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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2009

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

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

House physicians in hospitals

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

I'm responding to a questions asked by the Leader of the Opposition regarding which hospitals on Prince Edward Island have house physicians. The answer is two. Dr. Grimes is the house physician at Community Hospital in O'Leary and the Margaret Stewart Ellis Home, and he started that position over a month ago. Dr. Roy Montgomery will assume house physician responsibilities at Stewart Memorial Hospital in Tyne Valley. So I'll table that (Indistinct).

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Questions by Members

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

Aliant contract for high-speed Internet

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

A question for the minister of innovation. Would you table in the Legislature a copy of the untendered contract for Aliant for high-speed Internet for all of Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation

and Advanced Learning.

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

It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the great work of this company here on Prince Edward Island, a company that employs 350 Islanders.

I had a chance to review a document from 1997. It was a press release, I believe, issued by the former premier, Pat Binns. It stated that the government of the day, the Conservative government, were poised to make PEI Canada's smartest province by having broadband right across the province. Yet it took an election, a new government, a willingness to work with an Island company, and a lot of hard work, to allow that to actually come to fruition.

In 2008 this government was very pleased to partner with Bell Aliant in this province to bring rural broadband to Islanders right across from end to end.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Question to the minister of innovation. I know that you like to trumpet that you're an open and transparent government, but will you please table that untendered contract with Aliant for high-speed Internet to rural

Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

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

I'm pretty sure perhaps that the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters would be aware that there is no contract for high-speed Internet in the province. This is an initiative that's taken on by Bell Aliant. It is their \$8.2 million investment. Not the investment of taxpayers on PEI.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: A year ago, Madam Speaker, the minister of innovation and his government signed a contract and they were all in the picture, that they have an agreement for high-speed Internet.

It says that they will have that service in place by the end of this year. Minister, are you going to fulfill your promise to Islanders that they will have high-speed Internet in place by the end of this year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

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

Again, when we began to work with Aliant -

I guess actually prior to the election in 2007 it became well aware to me by some companies working in my constituency, a rural constituency, that they were at a distinct disadvantage in this province because they didn't have access to high-speed Internet. It meant that they couldn't be competitive in certain areas.

This government responded to that and were very pleased to work with Aliant. When this initiative began, there were 21,000 homes in this province that did not have access to high-speed Internet. I believe that as of today that's somewhere in the neighbourhood of 1,200 homes, and that Bell Aliant has committed to work with the isolated areas of the province to make sure everyone has access to high-speed Internet.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I think what the minister is actually saying is that a lot of people shifted over from dial up to high-speed, that they're already in place.

But I'm wondering if the minister of innovation, did you have any discussions with Aliant, and are you satisfied with the coverage that they're providing to all Islanders now with their high-speed Internet hook up?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Campbell: Yes, Madam Speaker, I did have the opportunity to meet with Aliant.

Of course, Aliant are great partners in this

province, not only in delivering phone and high-speed Internet service, but I mean great corporate citizens and great partners for a lot of events in this province.

You travel from end to end of this province and you will see that Bell Aliant is a great company that has a great presence and invests a lot. Not only in their own business but in helping charities and organizations right across this province. They're tremendous corporate citizens. We're very pleased that they've chosen to make this \$8.2 million investment into rural broadband in Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I think you just laid off 13 people in the last week.

Minister, I've been receiving calls from Islanders who are still waiting for their high-speed Internet connection. Do you have any concerns with Aliant with their coverage now that is supposed to be completed by the end of December?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

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

As I indicated, we've gone from 21,000 homes without access to high-speed Internet in this province to 1,200 homes. Bell Aliant has assured us that they are continuing and that they will work to address all the isolated areas of this province. I have full confidence in their ability to provide this service and I have the greatest respect for how this company operates on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I understand from a lot of calls we're receiving that Aliant is walking away from a large number of areas, that they already have their switches in place and they're not providing service.

Are you aware of these incidents?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, I have had the opportunity to talk to senior management people at Aliant as recently as last week. I think that the statement by the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters that Aliant is walking away from parts of Prince Edward Island, I think it's really misleading this House here today.

