children in our system that are not being serviced the way they should be and for this minister, it is sad to hear her response to this, Mr. Speaker. I would like you to tell us, Madam Minister, tell us please. Did you or did you not consult the union before this pilot project took place? Yes or no, Madam Minister.

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

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Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is a pilot that we are trying out in the Eastern School District. We're entitling it, Personal Care Attendant. The intention is not to undermine the role of the educational assistant. As I said earlier, the intention to allow or free the educational assistant to do the work that he or she is trained for and the pilot project with these two personal care attendants allows the educational system to do that, the educational assistant, so I think the hon. member should be pleased that the educational assistant is now able to focus on these children that she's so worried about.

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

Ms. Bertram: On this side of the Legislature, we're worried about children. We're worried about children in our schools. And the minister, her statement in December 7, 2005, in *The Journal Pioneer* she stated: We have to talk to the unions to see if we can somehow incorporate a change to our system to accommodate the students who are there. And this is all involving student attendant positions. So she actually stated that she was going to consult with the union, which she didn't so Madam Minister, there is no consultation that took place. Shameful, shameful, shameful! And the EAs have approached us and they're against this so what are you going to do? Are you going to pilot it again next year? Are you going to put more student attendant positions next year?

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the hon. member would understand what

a pilot is. A pilot means that you're testing something. Whether or not you'll continue with the pilot remains to be seen. There have been a number of occasions in the past when even their government didn't consult. I'm thinking right off the top the obvious one that I keep hearing about (indistinct) -

Speaker: All right, hon. member.

Ms. Dover: - is the 7.5% so I mean there are -

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Dover: - (indistinct) across this whole province.

Some Hon. Members: Shame, shame!

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

Ms. Bertram: Mr. Speaker, this minister and this government is living in the past. We are in year 2006. We want our children to succeed in this province. We want to support our education assistants in this province and I am asking that the minister before she goes any further with this for next year, will you sit down with the local 3260 union, CUPE union and approach them before any other changes take place to pilot? Will you go to them before any other changes take place? That is my final question, Madam Minister.

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that this government is living in the present. We certainly have invested more in education

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over the last 10 years than history would show for any other government. So whether you take it in the past or lump it all together, our government has invested quite heavily in education. And I know with consultation, my colleague here sitting to the right of me, they were involved in a number of consultations about the single hospital in the West Prince area but the Opposition doesn't seem to want to listen to that consultation.

Speaker: End of Question Period.