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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2009

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

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

Answers to written questions

Mr. D. Currie: Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

I am tabling for the opposition answers to written questions, and I believe there are approximately 40.

Speaker: Hon. member, you could do that during Tabling of Documents.

Mr. D. Currie: Okay. Sorry. I'm sorry.

Speaker: No problem.

The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

FoodTrust (further)

Mr. Campbell: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Yesterday, the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, or perhaps it was the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, asked questions about the sale of FoodTrust, and I just want to clarify some of the questions that were asked yesterday.

The sale of FoodTrust was a decision made by the previous administration and this government followed through on that decision made by the previous government.

The sale price of FoodTrust was \$890,000.

The question arose yesterday about writeoffs. The only liability paid was the loan amount in arrears for the merchandising units that the Member from Montague-Kilmuir spoke of. This \$447,000 liability was created when the previous government agreed to guarantee the merchandising loans.

As Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning I wish FoodTrust 2008 all the best. I wish them luck in expanding new products in new markets and helping out all Island producers.

Outstanding loans of PEI Lending Corporation and BDI (further)

As well, I believe the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters requested some information with respect to loans issued through both BDI and the PEI lending agency and I'd be pleased to table that now.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Property taxes attached to market value

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This government plans to attach property taxes to market value and not to their assessed value. The Provincial Treasurer thinks this is good news while opposition

certainly does not.

My question to the Provincial Treasurer: Is this sneaking in the back door another tax grab by your government?

Mr. Bagnall: Definitely is. Definitely is.

Speaker: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

That gives us a great opportunity to speak about the tax record of this government. Back in June of 2007, when we first came into the government -

Mr. Bagnall: Major tax grab.

Mr. Sheridan: - we were able to reduce the gasoline tax by 4.4 cents a litre, and what -

Mr. Bagnall: That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about the (Indistinct).

Mr. Sheridan: - that has meant, Madam Speaker, that has meant over \$20 million into the pockets of Islanders.

With the property tax freeze that we put in place as well there are a few reasons we did this, but what it meant was \$7 million in taxpayers' pockets over those two years.

What we were able to do over that time period is that we were able to improve - make it a very scientific piece of work on every piece of property on Prince Edward Island. What we've done is we've brought the assessed value to within 4% of market value on an average right across Prince

Edward Island.

Just as opposed to what the Leader of the Opposition has just stated, we are not tagging market values on homes.

Mr. Bagnall: Biggest tax grab in the history of the province.

Mr. Sheridan: What we're talking about, Madam Speaker, is a very fair, equitable and transparent way to bring the taxation piece on properties out of this freeze.

I know many Islanders were very worried about how we were going to come out of this tax freeze. They were worried that they would be engulfed by the loss in revenue that we've put aside for two years.

Just the opposite. We have now taken their assessed value that is from their last three tax bills, which have remained very constant through those three years. This year it will be the exact same number again with CPI attached to it. Right now we're trending under 0%. At the end of December 30th that will be looked at. The third week of January we'll announce what CPI growth was for PEI. At this point we expect it to be zero. So we're looking at four years of freeze, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, a simple question the Treasurer.

Could you explain the scientific explanation when a young couple has to buy a new house and they're paying extra tax? How is that going to be helpful to that young couple?

Speaker: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Just to explain for the Opposition Leader - and of course the Member from Montague-Kilmuir who goes in the newspaper always without fact - when we look at the difference between assessment value and market value on our tax bills, when we take a look at them now - and they've been there since the freeze came out - the previous administration for 11 years used one value, and that was market value. That's how they were taxed. How did market value go up? No idea. Totally arbitrary.

So there'd be a year of three, seven - one year, I think it was as high as nine.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Sheridan: Madam Speaker, it's incredible what the opposition leader is talking about here.

For the first time in the history of this province there's a government that's going to bring in a property tax increase that will be tied to something like CPI that you can explain, that is transparent, and it's equitable for all of those right across Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Maybe the minister didn't hear the question. Please tell us the scientific explanation when a young couple has to purchase a property and pay more taxes because of what you're doing here. Where's the science?