It's unfortunate that he chooses to bring this type of criticism against this great company

that employs 350 people in this province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I have a couple of maps here that clearly indicate, if you go to their web site and punch in a civic number, it shows that there is a large number of people, probably thousands of people, that are not getting their high-speed Internet connections.

I'm wondering if you're going to hold Aliant true to the promise your government made that everybody is going to have high-speed Internet connection by the end of this year. Well, we'd like to see the contract.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

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

Bell Aliant clearly recognizes that perhaps the web site isn't as up to date as it should be. I guess that may be a reflection that they're actually out on the ground, around Prince Edward Island, bringing broadband from one end of this province to the other.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, the map I

have is for the minister's riding, and it shows that over half of your riding does not have internet connection on the north side from around Hermanville clear around to East Point or even further.

So you're the minister of innovation. This is your own riding. Are you getting any calls from people that are concerned, and businesses, in your area that they do not have high-speed Internet connection?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

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

Yes, I have had some calls from constituents wondering when they will have high-speed Internet and I've worked with Aliant to address those concerns.

Perhaps the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters could leave the map behind. Perhaps he could come out with me for a drive in my constituency some day and I can show him where those areas actually are, since he was part of a government that neglected that part of the province for 11 long, hard, cold years.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I also have another map here for the Pownal area which also shows that there's a large area

that is not being covered by Aliant high-speed Internet.

Are you aware of that also? You said they were getting good coverage. Well, show us.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Campbell: As I indicated, Madam Speaker, we are well aware that there are areas of Prince Edward Island that currently are not being serviced by high-speed Internet.

We have the commitment from Bell Aliant that they are working to address those areas of Prince Edward Island and that they remain firm in their commitment to bring high-speed Internet to all parts of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

Last year when the Premier and his government made this announcement for full coverage by the end of December this year, there were a lot of tourist operators that believed them and put their ad in the tourist guides that they were going to have high-speed Internet by last summer.

That was quite an embarrassment for a lot of the tourist operators because that wasn't fulfilled by this untendered deal that you did with Aliant. So are you going to correct that

this year so these tourist operators will not go through that embarrassing situation again this year?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

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

Perhaps the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters is confused by the commitment made by his government back in 1997, a commitment that they completely abandoned back in 1997.

An Hon. Member: Shame, shame!

Mr. Campbell: This Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, a former minister of development and technology, was interested in investing taxpayers' dollars in a Quebec company while this government is pleased to partner with Bell Aliant so that private sector dollars are invested in this province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I was unaware that Bell Aliant was an Island company, I believe they're out of Toronto.

A question for the minister of innovation. So when these tourist operators call, what are we going to tell them on your behalf? They certainly don't trust the promise that your government made in regards to high-speed Internet connections.

So are you going to have a hookup by next summer? Can they put their ad in this fall for the tourist guide? Or will it be two years, or five years or whatever?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

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

I think what we can tell any operators or any homeowners in this province is that we have worked with Bell Aliant to take those numbers from 21,000 down to 1,200. We will continue to work together to provide coverage right across this province.

Again, here it is, the press release from 1997 from the former government talking about making PEI Canada's smartest province. Well, we saw how far that got us. Again, pleased to be part of a government that works with a company that employs 350 Islanders in this province and is bringing this very vital service from one end of this province to the other.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Question for the minister of innovation. Are you prepared now, are you going to let Aliant walk away from their contractual obligations in a commitment that was made

last year by the Premier and your government? Are you going to hold them to task?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Campbell: Absolutely, Madam Speaker.

As I indicated to the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters previously, there's no contractual agreement because there is not public money at risk here. Bell Aliant has made a commitment to this province and invested \$8.2 million to deliver this valuable service to the province and we're very pleased to have a great relationship with this company. We will continue to foster that relationship and work together to do good things for the people of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, there was a contractual agreement because the Premier and them did a backroom deal untendered for a phone service in excess of five years.

