



Session:	4/62
Year:	2006
Date:	14.12.06
No:	16

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND**

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

Thursday 14 December 2006

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD 14 DECEMBER 2006 PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Spring Park.

50TH ANNIVERSARY AS ISLAND TAILOR

Mr. MacAleer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Prince Edward Island is a great place to live and work. You just have to ask Samir Saad. In 1980 he first came to Prince Edward Island to visit his relatives, a sister and a cousin. He liked it so much that he immigrated to the Island in 1983.

Born in Katana, Syria, in 1941, this soft-spoken, unassuming gentleman apprenticed with the Italian fashion designer, Kazar, and after several years opened his own shop in Charlottetown in 1963.

Mr. Speaker, Samir recently celebrated his 50th anniversary in the fashion industry and his 23rd year in Prince Edward Island. Over the years, Samir has made suits, coats, and vests, and skirts - all forms of wear for both men and women.

Samir smiles and says he became self-employed because his mother told him to find a business that's nice and clean. This Charlottetown tailor has a reputation for consistent and reliable service. Mr. Speaker, he receives not only praise for his exceptional work but also for his exemplary service to his community. As one of his customers puts it, he is a phenomenal person, a gifted tailor, and a truly wonderful person. This is the description of a person truly appreciated for his skill and for his friendship.

I extend congratulations to Samir and his wife, Angele, and wish them many wonderful years serving the community by performing the work that they love very much.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

PRIME MINISTER'S AWARD FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Mr. Mooney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Recently, Prime Minister Harper announced this year's recipients of the 14th annual Prime Minister's awards for teaching excellence and excellence in early childhood education. In his remarks, the Prime Minister stated that these awards celebrate men and women whose commitment to excellence in education is helping to shape the Canadian leaders of tomorrow.

I'm more than proud to say that Anne Miller, who happens to be a very close neighbour and friend, of the Souris kindergarten was one of those recipients. Anne and her staff are often the first people to be trusted with someone's child and it's not a responsibility they take very lightly. And I can speak firsthand as four of my children went through the Souris kindergarten and I dropped one of the kids off for the first time. My wife said it would be a very good experience for me. The young fellow was pretty upset, clung to my leg and I said: You know what? I think I'm going to take him home. And Anne Miller took me

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aside and said: You stay outside for a minute, and took my son in. Shortly after she took me back to the window to show me how they started coming together in kindergarten. So I tell you she does tremendous work. Anne is well thought of by all the staff, students, and parents and she has touched the lives of over 1,000 children from the Souris area.

Anne has been previously recognized for her commitment to children with Early Childhood Development Association's Award of Excellence for Prince Edward Island and the Provincial Inclusion Award.

Anne works constantly to find appropriate services and systems for parents struggling with personal and monetary issues. And for more than 30 years, she gave her all to build a centre that is the envy of all the centres across Prince Edward Island. Mr. Speaker, these awards recognize the efforts of teachers who played such an important role in the intellectual and social development of our children and no one is more deserving than Anne Miller of the Souris kindergarten. So congratulations Anne.

And in closing, Mr. Speaker, I extend a Merry Christmas and Best Wishes and a happy and healthy New Year to all the residents across Prince Edward Island and especially the good people from the first district.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

RECOGNITION OF ARMED FORCES' FAMILIES

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to ask all hon. members to join me in recognizing the service and sacrifice of those brave Canadians presently serving in our armed forces. Their service to Canadians resonates even more during this very special time of year when their absence is most felt by those at home.

With Christmas rapidly approaching, most of us are looking forward to spending time with family and friends, those who help bring real meaning to the holiday season. Because as you know, the holidays are all about sharing time with those nearest and dearest to you, to reminisce about holidays past and to share the hope for happy and healthy holidays to come. But for thousands of families across Canada and on Prince Edward Island, the holiday season is quite different this year. For these families, their sons and daughters or husbands and wives serving their country so far away from home, the sense of joy normally associated with this time of year is replaced by a feeling of trepidation, a feeling that something is missing, that someone how all is not right. To these families, we owe a debt of gratitude and recognition that their sacrifices and the sacrifices of their loved ones are in the service of their country and in turn of each and every Canadian.

