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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
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PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2009

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

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

**National Building Code**

**Ms. Bertram:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Yesterday the hon. Leader of the Opposition asked questions in regards to the National Building Codes and barrier-free access.

In fact, this is the guide and the code that we do have in the province. We do have National Building Code standards for accessibility. So I will table that, and that's seconded by the Honourable Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry.

Questions by Members

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

**Kings County Memorial Hospital ER**

**Mr. Bagnall:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My first question today is to the minister of health. Minister, November has come and gone. Your commitment to me and to Islanders was that you were going to open the ER in Montague by November. You had comments in the *Guardian*, comments to me, and comments to everybody. Is the ER open in Montague today, 24-hour service?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Thank you very much,

Madam Speaker.

As I alluded to in this House over the last number of weeks, our priorities in the department in respect to services in this province are, and will continue to be, based on patient safety. In respect to the questions from the Member from Montague-Kilmuir, we've had some challenges, particularly in the allied health profession, with individuals particularly in the facility with combined lab techs.

I'm pleased to announce that we have been successful in recruiting two new combined lab techs. We have also looked out beyond in the next six months. We have another new students committed to Kings County Memorial Hospital.

The challenge that we're facing in the facility is that right now we have a number of staff that are out on sick leave, maternity leave. I, as the minister, am not prepared to push extended services until we're at a full complement to make sure that we can provide safe services to the residents of Montague-Kilmuir and southern Kings.

We've been very fortunate as a government with our physician complement. We've ramped it up to eight in the community of Montague. In the hospital we've made investments in a new emergency room and we made substantial renovations to the facility to keep it up. We are committed to services in Kings County Memorial Hospital but I have to work with the staff and the professional - whether it's physicians or allied health professionals - in the community to make sure that we're at full complement before we can reinstate

services, Madam Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

**Mr. Bagnall:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's obvious the minister kept his speaking notes from last year when he made the statements to it that he was going to close the emergency room because those were the exact same comments he made when he closed the 24-hour service last year. The exact same excuses, right - I mean, he used the same things.

**An Hon. Member:** Do you have a question?

**Mr. Bagnall:** The minister here has no problem hiring spin doctors. He has hired eight spin doctors to spin his message in his department yet he can't hire anybody to work in the hospital.

Minister, how come you can hire eight spin doctors to make you look good, or try to make you look good, when you can't hire staff for the hospital?

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

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

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

I'm not sure what the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir is talking about as far as spin doctors.

**Premier Ghiz:** That man looks good already.

**Mr. D. Currie:** We certainly have the challenge - I know that we have communication people that are positioned at the QEH to work with their staff as far as internal messaging and external messaging. I know that the department, with the H1N1, has required some additional supports to work with the communities and Islanders, to work with them regarding the messaging around H1N1.

We need to make sure that we're responsible as a department and we get the message out, not only internally but externally, to Islanders in respect to the day to day functions of health care.

I want to remind the Member from Montague-Kilmuir that health care services, whether it's in this province or other jurisdictions, governments are faced with intense challenges as far as recruitment and retention. We're no different.

I've got an article here. It was an interview by the former premier, Binns, who does a pretty extensive interview and is quoted saying, in respect to emergency room service, his quote is: It doesn't mean a different model of health care as you move down the road and we have to be prepared to adapt to a new reality, but we are making the changes.

This refers to emergency room services. They had the difficult decisions and choices to make and I believe the Member from Montague-Kilmuir was at that Cabinet table when these decisions were made. Change

has to occur and it has occurred. We'll continue to meet the needs of an aging health (Indistinct) workforce in our system.

I'm committed to emergency room services in Montague, but based on safety and the best possible patient care that we can provide, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

**Mr. Bagnall:** Thank you.

First, I'll start off with, he said he didn't know what communication spin doctors are. Darlene Gillis, Maureen Flanagan, Amanda Hamel, Colin MacDonald, Fraser McCallum, Laura Steeves, Cindy Gregory, and now you're looking for a new spin doctor for your new health promotion. So those are the communication people that are there to try to make you look good.

Now he's talking about the hospital, and he's talking about whether or not it should be open or not. He made a commitment last year to me, he made a commitment to the people of Kings County, that Kings County ER 24-hour service was part of his health plan. Now he's changing his mind. He's bowed down to the doctors. The doctors talked -

**Speaker:** Do you have a question, hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir?

**Mr. Bagnall:** Yes. The doctors have talked

to him and said: Back off, back off, so now he won't do it.