Speaker: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

Mr. Sheridan: Madam Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to explain this to all Islanders.

This is a very good news story. Islanders right across this province were concerned about how we were going to come out of this freeze.

Just let me speak to what the opposition leader is talking about here, and what the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir went in the paper with last night without ever looking at any fact, as he always does.

An Hon. Member: Shame, shame!

Mr. Bagnall: Millions of dollars (Indistinct).

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Sheridan: So let us take a look at what a real -

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Sheridan: - incident is. Let's take a couple of examples. We'll take a look at one that sits out in the municipality of the Union Road. The frozen assessment at this point is \$137,600. The market value assessment on this home is \$142,000. The difference on that is 3.2%, so that's within the provincial average that I talked about, the assessment being within 4% of the market values right across this Island.

The difference on that - and I'd like this to be emphasized just a tad - impact on annual taxes: \$44 a year on the provincial side and \$5.72 on the municipality side: \$49.72. That's the difference that the new couple moving into a home on the Union Road would have to pay.

The most important part about this is before the freeze was in place all we had was the market value and they would pay the exact same amount that this group did for 11 years, and then they jacked them up 10% every year after that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, today is the 25th of November.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Bagnall: He's always talking in the past.

Leader of the Opposition: The question now - it's really unfortunate that the tax minister -

Mr. Bagnall: They know you, minister. They know you.

Leader of the Opposition: It's really unfortunate that the treasurer continues to want to steal tax from the poor people. No matter which way he explains this, the poor couple's paying more money, but we'll get to a lot of questions with that minister when he's on the floor of the House with this famous bill.

Health PEI legislation

My next question, Madam Speaker, is to the health minister. I'm hearing a great deal of concern, confusion and general dismay from front-line health care providers who are more concerned with providing quality care than reinventing a previously failed hierarchy of the bureaucracy. Will we be seeing the Health PEI legislation tabled today?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

It's a good question. As a result of -

Mr. Bagnall: The answer's no.

Mr. D. Currie: - the restructuring that took place in 2005 that had an intense effect on health care providers in this province, Madam Speaker, there's not a day that I don't hear about the 2005 restructuring.

As our government embraces the challenge to build a provincial integrated sustainable

health care system, we certainly will be very mindful and respectful of all health care workers that are part of our health care system and do tremendous work, as we move forward.

I will be tabling that legislation in the near future and will be briefing and making sure the public is very clear and getting the accurate information as we move forward with our new governance model.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's great for the health minister to realize, too, that we're in 2009, not 2005.

So in terms of this legislation, I have a few questions for the minister on that. When will opposition actually have that briefing?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Corpus Sanchez work that we endorsed last fall, which was started in the year 2006, one of the challenges that was presented to our government was the present governance model that we are functioning under here in the province.

So what we did is we went out and approached Dr. Rosemary Henderson and Ron Maynard, who were the co-chairs of the advisory council, and asked for an independent objective assessment of our present governance model here in the province. As we prepare for our rollout of the report and the legislation, I've asked my department officials to make sure that all people, all key stakeholders, including the opposition, have an opportunity to see and to discuss the information before the report gets tabled.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. I understand in the legislation the minister will have the responsibility to appoint the first CEO of the Health PEI model. Is that correct, minister?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Could I ask the Leader of the Opposition to repeat the question? I had trouble hearing it.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Absolutely. To the health minister. I understand that the legislation that you're bringing forward is

going to enable the minister to appoint the first CEO. My question: Is that accurate?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

It would be a little premature for me to give details on the report before it gets tabled in the House and before we provide briefings to the opposition and to the media and general public. But I do want to reassure the Leader of the Opposition that having an opportunity to look at the report and feel that it's keeping the best interest of all Islanders in mind, particularly the health care workers that work in our system and provide great care on a daily basis.

So I look forward to tabling the legislation and bringing the report forward to the public.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Perhaps to the health minister a bit of advice. Advertise and go for the best competition.

Health PEI and Auditor General

My next question to the health minister. Mr.