Mr. Speaker, many Islanders have had friends and relatives who have served and are serving presently in Afghanistan and other troubled areas around the globe. In this Legislature, we know there are members who have been touched directly by these conflicts and at such

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times, we can only wish for the safe return of all those involved.

In closing, I want to recognize the service and sacrifice of our Islanders who are presently serving in the armed forces and may the peace and hope of the season be with them and their families this Christmas.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

The hon. Minister of Tourism.

PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT IN PARKS(FURTHER)

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

Yesterday, the Member from Crapaud-Hazel Grove asked about the inspection of playgrounds. I just want to inform the member in the House that each spring the department does a visual inspection and then throughout the summer, we coordinate efforts with government self-insurance to perform that inspection but there's no annual report done on the matter.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

PERCENTAGE OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES

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

My first question today will be for the

minister of education. As everyone agrees, especially with our changing economy today moving into the biosciences, moving into more research and development in this province in the aerospace industry that attaining a post-secondary education is becoming even more of an essential building block for a skilled workforce. At present 15% of adults 25 years of age or older in Prince Edward Island have a Bachelor's degree or higher. I'm wondering if the minister can inform this House how PEI compares with the rest of the country in this regard.

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

Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how the statistics run but I will be tabling a UPEI update that has been produced by the university. It does indicate what their performance is and I'll be making a statement about UPEI and the accomplishments of that university during the minister's statement.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

FUNDING FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

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

And it's a shame that the minister couldn't know that information but just to be informative, PEI has the second lowest percentage of its population with a Bachelor's degree or higher compared with the rest of the country. I'm wondering, Madam Minister: What do you think accounts for the second last place standing? Do you think the cost of post-secondary education is a factor in it?

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, the tuition that the hon. member is referring to in relation to PEI is the third lowest in the Atlantic region and I think that our economy here tends over the past number of years to be a more traditional economy and it's been related to farming and fishing and so on. But with this government coming into power, the economy and the sources of wealth for the province have become more diversified. We're now into quite a lot of new businesses that are coming into the province because of my colleague minister of development and so I think in the future and it's already being indicated by the university that we're going to have far more diversity in relation to education, both at Holland College and at UPEI. It's quite obvious from the growth of both institutions that there is progress that has been certainly growing since our government got in power.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'll now give the minister some facts and figures that will dispute what she just said. Madam Minister, you might not like the figures that I'm using today but they come from the Canadian Association of University Teachers and are based upon Statistics Canada. This organization tracked provincial government funding to post-secondary education and they recently did an analysis. They found that between 1993-1994, and 2003-2004 government funding on a per full-time student basis declined on PEI by 60%,

60%, Mr. Speaker.

Madam Minister, how do you respond to Stats Canada's information? What does this say about your government's commitment to post-secondary education?

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

Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that we had this argument last year in relation to statistics that the hon. member produced but certainly our government has been increasing the grants to both Holland College and UPEI and those figures are quite evident. There has been no 60% reduction in government funding since our government got in. In fact, maybe he meant to say 60% increase.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

I'm not surprised by that answer from the minister. Of course, Stats Canada must be wrong and the minister must be right. It's really interesting to listen to the minister's denial of her government's failure to adequately fund post-secondary education but Madam Minister the facts speak for themselves. This same independent research found that in terms of provincial expenditures on post-secondary education as a percentage of total government expenditures, PEI ranked last in Canada. We've got loads of money for golf tournaments here on Prince Edward Island. We've got loads of money for trips to Europe but when it comes to spending on post-secondary education, we are at the bottom of the barrel. Madam Minister, why

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have you failed at the Cabinet table to give post-secondary education the priority it so urgently deserves?

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly dispute that. Take a look at the number of dollars that this government has given - \$25 million to the Building a Legacy Fund, for example, an additional \$11 million for Kerry and those are just in relation to two programs for the university. This government has done more in relation to education not only in our public schools but in the university and Holland College and there's no question about the fact that this government has committed a lot of money to university here on PEI.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Obviously, Stats Canada and the Association of College Teachers must be wrong and this minister must be right but I've got a new question now for the same minister.