Minister, when are you going to have some backbone and stand up and honour your word?

**Premier Ghiz:** You're against the doctors.

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

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

In respect to his comments, once again the Member from Montague-Kilmuir is misinforming the Legislative Assembly. I believe some of the names that he referred to are not working in the Department of Health and I know that one in particular is out on maternity leave. So we have back-filled a number of those positions.

When I talk about staff at Kings County Memorial Hospital, I'm referring to the constituents that the Member from Montague-Kilmuir represents. As I alluded to, we've got staff out on sick leave, we've got staff on maternity leave. We're challenged. I am not, as the minister, prepared to force people back to work to open a service. That is just not the way we operate in the Department of Health.

But we are continuing to recruit, as I alluded to, to the member. We're committed to services. Once we reach a full complement we'll continue to look at reinstating services.

I just want to remind the Member from

Montague-Kilmuir that our track record in health care over the past two and a half years - if you look at medical residency, if you look at enhanced medical seats, if you look at the Accelerated Nursing Program, we're retaining 85 % of our nurses. The Royal College of Physicians is telling us that we have the highest percentage of family physicians in this province at 95%.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. D. Currie:** If you look at investments in health care in rural Prince Edward Island, the new medical centre in Tyne Valley, we have reached a full complement of physicians in West Prince.

When we came into this job back in 2005, I remind the Member from Montague-Kilmuir, they had two physicians in the west, they had five in Montague. Today we're at eight, Madam Speaker, and we're continuing to recruit to establish healthy strong services.

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

### Churchill Falls energy negotiations

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

A question for the minister of energy. I have a press release here that you indicated that

you were in negotiations with the Lower Churchill Falls hydro project in Labrador, and I'm just wondering if you could give us the status of those negotiations in the House today.

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

**Mr. Brown:** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

It has always been a long intention of this government that we need Maritime cooperation and Canadian cooperation in energy in Canada. We need to get together in Canada in order to secure energy for all provinces.

The United States is energy hungry. They need it and we have it. We have clean, green energy in Canada and plenty of it. We have been told by the Americans time and time again: If you don't get your act together in Canada, we're going to put a line out to the Midwest and you'll get nothing.

So we have to work together as the Maritimes and as Canadians in order to secure our energy future here. That's what I've been doing, working with our other sister provinces in order to secure energy from one end of this country to the other.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, I didn't know the minister of energy was working for the Americans, I thought he was working

for Islanders.

I would like to know, then, if you're in negotiations with Churchill Falls, when can Islanders expect their electricity rates to decrease?

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

**Mr. Brown:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I can assure this member that we are working for Islanders, and our sister provinces are working for Canadians. Because in these big mega-projects are billions and billions of dollars. Does he think PEI can go out and build Lower Churchill Falls at \$17 billion? No.

But if we have a good customer in the south that is willing to invest in Canada to help us build those projects, and we reap the benefits of those investments, then it is good for Canadians, it's good for Islanders.

I don't mind saying that we are exporting some of our power to the United States. They are a partner with us in securing energy not only for their people, but for Canadians too. Working together, North America will have a grid system that is affordable to all people in North America, Madam Speaker.

Thank you very much.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, we know now that the minister is more concerned about electricity rates in Boston.

### **Tidal power negotiations**

I also have here another press release where the minister was talking about negotiating for tidal power water projects. Can you give me an update on where your negotiations are with that project?

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

**Mr. Brown:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the member for that question.

Nova Scotia is working on tidal power. Each and every province is working on its own projects. It's no good for Islanders to go out and work on a project that our sister province is working on. We've taken on hydrogen in this province, the storage of electricity and the storage of power within hydrogen.

I can tell you, I commend the workers that are up on that project in Tignish area. They are doing a tremendous job, and I think not only Islanders but Canadians and the world will see a major breakthrough in that area up there. They are working hard each and every day in that area. We have got hydrogen, they're working with tidal, we're all working together.

We had a meeting there a few weeks ago with our sister provinces, and with NRCAN, in order to discuss the status of each other's project. It's no good if all of us are working on one thing at one time. Energy security in

this future is going to be based on diversity. There's security in diversity, and we're working on diversity.