I'm wondering, minister: Are you prepared to offer a contract to other service providers now that Aliant has failed in their obligations to deliver high-speed Internet to rural PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much,

Madam Speaker.

It's unfortunate, or perhaps it does make sense, that the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters finds it hard to believe that government can actually go out and do good deals with the private sector. We know what his government did. They threw dollar after dollar after millions of dollars away. What our government did was we took a contract that had to be renewed. It's been renewed in this province, and it was renewed by the previous government, three times, the exact same way that we did the exact same deal.

But what did we do for Island taxpayers? We did two extra special things. One, we went out and we reduced down the rate that Island taxpayers were paying for government's phones. The second thing we did was we were able to make sure that we got a commitment from Bell Aliant to deliver high-speed Internet all over Prince Edward Island.

That's what you call a good deal. Perhaps the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters should take a lesson from it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, there's your Premier's open and transparent, and does million dollar deals with a handshake.

I'm sure that's good advice for our taxpayers' money.

Minister, are you prepared to hold Aliant to

their agreement that you had that they're going to provide this, or are you prepared to work with other service providers, EastLink, Ruranet, and offer them some sort of an open process, maybe a tender if you'd think of it, to do this final mile hookup for high-speed Internet?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Perhaps if the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters paid attention to what the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning was saying he would know that Bell Aliant is out doing this on their own. We think it's great that we have a company here on Prince Edward Island that employs upwards of 350 people, is a large corporate donor to a lot of charities across Prince Edward Island, and they've taken the initiative to go out and make sure that all Islanders are hooked up to high-speed Internet.

We're going to continue to go out and work with Aliant to make sure that happens. I know that every time that I get to run in to Islanders, whether or not it's out in the Minister of Tourism's district and the minister of fisheries district, all over Prince Edward Island people come up to me on a daily basis and say: We just got hooked up, thank you very much, it's a wonderful thing.

I'll be honest with you. I say: It's not be who hooked you up, it's Bell Aliant. They're doing it on their own. We were just lucky that we were able to take a contract with the government and provide a little bit of incentive, unlike the former government

that just gave everything away, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, it's not hard to see that the Premier was hoodwinked by Aliant, but I don't expect that of the minister of innovation.

So, minister, would you stand up now and say that you're going to hold Aliant to their contractual obligations to deliver high-speed Internet to all parts of PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Campbell: Madam Speaker, the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters talks about obligations that have not been fulfilled.

I would remind the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters that today is December 2nd, 2009 and we will continue to work with Bell Aliant. I will continue to work with my constituents, as will everyone else in this government, to identify areas where we can communicate that information with Bell Aliant and work together to bring high-speed Internet to every home in this province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from

Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, question to the minister of innovation.

With those many thousands of people now that are not connected and with all the switches in place and those people cannot get that last mile connection - especially in your own district there's a lot of people not connected - will you go to an open tender now and allow the other service providers who were shuffled out the first time to see if they can give us that final mile? Open tender.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning.

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

As I indicated, this is an initiative taken on by Bell Aliant. It's not an initiative taken on by the Government of Prince Edward Island. This company has made an \$8.2 million investment in bringing rural broadband to Prince Edward Island.

If there are companies out there who think they can assist or who think they can add, it's a free country. If they have something that they would like to sit down and discuss with Bell Aliant, I'm sure Bell Aliant would be receptive to that. Can't speak for the company, but our goal is to have rural high-speed broadband to every home in this province and that is a goal that we will achieve.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

It's clear this backroom deal was - there's no contract, I guess, or they won't share it with Islanders, but it is disappointing.

C&D site in Hazelbrook (further)

Question for the minister of environment. Minister, you said that you were going to table a tri-party agreement that was made between the residents of Hazelbrook, your department, and also the operator of the C&D site. Did you bring that tri-party agreement back to table in the House?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, there is a letter or a part of the permit conditions that is gone to the operator of that facility that outlines the conditions of that.