Minster, this fall we continue to see the important role of the Auditor General. My question: Will Health PEI be held accountable to the Auditor General's office when it is brought in?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

As the Leader of the Opposition will see, once the report is tabled and the legislation is brought forward, accountability will be an underlying premise of the whole structure. I certainly, as the minister, feel very strongly that we need to continue to build accountability frameworks, particularly with a government department that carries a large provincial portion of the budget.

I'll certainly reassure the leader and I've been reassured by the report and the legislation that accountability will be our number one priority.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: In terms of accountability with Health PEI, will the Office of the Auditor General be responsible to go in and audit health PEI?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The role of the Auditor General in all government departments plays an integral role in holding government departments accountable, particularly with the use of public money. I feel that he will continue to do the great work that he's always been doing in all departments as he gives direction to us as ministers in our government about how we handle public money.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I remember back in 1994-1995 the Auditor General to (Indistinct) then-government said that: I believe it was never government's intent to put the entirety representing approximately 40% of the full provincial budget outside the Auditor General.

When you set up an agency the Auditor General doesn't have accountability, so are you going to correct that in the legislation before you bring it to the floor of the House?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

As I indicated, it would be a little premature to speak to the legislation or to the report. But I will reassure all members of the Legislative Assembly that this work has been ongoing and there will be a high level of accountability. I, as the minister, believe strongly in regards to accountability when we're dealing with public funds. So I'll make sure that we'll continue to have that discussion as we move forward.

The challenge for our government is to look at building an integrated sustainable system. There are tremendous challenges in health care, not only in this province, but all across the country. If we look at providing good quality health care in the future, these tough decisions have to be made.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: (Indistinct) it's a tough decision. If you've been working on this legislation you've been working on it for at least eight months. I'm sure it'd be quite familiar. Are you going to take a look at accountability with the relationship between arm's-length agency and the Auditor General? Are you going to do that?

Mr. Bagnall: He wouldn't have seen it yet.

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The legislation will be tabled in the near future, the report will be tabled, and as I reassured the Leader of the Opposition, there will be a high level of accountability and reporting mechanisms to the government and to this House.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Health PEI business plan

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

To the health minister. Mr. Minister, would you please table the business plan that you use to establish Health PEI? Would you table this business plan to the House tomorrow?

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

Mr. Bagnall: He hasn't seen it yet.

Mr. Sheridan: (Indistinct) you.

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The priorities have been set to create the legislation. Health PEI hasn't been formally created. That report will be tabled. One of the priorities in creating health PEI will be a very in-depth business plan as we move forward, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the

Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Minister, I'll have to ask you that again. Do you mean to tell the general public that you're creating this Health PEI for a second time and you don't have a business plan to go with that?

Mr. Bagnall: Yeah, that's exactly what he told you.

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The work that's been done by the advisory council and the tremendous commitment they made - and I must add, it was a tremendous report. We had individuals, strong community engagement, we had lay people, professionals that worked hard across this province and went out on a very extensive thorough evaluation of an interviewing process and presentations to look at the present governance structure.

I'd like to remind the Leader of the Opposition that presently we exist in the only governance model that exists in Canada. We as government feel that we need to look at separating the operational framework of health care from outside the department to look at building a more efficient health care system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Opposition.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Caught you. Hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

Health PEI and unions

Sergeant-at-Arms, I would ask you to take the phone from the hon. member and he can retrieve it at the end of the session.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

To the health minister. You forgot to mention one group. Were the unions involved in that process, too?

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the health minister. I understand from CUPE and UPSE they were not consulted and they're quite disappointed.

There was an opportunity, as the advisory council that went out and consulted with Islanders over a period of time. One thing I do want to remind the Leader of the Opposition, and I'll clarify it for the House. This is not about job loss, this is not about cost savings, this is about creating and separating the operational arm of health care from the Department of Health.

Health PEI and cost benefit analysis

But the next question that I have is lots of hard work and dedication goes into the health system, especially from front line health workers, and they're quite tired of being reformed once again.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

So my question to the health minister: If you haven't done a business plan, at least have you done a cost benefit analysis before you made this decision?

[A cell phone rang]

Speaker: Whose telephone is ringing?