The cost of post-secondary education is clearly challenging for many Island families. The Liberal Caucus has long advocated using the tax system to help recent graduates deal with paying down student debt. Specifically, we have argued that government should allow a portion of provincial income tax paid by recent graduates living on PEI to be directed towards paying down their student debt. Does the minister believe that such a measure would help make post-secondary education more affordable while at the same time

helping us retain recent graduates?

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

Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, the programs that we have here on PEI in relation to debt reduction are the envy of a lot of provinces, most of the provinces across this country. We have debt reduction programs. We have debt relief programs that community bursary programs. All of those programs go to help the students so that and this is a statistic that I quoted last year. On a \$20,000 student debt load, for example, the amount of money that the student would owe to the province would be \$2,000 of that \$20,000 debt load. The other \$18,000 would be a debt that they would owe to the federal government but because of the programs that we have including the ones I've just referenced, the amount of money that the student would owe to the province would be only \$2,000. So our province and the amount of contributions we make towards student debts and student loans would be the envy of most provinces across this country.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Obviously, I believe the minister is wrong here. Here we have a minister that disagrees with Stats Canada, disagrees with the College Teachers' Association, and now she says we're the envy across the country. Well, unfortunately, the minister is dead wrong on that and New Brunswick recently came out with a good approach. In New Brunswick, recent graduates get a tax credit back for up to \$10,000 of the tuition they pay while

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attending a post-secondary institution. I'm wondering: Will you consider supporting an option like that for Prince Edward Island?

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

Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member might comment on the fact that our tuitions are high and we're not supporting the university but the enrollment at UPEI has increased 35% from 1999 to 2004 and those are the last stats that I have. But during that time, the enrollment at UPEI increased 35% and enrollment at Atlantic universities generally have tended to drop about 5% a year so I think that this is an obvious cause of recognition. This is obviously a reflection of the commitment that this government has made to the university and the number of students that are coming from PEI who are choosing to go to UPEI has increased from 21% to 29% this year. So there is certainly a recognition of the assistance that this government has given through grants to the university and through assistance and student loans to recognize the fact that there are more and more students from both off Island and on Island who are choosing UPEI. So it can't be too bad in relation to tuition assistance when more and more students are choosing to go to UPEI.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Again, I guess all the stats are wrong. Perhaps the minister should pay a visit to Stats Canada and to the teachers' association but I think perhaps the minister forgot to listen to the

question. The question was: In New Brunswick, recent graduates get a tax credit back for up to \$10,000 of their tuition they paid while attending a post-secondary institution. I'm wondering: Would you consider supporting an option like that for Prince Edward Island?

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, when you look at what the other provinces give to their students and you look at what we do for our students, I think, as I said earlier and maybe the hon. member wasn't listening, I said earlier that we have debt reduction programs and interest relief programs that are the envy of almost all the other provinces across Canada. So you know, New Brunswick may be doing it one way. We're doing it the other way and have been doing it for many years. So New Brunswick may begin to pat itself on the back but our programs have been around for a long time and it seems to me that they are following our habit in assisting our students.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Now you know that a government has been in power too long when they start speling off answers like that. That was really hard to believe. But I truly wish this minister was less defensive in her answers so that we could get a firm understanding of why the costs of post-secondary education is so high here on Prince Edward Island.

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In September, Stats Can reported that the largest tuition increase in Canada is right here on Prince Edward Island, the largest increase. I know the hon. member from Winsloe-West Royalty might find that funny but I don't find it funny at all. It is reported that tuition increased 6.5% this year. Why is this minister not doing something to reduce the increased costs which are growing at a faster rate this year than anywhere else in Canada?