We, as Islanders, are doing tremendously more than any other province in Canada when it comes to a per capita basis here in energy conservation (Indistinct).

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

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

Question to the same minister: Minister, when do you expect electricity to be flowing from these tidal power projects, and when do you expect our rates to decrease because of it?

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

**Mr. Brown:** Madam Speaker, when do we expect energy rates to be reduced?

We're working on reducing energy rates. But I'll tell you one of the things we're not going to do, we're not going to come in here with a phony term sheet -

**An Hon. Member:** Oh, yeah.

**Mr. Brown:** - with some sort of a letter from some other utility saying: Here's a deal we got, and three or four months later, no deal is in place.

The history of the energy file on Prince

Edward Island is deplorable under that administration. In 1978 then Angus MacLean and then Pat Binns promised scared Islanders into the nuclear power plant in New Brunswick. They forced the provincial government out of the nuclear power plant in New Brunswick. We would have owned a good share of that nuclear power plant, and today energy's coming out of that - not today, but when it's refurbished it will be around 8 cents a kilowatt hour. The next cheapest power is around 11 cents.

These are the people that would put a good project down, got us out of a good project, and we're still paying for those decisions today.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Some Hon. Members:** Shame, shame!

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

### Natural gas

**Mr. M. Currie:** Question for the same minister, Madam Speaker.

I have another press release here that indicates the minister himself was in talks and negotiations with Maritime Electric to truck in natural gas to the gas turbine in Charlottetown here. I'm just wondering how your negotiations are going along on that, and when are you going to decrease the price for electricity with your negotiations?

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

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct).

**Mr. Brown:** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for that question.

Let's talk about natural gas.

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct).

**Mr. Brown:** The previous government came out with a proposal to ship gas in from - from off Nova Scotia into Prince Edward Island.

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct).

**Mr. Brown:** Deep Panuke. Deep Panuke took a deep dive.

At that point in time I said: Why build a \$50 million pipeline to produce electricity on Prince Edward Island? Why can't we just build a power plant next to the pipeline and ship our power in and save Islanders \$50 million?

Natural gas is flowing out of those projects right now. Right now a natural gas project for PEI under that proposal is not feasible, and I am never going to go into projects that are going to increase power rates for Islanders.

Our first priority is to reduce power rates for Islanders -

**An Hon. Member:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Brown:** - not to make phony press releases and to get people on board that something's coming. We're committed to lowering power rates on Prince Edward

Island and we will continue to do that. We will work with Maritime Electric. But if Maritime Electric doesn't want to work with us, we'll change things.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

### Electricity rates

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, so far all I see is the price going up on electricity.

A question for the minister of energy. You announced about this time last year with great fanfare with the media that there was going to be a billion-dollar project for 500 megawatts of wind power, and you were going to export this into New England.

Minister, can you tell me - I know you scuttled that deal since - but can you tell me how much electricity rates have gone down since you made this announcement on wind power for Islanders?

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

**Mr. Brown:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This time last year, July last year, power rates, I believe, were at 18 cents a kilowatt hour. We're down to about 14 cents a kilowatt hour. I'm not going to take credit for that. I could stand here today and take credit for it. That's the world price of gas, and lo and behold, I don't affect that in this

Legislature. I wish I could, but I don't.

But I'll tell you what. When it concerns energy and the wind on Prince Edward Island, I want to tell Islanders for a fact we are looking to increase our wind energy component on Prince Edward Island by 500 megawatts. The member knows that we've just gone out for another 100 megawatts of power, plus 30 for internal use.

**An Hon. Member:** Good.

**Mr. Brown:** A lot of Islanders will say: Why are we exporting power? This is a joint tender that we have issued out there. We're depending on a bigger project, economics of scale, and using the higher prices that we can receive from US market to lower rates on Prince Edward Island.

**An Hon. Member:** Great.

**Mr. Brown:** That's a simple thing. We have big American companies want to purchase our power at a premium rate. We take that premium and apply it against our electric bill. What's the problem with that?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

### **Electricity costs for communities**

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, a question for the minister of energy.

About a year ago you also made an announcement that you were going to work with communities that had rinks and you

were going to set up windmills so that they could cut down on their electricity costs. Can you tell me, minister, how much you've cut down the electricity cost for these communities?