If I haven't brought it back yet, it'll be here on the desk this afternoon.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, that's not quite what you said on November 18th.

You said that there was an agreement and that you'd table that tri-party agreement where there are strict guidelines for the

company to follow and that the residents and the government were party to this agreement. I'm wondering why you do not want to table that agreement when you always indicate you're an open and transparent government.

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, I just told the member I'll just pin my people and it will be here by the end of today.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Witnesses at PAC meetings

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Provincial Treasurer often likes to talk about open and accountable government. Just last week he spoke about the Public Accounts blue books being out early. My first question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, do you support bringing witnesses to Public Accounts, all witnesses, Cabinet Ministers and any witness? Do you support that?

Speaker: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

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

Yes, we brought out that blue book just over a week ago now bringing in a deficit that was over \$14 million lower than expectations on budget. We're very proud that it's out two months earlier than it has ever been done in the history of Prince

Edward Island. That's the openness and transparency of the Department of Provincial Treasury and I'm very proud and honoured to work with these individuals that are in place there.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: It's great to support open and accountable government. Do you support having all witnesses at Public Accounts? Public Accounts in the highest committee of government to hold government accountable. Do you support having all witnesses brought before this? Do you, Mr. Treasurer?

Speaker: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

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

Speaking of accountable and transparent committees, I believe that Public Accounts committee, very much like every other committee that is struck here in the Legislative Assembly, plays a huge role in government, and I have to take my hat off to the role that each and every one of these people play, and on aligning, making sure that government is held accountable to all that they do.

I have to say that watching from afar on what has gone through Public Accounts in the last number of months, every one of those members of that Public Accounts

should be thanked for the public service that they do achieve inside that very important Legislative Assembly piece of business.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: To the Provincial Treasurer. Do you support having at Public Accounts witnesses, all witnesses, including Cabinet Ministers, bureaucrats, etc.? To the treasurer, do you support that?

Speaker: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

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

As I spoke about a little bit earlier, every one of the committees right across government that are appointed here in the Legislative Assembly play a very key and important role, not just Public Accounts. I think that the work that is done in each and every one of these committees looks at all of the details that are needed there and who should appear before these committees, and make very good decisions at that board committee level. I would never question any of those boards' decisions, at this point. They do a tremendous job and I just take my hat off to them.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

That's really disappointing that the Provincial Treasurer does not support having a Public Accounts committee that can have witnesses.

To the education minister. Mr. Minister, often we hear that you like open and accountable government. You allowed experts at the eastern school board to actually make lots of decisions around school closures. My question to you: Do you support having witnesses, other than Cabinet ministers, appear before Public Accounts? Do you, Mr. Minister?

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

Mr. Greenan: Madam Speaker, I would certainly support any decision made by the committee.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: To the education minister: If there's a Cabinet shuffle comes and you end up that you're on Public Accounts, will you support bringing witness - all witnesses - to Public Accounts? Will you do that?

An Hon. Member: There's going to be a shuffle over here.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education

and Early Childhood Development, and Attorney General.

Mr. Greenan: Madam Speaker, if I were on that committee, I would operate as any other committee member would.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, the general public really would love -

Mr. Bagnall: Obviously no.

Leader of the Opposition: - to have a Public Accounts committee that is effective and accountable. So it's obviously another no.

My next question is to the Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development. This minister also talks about open and transparent and accountable government. This summer he even was happy that he had an online survey to get information back from rural PEI.

My question to the Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development: Do you support bringing witnesses, other than Cabinet ministers, to Public Accounts? Do you support that, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. -

Leader of the Opposition: Yes or no?

Sorry.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, if I was on the committee, I would do like my hon. colleague here and support what the initiative is of the committee.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Back to your same minister. So are you saying, Mr. Minister, that if the committee tells you to do something that's against the principles of open and accountable government that you will follow suit? Is that what you're telling the general public?

Mr. Bagnall: Yes, exactly what he's telling them.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Bagnall: Exactly what he's telling them.

Mr. LeClair: No, Madam Speaker.

