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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 7 APRIL 2010



Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

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

**Quality child care**

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

My first question today is going to the Premier. Premier, your government has the lowest investment in Atlantic Canada, the second-lowest investment in Canada for regulated child spaces. You have produced many glossy documents: the prosperity plan, moving tourism forward 2007, rural action plan, the 10-point wind plan. The list goes on and on.

My question to you, Premier, is: Who do you expect will be working in these sectors without affordable, accessible and quality child care?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

That is a very good question on the part of the Leader of the Opposition. We believe that early childhood education, and all education, is vital to a sustainable society and a sustainable economy. Since we've come to power we were able to make investments in the C.H.A.N.C.E.S. Best Start Program - which her government chose to cut - investments in literacy, investments in breakfast programs. We changed the age

of entry into the school system so that we could enhance our young people's education.

We also made a fundamental decision, a decision that has been overlooked in this province for a long time. We're one of the last governments, one of the last jurisdictions in North America, where kindergarten will be moving into the school system. Our government initiated that process. It will be taking place next year. We're very much looking forward to that taking place.

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

**Premier Ghiz:** Now we have to deal with the early childhood sector. We believe that this is a vitally important area, Madam Speaker.

We currently have a review going on where, I know, our Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and Attorney General has been involved in consultation with the industry, with stakeholders, with parents. Once the budget comes along we hope to be making some very important announcements with regards to early childhood education because I believe our record speaks for itself. It's our government that is putting Island children first in this province.

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

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

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

Right back to the Premier. Mr. Premier, you've produced, you know, your prosperity plan for a select few, your tourism plan for a select few. We're hoping that child care plan's not for a select few. But my question, Premier. Child care centres are at the risk of closing. Parents need to know: Is your government committed to the \$3 million grant for child care space that you have yet to commit to? Are you committed to leaving that \$3 million grant in place?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

The Leader of the Opposition can correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm pretty sure there was no \$3 million grant for early childhood education. There was a \$3 million grant for kindergarten, I believe, is what that was. James Rodd's in the gallery today, and I know that it was his former leader, Herb Dickieson, that forced the previous Conservative government to actually start funding kindergarten in this province. I want to credit the NDP for pushing that forward. Now it's our government that's taking it to the next level and making sure that kindergarten is going to be a fully funded, full day program in our school system.

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

**Premier Ghiz:** That is going to be a substantial investment in early childhood development, Madam Speaker.

We also realize that there is a shortage, because what happened with the Leader of the Opposition's party as well was that when

they came to power federally they got rid of the Ken Dryden program.

We know now that they provide \$100 dollars a month. We know that \$100 may cover off one day a month of child care that parents need at home when both parents are going to work. We believe that it's important that both parents be encouraged to go to work, to go out and earn a healthy living to support their families. Our government is going to make sure that we're standing up for parents in this province, we're standing up for the young people of this province, and we hope to be making even more investments once the budget comes down to help out the early childhood sector in this province.

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

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

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

We're not discussing your policy change at kindergarten, but when you actually implemented the change in the school entry age and the kindergarten age, it put tremendous pressure on the childcare sector. That \$5 million you referred to, two is gone with the kindergarten program. Three million remains to be confirmed for the childhood sector. Since you're talking about kindergarten, one quick question, Premier, is: What happens to the child that's five years old that is going to kindergarten? What centre is going to be available before and after school to provide early childhood care for that student?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

I want to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition, and perhaps she could give lessons to other members of her party across the country when it comes to early childhood education. She called them students. She's right. They are learning right from birth right through to the end. That's why our government made investments in the Best Start Program - why her government chose to cut the Best Start Program. So when we get lectured on that I think the Leader of the Opposition should look at her own party with regards to their perspectives.

Just so she knows, moving kindergarten into the school system is not a \$2 million investment. If it was probably that cheap her government may have looked at doing it in the past. But our government has priorities in this province and early childhood education is very important. That's why it's over a \$5 million investment for moving kindergarten into our school system. We hope, once the budget comes down, we're going to make some very exciting announcements when it comes to early childhood education in this province, for the first time ever in the history of this province.