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

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm looking forward to tabling the report, bringing the legislation forward to this House, for more continued discussion and

Speaker: Sorry, hon. Leader of the

debate. I look forward to media briefings, looking forward to briefings for the Leader of the Opposition, which I've committed to doing. Through that process we'll continue to debate and discuss the idea of Health PEI.

Once again I want to remind Islanders, I want to remind the Leader of the Opposition, this is not about job loss, this is not a cost saving procedure. This is the recommendation by an independent objective advisory council from Islanders who went out and listened to and did research and are giving best advice for the governance direction for the future of Health Prince Edward Island here in this province. I look forward to that debate and that discussion as we move forward in the House.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Health PEI and deficits

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We'll move out of the governance area and perhaps to an area that's a little bit more familiar with the health minister, operational.

My question to the health minister. When Health PEI runs into deficits, who's going to cover the cost of that?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health,

Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

When I bring the legislation forward - obviously the question that she poses is a good question - and certainly we'll continue to discuss and debate that. The legislation - and I must say that the work that was done by my department officials and the advisory council was strong, and the questions that are being asked will continue to be answered as we table the report and bring the legislation forward to officially move the Health PEI concept forward.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Health PEI matters

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the health minister. Here's a few more good questions you may want to ask. One: Who's the employer going to be?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The employer will be Health PEI. They'll have a budget, an envelope budget that will be given to them with frameworks and

accountability around that. We'll have a structure, we'll have a CEO, we'll have a board which will be accountable for the operational arm of Health PEI.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

In regards to the staff of Health PEI, they were ousted from the civil service the last time. Is that going to happen again?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

The discussion with unions, there will be very little confusion, I guess, for lack of better descriptors in respect to the transition. That's certainly discussion, and information is in the report and is in the legislation, and as we move forward and table the legislation and bring the report forward we'll look forward to not only educating the Leader of the Opposition but all members of the House in respect to the information and the work that will move forward in the operational separation from the department to create Health PEI.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. This morning I met a nurse that works in the front line. Her question to me is: How is it going to impact her pensions when the move takes place? Could you answer that, please?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

There'll be minimal interruption and there'll be no impact on pensions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Health PEI and cost benefit analysis (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Is that completed in the cost benefit analysis? Is that detail in there to ensure that? To the minister.

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

As I indicated on a couple of occasions, that will be indicated in the report, in the legislation. Very pleased with the work that

was done to date. Once we get an opportunity to sort of put the information on the table and clarify the legislation and to debate the legislation, and also the function and role of Health PEI,, it'll certainly create more of an awareness about the direction we're going in as we move towards an integrated sustainable health care system for Islanders into the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the health minister. Many front line workers see Health PEI as maybe an opportunity of government to look and move towards privatization, so it may actually impact on their pension.

Health PEI and ownership of hospitals and manors

But we'll go to a different direction. Health minister, under health, there are hospitals and manors under your jurisdiction as part of the infrastructure. In the new model, who's going to own these facilities?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The only impact (Indistinct) Health PEI will

be overseeing all the operational functions of health care facilities across the province of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: So, Madam Speaker, to the health minister.

You're saying that the hospitals and the manors are going to stay under the jurisdiction of government? And the new model is only going to worry about - part of operations are your buildings. Explain that. That's an interesting concept.

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

There will be no change in ownership. Once again, the operational function and the service delivery will be under the mandate of Health PEI.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: A simple question, then, to the Minister of Health. If the heating system blows up at Prince Edward Home - and that could be an operational cost in your budget to have repaired - will Health PEI say: Oops, transportation and public health minister,

would you please come and repair? Or will that be covered in the scope of Health PEI?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

That's an operational issue, just like if the furnace blows up at the Prince Edward Home tomorrow. They'll call Bevan Brothers who have the service contract to repair. So that'll be the responsibility on the operational side under Health PEI, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, back to the health minister, then.

Health Prince Edward Island, in the legislation, is it going to be an arm's-length agency? Because if it is you're not able to do that.

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As I indicated, as I bring the legislation forward, I'm not prepared today to walk through all the legislation that we will be bringing forward in the near future, and I'm not prepared to speak to the report before it gets officially tabled here in the Legislative Assembly.