That's not what I'm telling the general public. I'm saying that I would - when and if I got on the committee, I would see what the issues were and make my decision then.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. To the same minister. Mr. Minister, when you're in government the Premier and Cabinet ministers have to often speak together. In Public Accounts we're all MLAs. Do you support having witnesses at Public Accounts, to do our job in Public Accounts? Do you support that Mr. Minister - rural development?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Mr. Bagnall: No, he doesn't.

Mr. LeClair: Madam Speaker, like I said before, I would have to wait till I got on the committee and saw what the issues were and make up my mind at that time.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, another disappointment.

We're talking and speaking about demonstrating accountability. We often hear those words in this Legislature, we just never see the demonstration. To the Minister of Communities, Cultural Affairs and Labour, often this minister talks about demonstrating open and accountable government -

Mr. Bagnall: She hides.

Leader of the Opposition: For example, there's a committee that's going to review the two-tiered minimum wage.

My question to you, Madam Minister: Are

you supporting having witnesses - all witness - at Public Accounts? Do you support that?

Mr. Bagnall: No she doesn't.

Speaker: The hon. -

Mr. Bagnall: She hides.

Speaker: Hon. member, would you let the minister answer the question?

The hon. Minister of Communities, Cultural Affairs and Labour.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We've had this question asked two or three times, and, hon. Leader of the Opposition, I would support the work of the committee, and you work as a team as a committee.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm going to refer this question back to the same minister. Again, I remind - this is the government that campaigned on open, transparent, and accountable government. Public Accounts is to hold government accountable. To do the job, do you support having witnesses called - all witnesses - to Public Accounts? Do you support that, Madam Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Communities, Cultural Affairs and Labour.

Ms. Bertram: Madam Speaker, as has previously been stated, it's up to that committee's work and the committee's decision, and I truly believe that our government is truly transparent and working for the people of Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, that's another big disappointment.

Mr. Bagnall: Yeah.

Leader of the Opposition: People elect us to hold and do our job to the best of our ability. This is about accountability. Public Accounts, in order to be effective, has to have witnesses.

To the Minister of Tourism. She often talks about demonstrating open and accountable government. In fact, this week she talked about the \$500,000 going to the Olympic Games. My question to the Minister of Tourism: Do you support bringing witnesses - all witnesses - in front of Public Accounts in order for us to do our job? Do you support that, Madam Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism.

Ms. Docherty: Madam Speaker, I might want to save the hon. Leader of the Opposition some time from going to my remaining colleagues who sit in Cabinet, and state the fact that as a committee member you work as a team, you answer questions accordingly that are posed to you,

and you make decisions as a team. You don't ask individuals like us to do this, you support each other. I support whatever a committee wants to do. I think all of my Cabinet colleagues prior to me answering have answered that question, Madam Speaker.

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

Physiotherapy services in O'Leary

Mr. Henderson: Madam Speaker, my question is for the hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Yesterday in this Legislature, and during a recent meeting in O'Leary, a comment was made regarding physiotherapy services. Can the minister inform this House, and reassure the residents of O'Leary-Inverness what physiotherapy services are in place in O'Leary?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

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

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

I appreciate the concern from the Member from O'Leary-Inverness in respect to physio services. Our government and our department takes the responsibility of physio services in this province very seriously. It was just recently identified that a staff member who was a physiotherapist has changed his career, and we're committed to look at creative ways to continue to provide

that service to individuals in West Prince.

We know the environment to recruit physiotherapists into this province is very competitive, just like other jurisdictions, but we'll continue to work hard through the Office of Recruitment and Retention, to look at creative ways to attract physiotherapists to the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Does the minister have any long-term future plans for expanded physiotherapy services at Community Hospital?

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

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

As I indicated in the first part of the question, the challenge to recruit allied health professionals is very similar to other jurisdictions in the country, and the challenge for our department is to find creative solutions to these challenges to provide health care, particularly in physiotherapy. Right now there are some collaborative discussions going on between Prince County Hospital, O'Leary hospital, and Western Hospital, to look at some collaborative outreach services to maintain urgent physio services and to reestablish physiotherapy in the communities across the

western part of the province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford.