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

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** To the Premier. Are you suggesting you're removing all the

five million that used to be the combination of child care and kindergarten into kindergarten, so that would mean you have no grant dollars for child care right now?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier Ghiz:** Absolutely. She must know that the money that was going to the early childhood centres before was for kindergarten, Madam Speaker.

That's what it was for. Now, of course we're going to move all that money. We're not going to shortchange those kids. But what we're going to do is now we're going to take even additional dollars and put them into early childhood education -

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

**Premier Ghiz:** - because our government realizes, unlike her party's government, that early childhood education, not just early childhood education, starting right at birth with Best Start Programs, moving into the school system with kindergarten, make sure the student-teacher ratios are going down in this province, those are important things for the future of this province, for the sustainability.

So the Leader of the Opposition should get her facts straight. We are making over a \$5 million investment in kindergarten, and for the first time ever in the history of this province, when this budget comes down, there will be an investment in early childhood education unlike -

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

**Premier Ghiz:** - her federal party.

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

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

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

It's really nice that we're in the Province of PEI today and we're Progressive Conservatives. My question to the Premier is this. Mr. Premier, you're referring to Best Start Program and you're referring to \$5 million. Again, that would mean \$3 million right off the bat is short for the early childhood sector that's listening here today in the gallery. You refer to Best Start: Did you also give equal money to Kids West?

But my question to you, Premier, is this: Who's going to be available in what child care centre when that five-year-old has to be put someplace before the bus picks them up to take them to school at 8:30 a.m. and after 3:00 p.m.? What child care centre is open without that grant money?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier Ghiz:** Again, just to correct the Leader of the Opposition, there was no grant money for early childhood education. There was grant money for the kindergarten system, Madam Speaker.

Now the kindergarten system, for the first time ever, is moving into our school system, which is going to be a much larger investment with kindergarten moving into our school system. And for the first time

ever in this province our Liberal government, when the budget comes down, will be making an investment in early childhood education.

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

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

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

It seems that the Premier is having difficulty realizing the difference between kindergarten and the early childhood sector, so we'll go to the minister of finance. Minister, last year your department found dollars for wine and beer experts, for renovations to liquor stores and offices. Last year, Mr. Minister, child care centres struggled to stay open. Parents are worried, and staff continue to receive low pay. Minister, have you received the message and do you understand what financial support the child care sector is receiving right now, and what the total amount of dollars they need for the future is?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance and Municipal Affairs.

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

It's a pleasure to stand and answer to these questions when our government has done so much in this area and is continuing to do that. The most important part of this is going out to these sectors and making sure that we know exactly what is needed. My hat is off to the hon. Minister of Education and Early

Childhood Development and Attorney General for taking the time, in the very recent past, to go out and entertain over four different spots in this province to ensure he heard from everyone in this sector to see what this very complicated sector needs.

We have to look at pre-school, before school, after school. We have to look at what happens to those kindergarten students before and after school. We have to make sure that there's access for these centres. We have to make sure that there's a sustainable wage for the people that are working in this industry that take care of our very core issues here on PEI, and those are our youth. There are so many issues that make this a complicated part, and I will tell you, under the leadership of this minister we are going to answer that call and we will be there for them when they need us.

Thank you very much.

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

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** To the same minister. Where was all this commitment when you had the prosperity plan, moving forward 2000 tourism, the rural development strategy, the 10-point plan? Wouldn't you have actually put resources in to have a child care sector so people could actually work in those, Mr. Minister?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance and Municipal Affairs.

**Mr. Sheridan:** Madam Speaker, I couldn't

have answered that question any better than the hon. Leader of the Opposition just did.

I can't believe the work that we've achieved in two and a half short years. Quite incredible record to stand by. This is a very complicated issue and we had to answer it one piece at a time. The first of it had to be to make sure that we could make sure that we could have our children moving into a paid, fully funded kindergarten program in Prince Edward Island for the first time in the history of this province.