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

**Mr. Brown:** I thank the member for that question, Madam Speaker.

We had a proposal out to help rinks across Prince Edward Island with wind projects. The main developer on Prince Edward Island, Entegri Wind Systems, has gone through financial troubles. We waited for Entegri Wind to get out of its troubles. That hasn't happened. We're moving on to the next supplier in terms of this project.

The former member always asks about energy prices on Prince Edward Island. They were the ones who went off New Brunswick plus 10. Not only did they go off New Brunswick plus 10, they told the utility at the time, 2003, just before the election: Don't put up power rates. But the utility company said: But our bills are higher than what we can afford. Just put that money all aside in an account, and they called it ECAM, electric cost adjustment mechanism.

The real name of that was the election cost adjustment mechanism.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Brown:** They kept \$26 million off the bills of Islanders until after the election. You know what? Islanders are still paying for that election cost adjustment mechanism

today.

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Some Hon. Members:** Shame, shame!

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Islanders know, Madam Speaker, what they're paying for electricity today under this government.

**Mr. Bagnall:** Forty-two per cent more.

### **Negotiations with Hydro-Quebec**

**Mr. M. Currie:** Minister, you've also indicated that your negotiation with Hydro-Quebec on transmission into Atlantic Canada and you're certainly prepared, it seems, to give Quebec a monopoly on this. Can you tell me how much the rates are going to decrease with your negotiations with Hydro-Quebec?

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

**Mr. Brown:** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for that question because Islanders should have an opportunity to know about what is going on here.

I've been on this file for a number of years. Energy in Canada, up to a few years ago, was all in silos by each province. You couldn't get your transmission back and forth. In 1969 the lights went out in New York City. The Americans said that will never happen again. They set up a system in the United States called FERC.

**An Hon. Member:** (Indistinct).

**Mr. Brown:** But, see, it's an international market, and that's what these guys never understood. Energy is an international market. We have an international grid here.

**Ms. Bertram:** We could make money (Indistinct).

**Mr. Brown:** You cannot work in a silo when it comes to energy, Madam Speaker.

I know there's been a lot of discussions about transmissions throughout Canada. Every province has to have what you call an OATT, Open Access Transmission Tariff. That guarantees suppliers of electricity to put their electricity through one province's lines. It is law. One province cannot treat another province non-discriminatorily. They cannot deny access from us to get our power somewhere else. That is a federal international law that we must adhere to.

We are working with New Brunswick, and Quebec, and whoever can get us electricity at a cheaper rate here on Prince Edward Island, and we will continue to work.

I find it funny that Danny Williams is fighting the same issue. He's saying about Quebec and New Brunswick setting up a monopoly and talking about FERC. He's the person who has used FERC in order to get his power out of Churchill Falls, but now he criticizes FERC when it's only his own convenience. He should read the real book, the book - and I'll table it today - Overview of Electricity Regulations in Canada. It's all explained here. It's open access. You just apply, and the application form is here to

apply for transmission. You get your transmission rights. They cannot stop you from transmitting your power from one province to the other, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Electricity rates (further)**

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, Islanders now know where the Scrooge that ruined Christmas is in this House.

Minister, your energy policy so far is that you're talking about hydro-power from Churchill Falls, you're talking about trucking in gas to Maritime Electric, you're talking about wind power that you scuttled, you're talking about dealing with Quebec, and all we saw in this province is rates increased by 42%. When are you going to lower the rates for Islanders in this province? When is your energy policy going to come forward that you'll lower the rates?

Here we go.

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier Ghiz:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Premier Ghiz:** Because finally we have a minister that's about action, Madam

Speaker, and not so much about talk.

For the longest time in this province we saw the previous government talk about Deep Panuke. They said electricity rates were going down. Then they talked about what was going on at Meteor Creek. Electricity prices were going on. Then they said they were getting rid of New Brunswick plus 10, electricity rates were going down.

We're not saying electricity rates are going down. What we're saying is we're exploring all options to see if we can get them to go down. I'm not going to put out the disbelief there to Islanders and tell them that electricity rates are going to go down.