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is true that UPEI did increase its tuition this past year. A lot of it was due to the negotiations as a relation to the strike last year but even with the increase, I think you'll find that the statistics show that UPEI is third in the Atlantic area for tuition costs, total costs. In fact, I had a presentation just this morning from UPEI in relation to their financial picture and I will be tabling that in the House if the House sits that long but otherwise it will be available. It has to be tabled each year. Each year they come in and they report, first of all, to government and then that information becomes available. So in the tables that were presented to me this morning, and I didn't take them with me at noontime, but it does show that UPEI is the third lowest and I think even with the 6.5%, the university is doing quite well.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

I guess Stats Can is wrong again. Perhaps she'll even say it's wrong again with this question. There is also a problem identified by

Stats Canada with compulsory fees for undergraduate. Those fees cover a number of services offered at the university. Can the minister tell the House which province had the highest increase in those fees in the years between 2001 and now?

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

Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, I suppose because the hon. member is asking that question, the answer must be obvious but it seems to me, as I said earlier, even with those costs enrollments are increasing at UPEI. We have a great university. UPEI was first in the MacLean's ranking for teacher excellence and it seems -

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Dover: - UPEI is doing really well. That recognition is coming in increased enrollment and increased enrollment from out-of-province, international enrollment too and a lot of it is due to the support that this government has given to the university over the years.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Unfortunately, those compulsory fees rose by more than 75% on the Island during that period compared to only 34% nationally. Doesn't the minister agree that more must be done to improve the affordability of post-secondary education here on Prince Edward Island?

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, all you have to do is go out to the university and look at all the activity that's going on out there. We have infrastructure that has been supported over the years. You talk about infrastructure in the other universities and across the Atlantic area, universities are complaining about the fact that they have buildings that have quite a number of structural needs. Through the assistance of this government, we have research that's going on at the university. We have expansions at AVC. We have a new residence out there. There's a lot of assistance going on to - there's a lot of assistance, maintenance going on at UPEI. We're not in nearly the same situation that some of the other provinces are in relation to the infrastructure at UPEI and we have supported UPEI and Holland College over the 10 years that we've been in government. It seems to me that we have programs there that are certainly drawing people not only from across PEI but also from international and national locations as well.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

INVESTIGATION RE POLAR FOODS

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

(indistinct) that this minister and government is in denial but now I'll ask another question to the minister, this time in her role as Attorney General. As many Islanders may recall, the Attorney General contacted the RCMP over allegations surrounding the activities of Polar Foods. I'm wondering can

the minister please update this House on those activities.

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

Ms. Dover: I'm sorry I didn't catch the question.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

We want to know from the Attorney General whether or not the investigation into Polar Foods is still ongoing.

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, we had in the Attorney General's office no input into any request that went forward or any report that came back so I can't comment on that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

INVESTIGATION RE METEOR CREEK

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

There is also an investigation into the affairs at Meteor Creek, a sad situation where many Islanders lost money in a company that was partly promoted by this government and this Premier. I'm wondering will the Attorney General please tell this House what the status of that investigation is.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and

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Attorney General.

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, the investigation is still ongoing. It's still before the RCMP so I can't comment on that.

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

D I S A B I L I T Y S U P P O R T PROGRAM(FURTHER)

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

A question to the Minister of Health. Over the past few days in setup questions, the minister indicated that there was no cut to the Disability Support Program. Do you still stand by that, Mr. Minister?

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

Mr. Gillan: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do and that I qualified or I explained that that was from budget year 2005-2006 even though there was an over-expenditure in the forecast column.

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

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

Why was there an over-budget in the forecast then?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, that was the time when we still had the health authority, the various regions throughout the province.

Since that time, I think the hon. member realizes that we have consolidated now and that there is one health system for the entire province and that now comes under the auspices of social services and seniors. And we are trying now to tighten up the spending, tighten up the assessments, the method of how people are assessed and evaluated. Before we had five different versions and now we have one.

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

Mr. R. Brown: So you're saying the \$600,000. First of all, I don't believe a word he says because the five regions would have put their budget in. That would have been in the budget. Now he's trying to say, well, it was because of the five regions but they would have had their budgets in. Now I'm asking you again. Why were they over-budget? Are you going to stick to that story that it was just administration cost?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, the word 'administration', of course, is very broad in this extent. What I am indicating is that the over-expenditures were actually \$651,000 and we felt that a review of programming ought to take place. We are undergoing that programming review now. As I have explained, instead of having the various regions responsible for those programs, we now administer the disability file province wide.