But I want to reassure all Members of the Legislative Assembly that we are moving forward in a progressive model that has the interest of the front line workers in place, and most importantly, to the services that we provide to all Islanders.

There will be accountability frameworks and reporting mechanisms to this House in that legislation, and there will be a very transparent process to keep the public aware of the functions and operations of Health PEI.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Health PEI and liability insurance

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, to the health minister.

What about liability insurance on procedures and staff once you're outside government and an arm's-length agency. Who's going to cover those costs?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Once again, that responsibility will fall under the operational side of Health PEI. The Leader of the Opposition is bringing these questions forward knowing full well that we will be tabling the legislation and

bringing the report forward. That information will come public. I know there's been a tremendous amount of work to bring this legislation forward, and a lot of discussion, as we move forward in the creation of Health PEI.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

Upgrade to Hardy Road

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

First of all, I'd like to offer my apologies to the House for my phone ringing there.

My question is to the hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

I believe that the bridge in Kildare is scheduled to be replaced in 2010. It's fairly obvious that the Hardy Road will be used as a detour. The Hardy Road has a portion that is unpaved now. My question is: Will there be funding available through the capital construction budget to carry out upgrades to the unpaved portion of the Hardy Road?

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

Mr. MacKinley: Good question. The question is that bridge is - and next year we're going to do it. We got it in our capital budget. I would imagine the money's there,

providing the House votes it through.

We're giving you a \$4 million bridge, we're putting in there. It's a lot of money. I can look over there at the member sitting beside you. I think we spent about \$3.5 million out on his highway this year, along with everything else. The road is still passable. The other road, even though it's clay, people have driven on clay roads for years, and we'll make sure that the road continues to be passable.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

Mr. Murphy: Supplementary to the same minister.

This road is part of the North Cape Coastal Drive. There's a provincial park on the other side of the bridge on this road, and there's going to be a large increase in traffic on it. So do you think that the provisions are going to be made to accommodate the increased flow of traffic?

Mr. MacKinley: We will make sure -

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

Mr. Murphy: Thank you very much

Mr. MacKinley: I mean, we've got to face the facts that there's nothing been done up west for the last 10 year. I've been working awful hard, along with the members from up west and the Cabinet here, to get some of these roads paved.

We can only do so much. It's like the bypass

around Charlottetown. I consider it something like going to get a tooth out or something, short-term pain for long-term gain.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. MacKinley: So once that bridge is in, that \$4 million bridge, people will be able to flock up there in droves.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

DNR form at Community Hospital

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question is to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors. At Community Hospital in O'Leary physicians had implemented a do not resuscitate form, and were getting all patients who were admitted to acute care to sign this form before they would be admitted. I have been advocating for changes to this practice since its inception.

Can the minister inform this House of what measures have been put in place to eliminate the DNR form in O'Leary?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Member from O'Leary-Inverness and I

have discussed this issue at length over the last number of months, and certainly want to clarify that the position on the DNR is now not part of the admission criteria.

Part of these discussions, when clinicians make decisions, the consultations have to take place with site officials, administrators. A number of discussions have taken place. So the DNR is now not part of the admission criteria at the O'Leary Community Hospital.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Definition of acute care services at Community Hospital

Mr. Henderson: Supplementary, Madam Speaker, to the same minister.

As there has been confusion to the definition of acute care services in O'Leary, can the minister update the House of what acute care services will be provided at the Community Hospital in O'Leary, under this new model?

Speaker: Hon. member, that does not relate to your original question.

Thank you.

Mr. Henderson: It doesn't?

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Surplus schools

Mr. M. Currie: Thank you. Madam Speaker, a question for the minister of education.

A little over two months ago the eastern school board declared surplus eight schools that your government had closed. I'm just wondering if you have transferred them over to Department of Transportation and Public Works.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, and Attorney General.

Mr. Greenan: Madam Speaker, when schools are declared surplus that is the process that is followed.

We have not completed that process, but it is in the queue and it'll be done in due time.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: Maybe, Madam Speaker, the minister can advise us what his plans are for those eight surplus schools that you closed?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, and Attorney General.