But what I am going to commit to them is that this minister and myself are going to go out and we're going to explore every possible opportunity to look for a way to find clean renewable energy so that we can get off the fossil fuels and lower down our carbon footprint, and we're also going to look for opportunities to lower down electricity costs. What we're not going to do is mislead Islanders like the former government and put out false impressions. What we're going to do is work hard on behalf of Islanders, Madam Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Point Lepreau shutdown costs**

**Mr. M. Currie:** I'm just wondering why, Premier, you never put the minister on your negotiation team?

Question for the minister of energy. In regards to Point Lepreau shutdown, can you tell me, if there is a scheduled shutdown, that costs associated with that shutdown are built in to the price we're already paying today?

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

**Mr. Brown:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I thank the member for his question. I must say the extended shutdown at Point Lepreau is very disappointing to this government and to the Government of New Brunswick. We are fighting with the federal government right now because Atomic Energy Commission, who has a firm contract with the refurbishing of that plant, we believe that it is the Government of Canada that should be flipping the bill for this cost over the extended shutdown of Point Lepreau.

I can tell him that it's costing us about - right now O&M, operations and maintenance, of the plant is about \$800,000 a month we're paying for that as the plant is shut down. We also have to go out and secure off-line power or a non-nuclear power, and that's running us about \$2 million.

That alone tells you right there. If Lepreau was up and running we would be getting billed around \$950,000 a month for electricity out of that plant. Our replacement power right now for Lepreau is running us around anywhere from 1.8 to \$2.2 million a month. That just shows how good nuclear power is. It was a shame that we got out of that power deal in 1997 because Islanders

could have been benefitting further from that deal if we would have stayed in it.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

### **Property assessment tax changes**

**Ms. Dunsford:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

A question for the hon. Provincial Treasurer. Stratford residents and Islanders in general, and all of us here in the House, know that the property assessment taxes are going through a change. Could the minister take an opportunity to again clarify to everyone how these changes will take place and what it means to the bottom line for all Islanders?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

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

I appreciate that question today. I think we have to go to the very basis as to why we had to go about this increase and why we have to come out of this freeze that we're in.

As all Islanders know, assessments over the five years previous to the freeze went up a rate of 7.2% per annum when CPI was growing at 2.4%. If the proposed changes that we're going to make now were in at that time, Islanders wouldn't have this ridiculous rate of assessment that is underway.

I have a form here that explains it very clearly as to what our changes are. On this form is the second page of our property tax bill, and there are two amounts. One is a frozen residential and one is market value, right on the second page of the bill. Here on the frozen residential is a statement that says: If you stay in your home you will pay tax on this number plus CPI starting January 1. So the frozen residential that has been in place for three full years is going to increase by CPI in the new year. As we know, CPI at this point is in a negative category so we'll be plus zero.

In this other category on this bill - and this is where the confusion arose - are the words market value. These words market value must stay on this bill for uses in Ottawa with regard to equalization and how they do the property role on Prince Edward Island.

Here in this box it says: If you sell your home the new buyer will pay tax on this number plus CPI. This number of market value that we speak of, and the confusion surrounding it, is on the bill. This will be the number that new home buyers will pay tax on, and those two numbers are, on average across Prince Edward Island, 4% (Indistinct). There is no two-tiered portion to this.

Out over time this assessment for Islanders will grow to meet the market value, out over a protracted amount of time. This number will never go over the market value amount.

Very clearly. Frozen assessments.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

**Ms. Dunsford:** Thank you for that clarification, hon. Provincial Treasurer.

Supplementary to the same minister. Is this better for Islanders or not?

**Speaker:** The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

**Mr. Sheridan:** Madam Speaker, very clearly, if we would have had this system in place the five years previous to our freeze, instead of going up 7.2% per annum - that makes it a collective 37% over the five years - it would have grown at 2.4% per annum, and that would have been less than 10%. So we're talking about a 25% difference on your assessment.

Everyone knows that without raising taxes - the previous administration said they didn't raise property taxes. Well, they allowed assessments to go through the roof. It was unfair to Islanders and we'll make sure that never happens again.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Linkletter.

**St. Eleanors and amendment to electric utility act**

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I just have the one question, if I may indulge you for a moment. I may need to. My

question is to the minister of energy. Mr. Minister, in 2004 the residents of St. Eleanors were annexed to the city of Summerside. The present electric utility act excludes these residents from access to their city utility. These residents pay the same municipal tax as those that have access to the city utility during power outages.