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

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Mr. R. Brown: So you say in this House, Mr. Speaker, is the minister telling us in this House that there's no, that cut or that saving is all administration \$650,000. Like staff must have been laid off and all that. So were people laid off and the budget just cut that way or was any of the money that's paid out to the disability people cut?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, I have indicated that the budget from one fiscal year to another remains basically the same. I think that there is a variance of approximately \$86,000 or \$87,000 but, basically, what has happened is that there have been evaluations and assessments done and those people who would have received higher disability awards are not getting the same amount of money. There have been reviews and varying different degrees of money awarded to individuals so province-wide we are now administering it from one base as opposed to five different bases.

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

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

So what the minister is saying then is if somebody in Tignish or in Souris needs to be assessed under the Disability Support Program, they have to come to Charlottetown.

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

Mr. Gillan: No, Mr. Speaker. We have workers throughout the province.

Applications are done, of course, by mail. Individuals do not have to physically appear. I think the member opposite realizes that but we are saying is that there was - we're not indicating that there was any shoddy work being done but what we are saying is that with five different systems that we have been able to re-evaluate them. We have been able to assess individuals in a different light. We now have over 1,000 individuals on Prince Edward Island receiving these disability benefits. I can always indicate as well - I think the member is cognizant of this - is that the dollars that go out in the DSP program go out for disabilities. They are not intended nor do they go out in any way to provide income to the individuals, only to the disability.

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

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

I've learnt or I've had some calls from people saying that mobility devices are no longer eligible for funding under the Disability Support Program. Can the minister update this House on that issue or things that people need to get around the community to get out of their houses? Are they no longer sponsored or funded under the Disability Support Program?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, that would vary on one client to another, one individual to another. I would have to be able to know exactly what the device was and the individual's requirement but that is a good example. An individual may have been getting some sort of mobility device at some time and

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maybe for whatever reason that I can't point to right now, that type or piece of equipment may no longer be necessary or replaced by a different type of equipment. But, as I said, what we have been attempting to do is to run a more uniform, fair assessment for all of the individuals who need it. There certainly is not an intent to take back or to withdraw from people who need these services and needs the equipment. They are assessed very, very fairly. They are always given the benefit of the doubt and this government has been held across the country as a province which has done more for its people on disabilities than any other and we won that Best Practice award. We're very proud of that.

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

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

That was a lot of talk about nothing. I'm going to ask him a simple question. Is a person who needs a scooter or something like that to get out of their home to get around the community to go shopping and stuff like that, under the Disability Support Program will the minister fund that person's scooter?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that in that particular case - again I'm not sure of the individual - but we usually do not to my knowledge fund equipment pieces for transportation. I could be wrong in that. I will definitely check but I think for most equipment we do not cover it.

Speaker: The hon. Member from

Charlottetown-Kings Square.

Mr. R. Brown: It's kind of funny. Each minister gets a \$40,000 car, gas card. They get their transportation paid for out of the government, out of the public purse. Can't you understand? Someone needs to get out around their community, get out around their community. Oh yeah, tell him the question Premier. Somebody that needs to get out of their house, get around the community and get the shopping and things like that, don't you understand why they need that? Don't you understand that this is very important for them to have?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, yes, just trying to check my notes as to exactly what is covered and what is not and as indicated, not in every situation. For instance, medical travel, there is an area of support obviously, nursing, optical, dental, all of that but, as I said, I'd have to double check just to see exactly what the situation is for transportation.

An Hon. Member: (indistinct)

Speaker: All right, hon. member. The hon. Member from Morell-Fortune Bay.

WAIT TIMES FOR BREAST SCREENING

Ms. Crane: Mr. Speaker, my question goes to the Minister of Health too please.

Would the minister please provide the House with an update as to what action is being taken to alleviate the reported wait times for

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breast screening?