Maritime agriculture initiative

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

My question's to the Minister of Agriculture. Maritime hog, beef, and feed grain sectors have been working on a Maritime strategy to deal with the decline in their industries, and the potato and dairy sector is concerned with that issue as well, and where it may affect them in the long-run. I was wondering what your concern is, or where you are with this Maritime initiative and how it's going at the present time?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, our red meat sectors in Prince Edward Island are facing some major challenges in the last number of months, and those are national challenges with regards to pricing.

About two months ago I did have a conversation with Minister Ritz. He is planning some assistance and help for hog producers, especially in western Canada, and he's trying to develop a national policy. I was able to get him to agree to developing a regional policy here in Atlantic Canada. The western policy, if you like, would not work that well. He did commit to that.

We did have a meeting on November 16th, 2009, the first meeting in Moncton, as a preliminary discussion on what that strategy might be for beef and pork. We don't have anything hard and fast yet and any details worked out, but every sector of agriculture on Prince Edward Island is very important to our economy. We are working extremely hard to sustain those enterprises and those businesses so they can go forward with profits some day.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford.

Mr. McIsaac: Supplementary to the same minister. The Maritime approach sounds like a good idea. Working with the feds is a good idea. Do you have any idea on a time frame? When we might get something together for these sectors?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, we actually do have a meeting this Friday at 2:00 with the PEI Cattlemen's Association, also another meeting at 3:00.

So we are in preliminary discussions. We want to select an approach that will sustain those industries in the end. In the meantime, we are providing assistance on many different fronts, and eligibility such as advance payments, those kinds of things, to sustain those industries. We are working vigorously on it. We want to be sure we get the right conclusion, and the right approach

as to these industries so we can maintain them as a valuable part of the PEI agricultural sector.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Witness at PAC meetings (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's extremely disappointing that this government - and that's the Premier and Cabinet ministers so far - really do not want to demonstrate accountability, but we'll go to the Minister of Transportation and Public Works whose served this House for 24 years, who used to be known as a people's politician.

My question to this minister: After all the years that you were at Public Accounts, do you support having witnesses at Public Accounts, all witnesses? Do you support that?

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

Mr. MacKinley: Madam Speaker, I support the Rules of this House.

This is one of the established, we have democracy, and the Leader of the Opposition should know very well that the rule, page 26, 91: Ministers of the Crown are not eligible for appointment to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and may not attend its meetings other than

as witnesses before the committee.

So it's up to committee what you do. You shouldn't be asking those questions because what you're trying to do is intimidate people on the committee. We're not even allowed to be in the same room. You should respect the laws of this House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

To the same minister. I respect the people, the public that vote us in. My question to you: In your experience, do you support having witnesses at Public Accounts? Do you, minister of transportation and Public Accounts?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation -

Mr. MacKinley: I support the law -

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public -

Mr. MacKinley: - of the House and I support the decisions -

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

Mr. MacKinley: Madam Speaker, I support the law of the House that's made up here, it's been here for years.

I also support whatever decision the

committee makes.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the Minister of Health. Mr. Minister, you have the Prince Edward Island health bill on the floor. There's a lot of detail in this bill, including a huge section on governance, on conflict of interest, demonstrating the concepts of open and accountable government.

My question to you: Do you support the Public Accounts being able to invite witnesses to Public Accounts? Do you support that?

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

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

In 2005, when this work on transparency and accountability should have been done, it wouldn't have to be done on the floor of this House as we move forward with *Health Services Act*. The Leader of the Opposition is challenging individuals in this House. I take my credibility and my integrity very seriously as an MLA, but I also certainly respect the responsibilities of committees, and there is a role and function of everybody inside the committee to voice their concern and challenge any direction. But at the end of the day I respect the laws of this House, Madam Speaker, as we move forward.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: To the health minister. Your Premier often describes about a Cabinet shuffle coming up. If you end up as an MLA on this committee, will you support having witnesses called to the committee, Mr. Health Minister? Will you do this?