Will the minister consider amending the electric utility act to enable these citizens to switch from Maritime Electric to their city utility?

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

**Mr. Bagnall:** Let's hear the answer now. (Indistinct) check with Obama first (Indistinct).

**Mr. Brown:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I thank the member for that question. When amalgamation occurred customers of Maritime Electric were taken into the city of Summerside's boundaries. These are Maritime Electric customers. They are owned by Maritime Electric, they claim rights (Indistinct). But we can discuss that issue with Maritime Electric in the future and see what can be done here.

But if the city of Summerside - I have not received a formal request to look in this from the city of Summerside or no formal resolution from the city of Summerside to look into this issue at this time, Madam Speaker.

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

### Documents

**Mr. M. Currie:** A question for the minister of finance. Yesterday you promised you were going to bring the documents, studies and so on. Have you got them today to table?

**Mr. Sheridan:** Right here, sir.

**Speaker:** The hon. -

**Mr. M. Currie:** Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

**Mr. Sheridan:** They'll be tabled under Tabling of Documents, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** Thank you.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

### Increase of electrical rates

**Mr. M. Currie:** A question for the minister of energy. You indicated a few minutes ago that it's costing \$2 million a day, and I think it's going to be somewhere going out a year and a half - that's around \$44 million. When are you going to increase the electrical rates for Islanders with those increases?

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

**Mr. Brown:** Madam Speaker, we don't increase electric rates on Prince Edward Island.

They were the ones that changed the legislation that guaranteed Islanders New Brunswick plus 10.

**Mr. M. Currie:** You (Indistinct).

**Mr. Brown:** They took that legislation and ripped it up and gave Maritime Electric the right to go back to IRAC, and increase those rates. Today we are paying close to 50% higher than New Brunswick right now.

**An Hon. Member:** Shame, shame!

**Mr. Brown:** If that legislation wouldn't have been passed, Madam Speaker -

**Mr. Bagnall:** (Indistinct) your administration.

**Mr. Brown:** - Islanders would have been saving a tremendous amount of money.

As per the deferral costs of the Point Lepreau plant, that's another good reason to be talking to our sister province of Quebec at this time. Because under the New Brunswick deal, Quebec is going to take over the nuclear power plant and put it into its asset base and help reduce the overall cost of Point Lepreau.

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, we have seen the rates go up 42% since this government came into power.

### **Summerside appeal to IRAC**

A question for the minister of education. I see that the city of Summerside with their utility has an appeal into IRAC for - they want the same discounted rate that Maritime Electric is offering to some of the wind developers. Do you support the utility with their appeal to IRAC for those discounted rates?

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

**Mr. Greenan:** Madam Speaker, this is information that I've just learned from the hon. member and I shall look into it, but I'm not going to make a statement one way or the other in the House today on that matter.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, I'm a little bit puzzled.

He's the minister responsible for Summerside, and the utility looks after all the needs of the residents of Summerside, and it's been in the paper a number of times that they are looking for the same rate that is being offered to a wind developer for a discounted rate.

I'm just wondering - or I figured that you would have written a letter in support of your utility to IRAC that they receive the same discounted rate as the wind developers.

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier Ghiz:** Madam Speaker, let's just put this into context.

Just to realize - I don't know who's writing these questions, or where the hon. member's getting these questions from -

**Mr. M. Currie:** Just read the papers.

**Premier Ghiz:** - but he's basically asking the minister who's responsible for IRAC to the province to write a letter to IRAC.

If the minister ever did something like that, the hon. member would be all over him like a dirty shirt. That's a ridiculous question. He should know that on this side of the House we respect processes, whether or not it's the Auditor General, conflict commissioner, independent boundaries, IRAC, or the judicial system in our country.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

#### **Status of Women and prosperity plan**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My first question is to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women. As you know, there was an equity report card done in June. My first question to you is this.

The status of women criticized your government in regards to the Island prosperity plan, and I quote directly: They were very concerned that the plan was

developed without public consultation or input that may have provided insights into diversity of grassroots perspective.

You've had the report since June. Tell me, highlight for the Status of Women and women across the province, three things that you've done since June to address this issue.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Tourism.