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

Mr. Gillan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I think this is an important question. We did have an opportunity a number of weeks ago to indicate that at that time we were running quite far behind with appointments of breast screening and I am now glad to report that with the services of three individuals which we were able to bring into the province that we have caught up to that wait time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Fortune Bay.

Ms. Crane: Mr. Speaker, my next question still is to the Minister of Health.

Is there a difference in appointment wait times for women who are having routine screening compared to women with symptoms?

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

Mr. Gillan: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and I think that that's a valuable difference that the appointment wait time is still going to be in excess of eight months or so. It was in excess of nine months. We have been able to decrease that by a month so those individuals needing to get in, there is a bit shorter time. But the concern is still there and it's not only breast screening but, of course, all the different forms of diagnostic imaging. As far as the report times are concerned, which was

of great concern for individuals, ladies going in, is that they would have their test and the report time was in excess of eight weeks. That report time now due to those three radiologists visiting the province and reading over 1700 mammograms is now down to less than one week so a significant gain there. And I guess the final aspect is that now we do have a plan in place that in the future we should be able to avoid those long wait times.

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

CHILDREN'S GIFT PROGRAM

Mr. Collins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to keep that same minister on his feet a little while longer here today.

At this special time of the year, you know, there's a lot of very caring community organizations that get involved with special projects to try to help families in need. One of them that comes to mind is the Park Royal Children's Gift program. Sixteen, 17 years now they're providing a free shopping experience for a lot of moms and dads shopping for their kids. Now I do know that within the minister's department, the Child and Family Services Division tries to work closely with a lot of these groups and organizations. But this year suddenly and significantly the clientele list for the Park Royal gift program decreased so I'd like the minister to tell us what happened.

Mr. R. Brown: He didn't (indistinct).

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

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Mr. Gillan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And again, in reply to a question from the Charlottetown-Kings Square member when I indicated that the five health regions were there prior to last year, initially, what happened was that the Charlottetown, those individuals in Charlottetown area in social assistance would have received a notice in their Charlottetown mailout. This past year, of course, now that we are under the one service the letters would go Island-wide and we did not think that it would be appropriate to send out a notice for those only on social assistance in the Charlottetown area. But subsequently, what we did do is those in social services made out flyers, distributed those, made telephone references and we have to date referred over 200 to this Park Royal group and we know that it is less than perfect but we're doing our best.

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

Mr. Collins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know everyone is trying to do their best at this time of the year but could the minister agree that for the future anyway that his department could try to review and maybe improve coordination, not just for this group but all those other caring community organizations that I mentioned?

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

Mr. Gillan: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we're doing exactly that at the moment. We know that the needs out there range to quite a high degree. We know that there are other organizations

supplying needy children and needy families with these so we're trying to be able to take a look at how we can best reach every single family in the future and I think that what we have been able to do in the past week is to increase the opportunities of identifying where these families are in need. And if anybody knows of families that are in need, certainly contact the social services and we will respond immediately but we will also be working on a long-range plan.

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

COMPUTER SYSTEM

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

Now that the minister is back from his break, I'll just ask him a real question. The computer system at the five regions used, was that not all on the same computer system, the Carr system?

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

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, yes, and obviously, individuals operate these computers. Obviously, the minister, the individual who asked the question doesn't want to listen to the reply. Maybe the next question coming will be a written and all he has to do is to read it but anyway, I'm going to have to deliver the response anyway.

Speaker: All right, hon. member.

Mr. Gillan: Individuals, obviously, are at their terminals or at their computers and we

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have found that the application and the interpretation of assessments and programs from one region to another was not consistent and this is what we have attempted to do now that it is one system in there is to provide the same sense of consistency.

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

HILLSBOROUGH HOSPITAL

Mr. R. Brown: I had a person in this morning and the person was in the office wondering that Hillsborough Hospital, renovations or repairs to Hillsborough Hospital, there was no mention in the long-term budget in that. That facility is in dire need of some repairs or even a new facility. Why was that not put in your budget in your long-term plan?