It had been largely ignored by the previous administration, embarrassingly so, and this is not something that we could take on in the first year. We had to make sure that we knew exactly how it would run out, how the sector wanted us to take care of it, and we have answered that in spades. We have rolled out Pat Mella's report in very fine fashion. We have taken all of her recommendations forward. We have consulted throughout with this whole sector, and now we're ready to answer the call on the early childhood side as well. I stand by our record as being very proud, and that's how it will be.

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

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** To the same minister. Mr. Minister, you have a deficit between 85 and 100 million, 30 centres to 35 centres are at risk of closing across Prince Edward Island. Are you comfortable, to the minister of finance, with the early childhood educator receiving \$8.50 to

\$10.00 an hour?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Finance and Municipal Affairs.

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

As I mentioned, that's one of the complicated parts of this whole exercise, is that we have to look at so many portions of this sector that have been struggling. When you have 11 years of total disregard for this sector there's an awful lot of ground to be made up, and we are taking that into consideration.

I think it's shameful that those that take care of the very biggest asset, the most important asset that we have, our own children, would ever be paid that kind of a wage, and that 11 years the member of the opposition, the opposition leader, all sat there and put up with that. Had no inkling to ever move on that sector. For the first time ever in history this government will make that right.

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

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you.

This is the minister of finance who had no difficulty with getting wine experts, beer experts, and a liquor store - how many liquor store renovations and contracts (Indistinct)?

But to the same minister: Are you comfortable with the early childhood

educator - who's a supervisor or a program director with two years of Holland College experience, and perhaps as much as 10 years work experience - are you comfortable with them receiving \$13 to \$14 an hour with no benefits?

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

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

The discussion on early childhood education is an important issue on the minds of families in communities all across Prince Edward Island. When you look at the investment that we're making in five-year-olds, we're the last province in this country that is transitioning our five-year-olds, which was part of the early childhood sector in the public school system, investments of over \$9 million. Very comfortable with the transition of our five-year-olds into the public school system.

Over the last month-and-a-half I've had the opportunity to be in communities all across Prince Edward Island, listen to families, and listen to educators, and listen to the sector. Our priority right now, as government, is to look at the zero to four sector and to look at a system that's sustainable and accessible in communities all across this province. We're certainly committed to do that.

I had the opportunity over the last number of weeks to meet face-to-face with the sector to look at issues around wage enhancements, look at issues around subsidies, look at issues around viability. Issues are coming

up, and certainly as a government we're extremely excited about the opportunity to renew this sector and rebuild the sector and to try to keep pace with other jurisdictions.

The message that was loud and the message that was clear during those meetings is that the sector has felt disrespected and neglected for way too long, Madam Speaker, and our government is going to make sure that they're a priority as we move forward.

Thank you.

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

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

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

Since the finance minister is really comfortable, I guess, with paying early childhood educators that have two years Holland College experience, supervisors and program, 10 years experience only \$13 an hour, that's a disgrace.

Next question to the Premier: Premier, a couple of weeks ago a nurse actually contacted opposition. She works in the Charlottetown area, has three children attending a Charlottetown child care centre. She's concerned that with no immediate financial investment from your government into the child care sector she's not going to be able to afford the increased rates that are already starting to happen.

Premier, are you comfortable with losing

professionals to other provinces where quality child care is available? Are you comfortable with that?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

That's a good question on the part of the Leader of the Opposition. She talks about our Island Prosperity Strategy and different strategies. Part of the reason why we made the move to put kindergarten in our school system was when we were out looking at attracting new businesses here, and looking at what the workforce really wants - exactly how the Leader of the Opposition just posed this question - one of the number one issues that came up was kindergarten was not part of the public school system.

So that is exactly the change that we are making, so that we are going to be more competitive, to attract in the health care workers, the nurses, the doctors, the LPNs, you name it, in our health care system.