**Ms. Docherty:** Madam Speaker, the reference that she's making to the Island prosperity study - as far as I'm aware - I mean, we've been consulting with Islanders.

We've been asking for input, we've been obtaining that information. I have to say actually, hon. Leader of the Opposition, it's not a bad thing sometimes from the perspective of women's issues to be taken to task, and maybe to have a few things pointed out to us. It is a good way for us to make sure that we aren't overlooking the women of Prince Edward Island, and I truly don't believe that we are.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister: Your prosperity plan is your gospel for economic development that you've announced as a government since 2007. My question for you: Please highlight for the women across PEI three things that you've done to try and get the women considered in the prosperity plan for

economic benefit. That prosperity we're all waiting for.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Tourism.

**Ms. Docherty:** Madam Speaker, women are constantly considered, no matter what it is that we're doing.

Our GBA, as an example, women are being considered to ensure that the roles that they perform are looked at from a gender-based analysis. We're doing many things for women, and if the Leader of the Opposition has something specifically that she would like to refer to that maybe we're not addressing, please bring it forward.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is to the same minister. It's actually the PEI Status of Women that's highlighted all these concerns in June of this year.

My next one then. They identify the Council of People with Disabilities remind us, on PEI, about 65% of homes that receive social assistance support include a person with disabilities, yet the province's economic development plan so far includes no intention of planning for inclusion, accessibility, or other strategies to ensure people with disabilities can share in the Island prosperity plan.

Please highlight to us what you've done to address this issue since June.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Tourism.

**Ms. Docherty:** Madam Speaker, I believe yesterday the hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors brought forward his committee for disability review.

We have the report that's been done. When government makes any decision, we don't exclude any one specific group. We look at all groups. The issue with women with disabilities is part of the work that we're doing in government.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Again, this is a group of women that is trying to look out for the advancement of women across the province. Another concern they had is the growing concern in the community about this government's uneven and unpredictable interactions with grassroots organizations and the drivers of social economy.

Can you highlight, once again, the top three things you've done since June to address this issue?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Tourism.

**Ms. Docherty:** Madam Speaker, the Status of Women - we work very closely with the executive director and the chair of the board.

I think we've got an actually extremely good working relationship. But regarding

grassroots, I would have to say the rural development initiative that we put forward, the minister responsible has been holding public meetings, has been receiving input, whether written or otherwise. I believe that all grassroots organizations that specifically deal with women's issues had a great opportunity whether they wish, as I said, to come forward in a public meeting or send in written submissions. We believe that this is a great opportunity for them, and I know that they did participate.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. One of the biggest areas across the province is the child care facilities that have had no attention. Many groups have been bringing this to the attention of government. As the Status of Women's minister, how are you going to ensure that this area, child care facilities, and educators and parents, are going to get the immediate attention they deserve?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Tourism.

**Ms. Docherty:** Madam Speaker, as a member of Cabinet, we have many discussions around the table, and even though some of these don't deal directly with me in regards to initiatives that are led by another minister, I want to ensure you, I want to ensure the Leader of the Opposition, and I want to ensure the House, I am always out there speaking on behalf of women and the rights that they should have.

Whether it's early child care centres or any other issue that may have an impact on women, you need to know that I'm there at the table. I support these issues that are being mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition. She should have confidence in the fact that we will make sure that they will always be addressed.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This is an area near and dear to my own heart, and people are tired of words of government. They want to see action. So my last question then will be: Again, in this report card, your government received a D for gender focus and gender-based strategies, especially in regards to the role of an MLA.

My question is - I know there was going to be a women's caucus, it was announced in 2007, the Stratford-Kinlock MLA was going to chair it. Has this been scrapped? Does it still exist? And are we ever going to have meetings?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Tourism.

**Ms. Docherty:** Madam Speaker, the women's caucus, we have had some meetings.

I can't honestly answer the hon. Leader of the Opposition as to exactly why - maybe we have fallen down on making sure that follows through. But having spoken to both the executive director and the chair of the

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board for the council, they understand the fact that we're working hard on their behalf. The interests of the women are very important. I actually have been asked myself, from various groups, Women's Institute, whatever it may be, what it's like to be a female MLA, so it's not an issue that's been forgotten, and it's one that the hon. Leader of the Opposition should realize that we have as a priority.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]