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

Mr. Gillan: Well, Mr. Speaker, there you go again is that you do what you have to do. You go beyond doing that but the situation in the health and social services area are very great. We tend to get to where the need is greatest. I think that we have certainly replied in an outstanding way in the past year to the needs of facilities and to groups and to institutions. And of course, I refer to what we have just released in the capital program and if the member opposite needs any reminder, I'll remind him of not only the phase one at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital but also the ongoing renovations, the renovations that are going to be put to the manors to our long-term nursing care requirements. So Mr. Speaker, as I say, it's impossible to provide renovations to every place but we are certainly getting to those who

are in need.

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

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

Has the minister toured the facility? Has he looked at it and does he not agree repairs or maybe a new facility is needed out there?

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

Mr. Gillan: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I have been in it a number of times, of course, over the years. I do not have on my desk a report from transportation and public works regarding that but my previous response was that I think that what we have been able to demonstrate is that we are listening. We are also responsive to the needs of the individuals in those various institutions and I think that the list of manors that we have chosen are the ones that are most needy and they are the ones that we're going to get to work on right away.

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

LANDS PROTECTION ACT RECOMMENDATION

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

A question to the Premier. The forestry council did a number of public consultations. They did come back with a great report, report to the minister. And recommendation no. 13 - the government amend the *Lands Protection Act* so organizations such as the Island Nature Trust can hold title of more than 3,000 acres.

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Why didn't you put that in your forestry policy?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs.

Mr. MacFadyen: Mr. Speaker, we are looking at options that we may consider but we have not changed the limit in regards to individuals or corporations under the *Lands Protection Act* to date.

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

Mr. R. Brown: So are you going to bring in new legislation to allow Island Nature Trust to go over the 3,000 limit?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs.

Mr. MacFadyen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Not at this time but we are looking at options we can do.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, I find it quite ironic because, you know, here's a company - and I'm not against the company - Ventis Energy and collectively they were granted 6,831 acres and they were only allowed 3,000 acres limit. You allowed them to go over the limit. Why don't you allow Island Nature Trust, an organization in Prince Edward Island that allows this, allow this to happen? Why does one get it and the others don't?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community

and Cultural Affairs.

Mr. MacFadyen: Mr. Speaker, I can't say how many acres that Ventis has but I would assume that they would be required to be within the limits of a corporation which would be 3,000.

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

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

In Ventis's business plan - and I'll quote from page 48 - the *Lands Protection Act* requires corporations having an aggregate land holdings in excess of 3,000 acres to obtain approval from the Island Regulatory Commission of Prince Edward Island. Accordingly, West Prince Cape has obtained the approval from IRAC in respect of lands compromising the West Cape facilities.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs.

Mr. MacFadyen: Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that Ventis owns 6,000 acres of land on PEI but I will certainly have my staff look into it and if they do, I will bring back whatever information I can to the House.

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

BUSINESS PLAN OF VENTIS

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

Question to the minister of energy. Last week or this week in the meeting, the minister indicated to Laura Meader, the reporter, that

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the business plan for the 10 windmills up in Souris area is available publicly. Now this is Ventis's business plan. It has financial statements in it and everything. Is the business plan with financial statements available for the public to review?

Leader of the Opposition: Good question.

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

Mr. Ballem: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of financial charts that are available if anybody asks for them.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, here is Ventis corporation's business proposal. They have the financial statements. You told Laura Meader there was a business plan available. Now will you table that business plan in this House or where can we find a comprehensive business plan for that project?

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

Mr. Ballem: Mr. Speaker, when a private company is going for an initial public offering through the *Securities Act*, they are required to have a lot more detail than would be required for a Crown corporation to do any kind of a project. We have the financial projections, the financial statements, projections. Those will be made available if the member wants them. He hasn't asked for them but, yes, I'll make them available for him.

Speaker: The hon. Member from

Charlottetown-Kings Square.