What we are now doing is bringing kindergarten into the school system which will be a major investment, up to \$9 million, as the minister of education mentioned. Now, for the first time ever, when this budget comes down, we will be the first government in the history of this province to be making substantial investments in our early childhood education system.

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

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

**Per diem rate for child care subsidy**

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

The Premier seems to have quite the difficulty of understanding the difference between kindergarten and the early childhood sector, so we'll go to the minister of community services.

This question, Madam Speaker - the per diem rate for child care subsidy is a maximum of \$22 a day. However, child care centres are charging a minimum of \$25 per day for a 22-month-old child. My question: Are you increasing the per diem rate for the child care subsidy?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour.

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

I certainly understand the situation that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is addressing here today. I would like to rise and say that all of those things will be under review. We are moving kindergarten into the public school system, and it has created some pressure points in the early childhood sector. I would like to assure the Leader of the Opposition that we are definitely working towards positive solutions for all families.

Thank you.

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

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** To the same question. Will that actually mean a per diem rate increase?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour.

**Ms. Sherry:** As I've indicated, Madam Speaker, all things surrounding the early childhood are under review.

Certainly when that review is completed, everyone in the House and on Prince Edward Island will be aware of what the changes may be.

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

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

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

To the same minister. The Little Angels child care centre staff often take money out of their own pockets to pay for diapers, snacks, and other essentials, when social service clients can only receive the \$22 a day for a 22-month-old child, and the costs are actually higher.

My question: Madam Minister, are you going to take the burden off staff? Will your department be providing supplies to the staff for those or will you be increasing the per diem rates?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour.

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

To the Leader of the Opposition, I would like to reiterate that I am quite aware of the pressures on the daycare centres across the province. As a government we realize that in the early childhood sector there are pressure points and we'll work towards finding solutions for the issues that are presently facing our daycare centres in the province.

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

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

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

The Little Angels child care centre, in terms of the staff, right now the maximum rate they can receive - 50 out of 52 children that attend this facility are actually social service clients parents, right? So my question to you, will you be providing the diapers, the creams, etc., that the staff are taking the money out of their own pocket? I know you had a visit to that centre, and so did the member from Wellington, I believe, as well as myself. They told me that they had great conversations with you and they're expecting you to actually deliver with some of the things you talked about.

Will there be increase in per diem rates and will there be supplies for children?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour.

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

As I've already indicated to the Leader of the Opposition, this government, and as

Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour, I am well aware of the pressure points for the early childhood sector. I am working collaboratively with other departments, and increasing subsidies is something that we are taking into consideration.

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

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** To the same minister. So you have brought that to Cabinet in terms of increasing the per diem rates for social service clients for child care subsidy?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour.

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

As I've previously indicated to the Leader of the Opposition, we are continuing to work hard to find solutions for this issue. It is not a simple issue, it is rather complex in nature, and we will continue to work collaboratively and bring forth some changes whenever we're finished our review.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you.

I hope all the parents and the early

childhood facility owners are listening to this.

**Mr. Bagnall:** She didn't take it.

**Leader of the Opposition:** There's not much commitment here.

### Quality child care (further)

My next question is to the minister of innovation. Minister, your prosperity plan clearly targets bioscience, aerospace, alternative energy and innovative technologies. Please highlight the actual areas of financial contribution to the sector from the prosperity plan so that professionals can actually work in these sectors and have affordable, accessible child care, and give us concrete examples of what's in that document for this sector.

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

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

All indications are that our Island Prosperity Strategy is paying great dividends to the Province of Prince Edward Island. Of course, in my role, my responsibility with respect to education is in the post-secondary sector. We've made some significant investments through this government in post-secondary, whether it be through the George Coles Bursary or the Island Student Awards or Island Skills Awards, whether it be through infrastructure investment at Holland College and UPEI.

Now we've realized the importance of

transitioning kindergarten into the public school system in this province. We're shifting our focus a little bit to the other end of the spectrum and making sure that we give our young children in this province every opportunity towards a high quality education.