Mr. Greenan: Madam Speaker, those schools will be - when we make that decision that they are surplus, they will be turned over to the Department of

Transportation and Public Works for disposal.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm looking at a press release that was put out by the eastern school board indicating that they wanted to close these schools because they wanted to save money, over a million dollars. So I'm just wondering who's picking up the tab now for the furnace oil, the lights, everything else. Is that your department or the eastern school board or the minister of transportation?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, and Attorney General.

Mr. Greenan: Madam Speaker, in response to the member's question, until the decision is made, the lights and the oil to heat the vacant buildings, if indeed they are vacant, is the responsibility of the Eastern School District.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I don't know why they would want to be saddled with that expense because they already deemed them surplus.

So are you going to go in and pick up the tab for all these added expenses? Because they

said they wanted to close them to save a million dollars and that was their response.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, and Attorney General.

Mr. Greenan: As I had already indicated, these schools are vacant, or there could be someone in them, and they are still in the hands of the Eastern School District.

Until we have made our decision about their disposal, they will continue to be responsible for the costs.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

A question for the hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works. When you receive these schools are you going to schedule them for demolition?

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

Mr. MacKinley: No.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, maybe the minister of transportation could be a little more clear and let Islanders know what his

intentions are with these eight vacant facilities that were closed by this government.

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

Mr. MacKinley: Our intentions are to work with the communities and see if any of the communities want these schools for their communities, and that's where we'll be, working with the communities. Then, if nobody in the community wants it, then we'll look at something else.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I'm glad to hear that the minister wants to work with the communities now.

Maybe they'll go out and talk to the communities. The Premier nor the minister of education wouldn't go to any of the public meetings, but the minister of transportation will.

Georgetown legal fees

So if you're going to work with the communities, and that's what your government is all about, maybe you'll now forgive the \$70,000 legal fees the town of Georgetown had to endure to save their school, if you're all about saving communities.

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

Mr. MacKinley: That's not - I mean, I

build roads, look after buildings. You've got to check with the school board on that one.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, he does sit at Cabinet and he does have a lot of input.

I'm just wondering. He just finished saying he was all about meeting with the communities and trying to find a solution for them. I'm trying to find a solution for Georgetown that had to endure a lot of expense to save their school. None of you guys would go to the meetings that you were invited to. I believe it's a double standard. Is that what's being done here, that you'll write off money for FoodTrust, for your relatives, and then you won't do that for a community out in rural PEI? Here we go, here we go.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The hon. member knows -

Mr. M. Currie: (Indistinct) rural PEI (Indistinct).

Premier Ghiz: - that for a long time education in this province has been ignored. It was our government that recognized that there were declining enrollments, that there were students in this province that weren't getting access to whether or not it was bands, gyms, arts programs, and what we want to do is make our entire province stronger.

That's why we allowed the Eastern School District to go ahead with their closures. We think that in the long run it's going to be better off for our school system, as I know that now there are a lot of kids that are very happy in the new schools that they're attending.

As the minister indicated, we will be working with the communities to try and find the best possible use for these buildings. In relation to a decision that the town of Georgetown made, we're being as compassionate as possible there, but at the end of the day it was the town of Georgetown that chose to go down this road. I believe that they got rid of their former mayor who is now, perhaps, about to be the leader of the opposition party there soon enough in the House. Perhaps he could have a talk with him.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, you just saw there what the Premier thinks of rural PEI and dealing with communities, certainly a double standard.

Re-zoning re: schools

A question for the minister of education. In the school organization plan that was tabled, you followed through with closing a number of schools and reorganizing some of it, but also there was one very important part - the other one was bringing in kindergarten - the other one was re-zoning. Can you tell me if you're going to implement re-zoning before

kindergarten's brought in?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, and Attorney General.

Mr. M. Currie: Of remaining schools.

Mr. Greenan: Madam Speaker, re-zoning is the responsibility of each school district, school board, in the province, and it's their mandate, and they will initiate that when they see the timely time to do that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, it's very nice to see the minister and the Premier shift blame from one side of the room to the other here.