Mr. R. Brown: Mr. Speaker, this member is misleading here. I asked the question last year for these financial statements and you said no, they're not available. So now you're going to make them available, are you? Will you table the report in this legislature, the business plan? And I find it funny government doesn't need to do the same as private corporations. We can just go out and spend the money. Who cares. Polar Foods lost a bunch of money. Dundarave Golf Course lost a bunch of money. Maybe if we did have proper business plans, this government wouldn't have lost so much money. So will you table the full business plan, just not a couple of financial statements, the full business plan that you presented to your Cabinet colleagues in order to get this project underway?

Leader of the Opposition: Good question, very good.

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

Mr. Ballem: It's amazing how someone can take, you know, such a positive project like having wind development in this province an opportunity for Islanders to invest in their future and try to turn it around and make it negative but if that's the best they can do, I guess that's the best they can do.

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

Mr. R. Brown: There he goes, Mr. Speaker, just going around the question not answering the question. I know he's not going to table the business plan. I know he's not going to do

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it and it's a waste of my time I guess and it's a waste of the people's time trying to get that information out of him.

How many renewable energy credits are you going to sell under that business plan?

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

Mr. Ballem: Mr. Speaker, when we did our initial projections for the wind farm in Eastern Kings, there was no value put on the renewable energy credits because there was no official value for them.

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

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

According to Ventis's proposal that is on their web and their business plan and their financial projections, if you go to page 17 of that report, you will see that Ventis is projecting to make \$18 million sales on this energy, \$11 million in renewable energy credits but if they didn't - and that would give them a \$3 million profit. Without the energy credits, this project would lose close to \$8 million so is that what the wind farm is going to lose up west or is that the reason you're not tabling those documents in this House? Because this private corporation is saying: We need \$11 million worth of renewable energy credits in order to break even. This minister is now saying: I have no renewable energy credits in mind. So why the difference?

Leader of the Opposition: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment,

Energy and Forestry.

Mr. Ballem: Mr. Speaker, he'd have to ask the officials at Ventis Energy why they are calculating that value and why they need it in their business plan. I don't know what they're selling their energy for. I don't know who they're selling their energy to. It's a private company. We know what our price is for energy. We know based on our data that we have from our wind test sites, our (indistinct) towers that we have. We know the cost because we've operated a wind farm for five years of what the operating and maintenance costs are going to be. We know what it costs us for our money so that's how we did our business plan. I'm not sure how Ventis did theirs. That's entirely up to them.

Leader of the Opposition: Show us your business plan.

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

WAITING TIME FOR SCHOOL BUSES

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

A question to the minister of education. This morning the head of the school board, Sandy MacDonald, was on talking about buses and how the students are going to have to wait hours in order for one bus driver to get back and pick up a bus and get back. He indicated on that the government doesn't pay for training for bus drivers. I see this as a simple solution. Why doesn't the government pay for bus drivers to get the training and then we'd have the bus drivers so the children wouldn't have to wait two or three hours for buses?

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

Ms. Dover: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a problem that as the superintendent said has just come up lately and part of the reason for it is that we've had a number of people leave for the west. What the superintendent said this morning is that they're certainly looking into it to see what else they can do but it is something that we can't have go on very much longer and we'll be again in consultation keeping a close eye on this in consultation with the superintendent to make sure that it is being watched very carefully.

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

CHANGES TO GUN REGISTRY

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

A question to the Attorney General again I guess. The federal government has introduced legislation to cancel the long-gun registry. I feel it's very important personally that all guns be registered in Canada. You said to me last year in this House that you were going to go back to your ministers' meetings and you guys were going to come up with some decision on cancellation or not cancellation of the long-gun registry. Have you come up with a decision or what's your decision on the cancellation of the long-gun registry?

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

Ms. Dover: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the federal government has the final decision on this. We did talk about it the last time we met

and there is a range of opinions about it. Personally, as I indicated when I was on the floor the last time with the budget, the federal government is intent on doing this. I talked to the RCMP and other peace officers and police officers and they have a different view on the long-gun registry. They think that anything that helps protect the public should be left intact so it's very difficult to merge the intent of some of the ministers with the intent and wishes of some of the other ministers. So what we've done, we've discussed it on the provincial and federal level and the federal government will make its decision and we'll have to abide by it.

Speaker: End of Question Period.