I'm very pleased to be part of a Liberal government that recognizes the importance of that, and we are now investing in the early childhood sector for the first time as a government of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

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

The prosperity plan seems to have brought prosperity to a small few. We're talking about the entire province.

To the same minister. In the Souris area there is a number of child care facilities and a number of them have been in the media wanting to be treated fairly. My question to you is: From your prosperity document, are you actually going to be providing a grant to cover the rent for all child care centres across the province?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

The Leader of the Opposition is trying to play games here asking about the prosperity strategy to get the minister from that area to answer the questions. But I want to point something out here. Our government takes this very seriously. Just to indicate how serious we are, first government in the history of this province to recognize how important early childhood development was. We came in and I changed - one of the first things I did was change the department of education. I changed it to reflect the times.

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

**Premier Ghiz:** The times today are different than they were 30 years ago, Madam Speaker.

We now realize how important it is that education does start at birth. That's why we have called it the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. That is a clear indication of our government's commitment.

I find it interesting. I stood up in this House when I was Leader of the Opposition and Pat Binns was the premier here and the Leader of the Opposition sat over there as a member of this government. Stephen Harper came in and he cut the Ken Dryden program which would have raised those salaries that she was talking about before, would have made it much easier for all these families. I asked questions day after day after day, and what did the Leader of the Opposition do at the time? She applauded the premier of the province for defending Stephen Harper. I'm glad to know now that she's changing her tune, Madam Speaker.

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

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

**Spring weight restrictions**

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

My question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. Mr. Minister, our province has had lots of construction taking place over the winter. Things have been moving. This spring we've been blessed with great warm temperatures, but because of this transportation and public works has had to place the spring weight restrictions on earlier.

Could you please tell the Legislature and the construction industry, and those in general who want to get out there and get their fields planted, when we can expect the restrictions to be lifted?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

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

We certainly got a problem in the eastern end of PEI where people are planting there now. We seemed to raise the weight restrictions all across the province at the same time, yet up your way I think it's still pretty wet if you're in the fields. But down east the dust is flying. So I'm trying to get the department to take a look at separating the Island in certain areas to be more convenient for our farmers that are on the

land down there. I haven't got an answer from them yet.

Yes, we had to put the weight restrictions on earlier because it costs us something like \$280,000 to fix a kilometre of road. I will say that the truckers and that have worked really well with our department. Basically what they're saying to me, they haven't seen pavement go down like this since the Alex Campbell days. They're trying to work with us, and we got to try to work because our young people just can't afford to pay to have roads smashed up, pave them one year, smash them up the next.

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kellys Cross-Cumberland.

### **Improvement to unsightly property legislation**

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

My question today is for the Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry. Since being elected to represent the District of Kellys Cross-Cumberland I've been approached by both residents and community councils about properties that are in my district and that can easily be described as unsightly. I've made many attempts with the minister's department to address these concerns, but unfortunately have had little success, much to both my disappointment and of course those that I'm representing.

However, I do want to make it clear that the lack of success is not due to the minister's

staff and their efforts, but it's due, in my opinion, to the current legislation. As I understand it, the act currently does not give the minister or the department the power to follow up after the ministerial order and the fine.

So, Madam Speaker, I would like to know from the minister if he can tell myself, the constituents and I'm sure every other Islander concerned about unsightly properties, what is being planned to improve the legislation in order to deal with this issue.

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

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

There is an *Unsightly Property Act* enacted in the provincial Legislature here and it does require our residents of Prince Edward Island to keep their properties in proper maintenance. It doesn't allow for dilapidated cars, properties, buildings and things like that to be on their property. We have a very nice Island here and it's important that we keep it clean and up to date. Sometimes there are individuals that don't want to do that, and that's why this piece of legislation is there.