Because it's your report. You paid Accent Group \$96,000 for this report and then you lay the blame at the eastern school board when they close schools and - but the reorganization, it's your plan, the re-zoning. Are you going to follow through with the re-zoning of the remaining schools before the start of the school year next year?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Member from Georgetown-St. Peters might not respect the independence of different organizations in the province, but we do. There's a process that has been in

place here for many years, where it's up to the Eastern School District, or western school district, or French district to decide on school closures, and also with regards to re-zoning.

Our government actually allowed the school boards to do their work without interfering, like the previous government would do, by announcing schools in the middle of an election campaign that weren't even on the school organization list. Or perhaps by taking an independent report that comes with regards to electoral boundaries and throwing that out the door and hired their own consultant to do it.

Our government's going to continue to respect the processes and make sure that we offer the best possible education to each and every child in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

School construction

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I'm glad the Premier brought up the new school, because I believe in the last election you and the member from Stratford were against the new school being built in Stratford.

An Hon. Member: Process.

Mr. M. Currie: I have a question for the minister of education. Minister I see in the picture - that's yourself and an MLA and the chair of the eastern school board. I'm just wondering why you wouldn't have the

courtesy to invite the mayor and the town councillors from Stratford with an announcement like this.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

It's unfortunate that there's short-term memory loss on the other side of this House from the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters. He talked about during the previous election, and that was the previous government again circumventing the process of the Eastern School District and going ahead and promising to build a junior high in the Stratford area.

As the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters knows, our government committed to putting kindergarten in the school system, and the Eastern School District was allowed to go out and do their work. The recommendation they made was for a new K-3 school in the Stratford area, and our government is very happy that we're able to provide the funding for that great school to be built.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm glad the Premier brought up the issue of circumventing process because I believe you're going to table a capital budget here in a day or two. So I'm wondering, to the minister of education, under the *School Act*, - the eastern school board - if you're going

to lay blame on the foot of anybody now, now is the time to do it - did they approve the construction of new schools before it was sent to Cabinet? Under the *School Act* they're supposed to do that, so did you get that?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, and Attorney General.

Mr. Greenan: I'd perhaps ask the member to restate his question because I'm not quite sure - is he asking about the projects that may come forward in the capital budget he's referring to, or is he talking specifically about the announcement of Glen Stewart and Westwood?

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We saw where you announced a school. We have a *School Act* that you're responsible for, and the Premier talked about circumventing process. I'm asking you, in the capital budget that's going to be tabled tomorrow, did the eastern school board, under this act, approve new construction so before it goes to the capital budget? Under the act, you're supposed to do that. Did you do that?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. M. Currie: Of course you did. Never done a thing.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education

and Early Childhood Development, and Attorney General.

Mr. Greenan: Madam Speaker, we have the kindergarten system moving from its current place in Island communities into the public education system.

This is the last province in the country to have publicly funded kindergarten in their schools.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Greenan: Our government had made the decision and has made the decision, and that will happen in September 2010. In order for it to happen, Madam Speaker, we need space in schools to house these children, and those two schools that the hon. member referred to did not have the space, and our government acted, and they will have space when they get there in September 2010.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, final question.

Mr. M. Currie: That's exactly what I was trying to find out from you, minister. I'm asking if you're saying in one breath here that the eastern school board is responsible for closing the schools - and not you, because you never went to the meetings - now I'm asking you if you're going to build new schools. Did they approve and ask them expenditures to go to Cabinet for capital budget? Did you do that? Follow your own act.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

No one here is trying to pass the blame on to anyone else. I'll be the first person to admit, when our government came to power we thought for too long in this province education was being overlooked. Politics was being put before education because the school boards in this province were not allowed to do the work that they rightfully should be doing, so we allowed them to go out and do that work.

They made the recommendations on those school closures, and at the end of the day, guess who makes the decision? Executive Council makes the decision to close down those schools based on a recommendation from the Eastern School District. I'm not going to apologize for doing what's right in this province for the children to that member or anyone else.

We made the best possible decision for the future of this province. We're very excited that kindergarten is going into the school system, that we're providing the necessary infrastructure and the necessary funds so that our children in this province can compete with anyone else in this world.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]