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

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

As I have alluded to, I take my responsibilities as an elected official in the Province of Prince Edward Island very seriously, and I take great pride as an MLA representing the District of Charlottetown-Parkdale. I will uphold and respect the integrity of this House and the laws and the work and responsibilities of the committee.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, it's, again, disappointing, but we'll go to the Premier.

I want to quote the Premier's exact words:

I move, Mr. Chairman, that in light of some of this information that came to light today regarding insufficient answers, regarding

hearsay, regarding as not being able to find out who exactly gave information to KPMG, that we ask KPMG to come before this committee. And we ask the bureaucrats - I believe their names are Kent Scales, who was interviewed, Mr. Neil Stewart, if I'm correct on that, Mr. Chairman. I believe that we should ask these individuals to come before the committee.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: My question - these are your own words, Premier. Do you support having witnesses at Public Accounts, all witnesses, Premier?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

It really depends on what the issue is. Obviously, at that time the Auditor General of the province asked for a forensic audit that was done into the Polar Foods file. So there were obviously questions that had to be answered. The Auditor General, I believe, it was the only time he asked for outside help, was going back to the Polar Foods file.

Recently, the Auditor General's report that I read is that since we've come to power he's read the reports, he hasn't asked for forensic audits, he hasn't asked for RCMP, he hasn't done any of those things. He's made recommendations, and our government's following through with those recommendations that the Auditor General has put forth.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Back to the Premier. Mr. Premier, we're not talking about any Auditor General's report. We're talking about Public Accounts. At one time you wanted Public Accounts to operate, to function, to have witnesses. What I'm asking you, Premier, is: Do you still support the concept, no matter what the topic is, of having witnesses at Public Accounts? Do you support that?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: It depends what the issue is, Madam Speaker.

Obviously, you're not going to call witnesses just for the sake of calling witnesses. If there's information that needs to be found out, like the Auditor General did with Polar Foods when he asked for a forensic audit, when he asked for outside help, that's a different story.

But I have faith in the Auditor General of this province. He comes forward with a report. He's obviously going to put forth the information that is accurate and that's factual. He also has an obligation to report anything that is done untoward in this province, whether or not there's a law broken or anything like that. The Auditor General, since I've been Premier, has not made any of those recommendations.

Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition wishes to go out and tar people's reputations. On this side of the House we prefer to respect the work of the Auditor General.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition, final question.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The final question will go to the Premier. This is about the Premier. This is about another direct quote:

Either people want to get work done at this committee or they don't. And what they're trying to do now, Mr. Chairman, is to put in stall tactics so that we can't do our job to make sure our taxpayers' money is protected. There were rules, regulations and laws allowed to be broken. Stop protecting your masters. Start protecting the taxpayers of Prince Edward Island. That's what we have to start here.

Mr. Premier, do you support -

Mr. Bagnall: Practice what you preach.

Leader of the Opposition: - at Public Accounts - you're in the driver's seat, you're the Premier of the province. This is something you've wanted. Do you support having witnesses at Public Accounts no matter what the topic in order to let Public Accounts do their job? Do you support that, Premier?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Do you want to know what? The Leader of the Opposition made an interesting point there. Laws were broken. That was under the Polar Foods investigation. I'm happy to say -

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Premier Ghiz: - that under our investigation into all government departments, laws have not been broken.

The Leader of the Opposition is mixing apples with oranges here. The Leader of the Opposition wishes to go out and tarnish people. What we choose to do on this side of the House is respect the work of the Auditor General, respect the work of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, instead of saying everyone else is wrong except for the Leader of the Opposition. That is the approach she takes. Everyone else is wrong except for her.

At the end of the day you have to respect the processes put in place. The processes put in place are that the Auditor General reviews the books of this province and that the Conflict of Interest Commissioner abides by the rules of the Legislative Assembly when it comes to conflict. We respect both. It's a shame the Leader of the Opposition does not.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]