What happens right now is we can go out, issue a clean up order. We try to work with the residents throughout PEI. I must say, the majority of the time they will work with the inspectors and clean up these properties. But at certain times people just don't do it. A lot of the time they're absentee landlords on Prince Edward Island, there are people that have been left property, and they just leave

it to go by the wayside and they're living in Toronto or some other place in North America and they're not really concerned about what the property looks like. We have to step in on those properties and issue an order. If they're not here, we can go in and clean up the property ourselves as a province.

What's happening right now is that we have to get budget money for that. We're working with the department of finance and the property tax section in order to see if we could - when we do go in and clean up these properties that we can add it to either the property tax bill as a receivable against that property, and when the property is sold we can get our money back.

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

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Kellys Cross-Cumberland, do you have a supplementary?

**Ms. Docherty:** Please.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I guess I would like the minister to inform the House and everyone else when we can expect this change to occur to the legislation so that maybe the residents will have some piece of mind knowing that this will be addressed soon.

**Mr. Bagnall:** Twenty and twenty.

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

**Mr. Brown:** We are working with the

department of finance, Madam Speaker, and we hope to have something resolved very soon before this season.

I must say, a lot of these properties are complaint driven. It's not our officers out there looking up these properties, it's just neighbours that have to look across the roadway or next to their neighbours and say: Would you clean it up? They just say no to it. They don't want to clean it up. (Indistinct). That's when government has to step in.

I've asked my enforcement officers to follow up each and every complaint, work with the landowner, but from now on give them a certain amount of time. When you recognize that they don't want to clean up their property, issue the order and get it cleaned up and we'll find the money in our budget somewhere. Once the change comes that we can put it on the receivable statement that'll make it much easier for us to go out and clean these properties.

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

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

### **Quality child care (further)**

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

To the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning. The question that I believe you started to answer for me was: In the Souris area a number of child care facilities are interested in being treated equally. From your prosperity plan, what dollars are

available to provide grant money to cover rent for all child care facilities across the province, Mr. Minister?

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

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

Just to give some information to the Leader of the Opposition, part of the issue that we're dealing with on renewing the zero to four sector is that questions around subsidies - subsidies have been neglected now for over eight years. One of the things that we've gone out and done, after we make the substantial investments of over \$7 million in the kindergarten program or the 1,400 children moving into the public school system, we realized that we needed to do a very thorough assessment of the sector.

We've done an impact analysis to give us a fiscal picture of the pressures and challenges that operators are under. We have addressed and looked at the HR challenges in respect to the workforce. All these discussions will allow us to bring good recommendations forward, but most importantly I want to remind the House that our department has brought in Kathleen Flanagan.

Kathleen Flanagan is an expert in the area, a very well respected early childhood educator. She's working closely with the sector to make recommendations to government, to make recommendations to communities and to operators, as we move this very important sector forward into the future.

When we talk about the Island Prosperity Strategy, our government realizes that without a future and quality investments in early childhood education we have no future. So our commitment is that we'll continue to work. We're working with the minister of finance to make sure that we're very clear on what needs to be on the table as we work through some very fiscal challenging times. But we must realize that investments today are an investment into the future of this province and we're looking forward to bringing those announcements down.

The sector has spoken. The sector has been listened to. We're looking forward to partnering a new relationship as we move forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

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

It's interesting that the innovation minister is still interested in prosperity only for a select few and the education minister is certainly good at spinning.

My question - the next one's to the minister of fisheries and rural development. Minister, a major focus of your department should be on job creation. In your rural action plan document, it provides two paragraphs in a 107-page document on how to access child care. Minister, another important facility

that provides support and play programming for parents and children is Kids West Inc. They provide four community-based programs from Tignish to Tyne Valley for 150 children.

Please highlight from your Rural Action Plan what dollars are available for grant money for Kids West, and will it be an equal amount to the money that's given to C.H.A.N.C.E.S. on a yearly basis, Mr. Minister?

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

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

I want to clarify for the Leader of the Opposition that the responsibility for the renewal, the sustainability, the early childhood sector, falls within my department. We have a tremendous staff that is working diligently, has been working hard over the last number of months, engaging with the sector, engaging with Kathleen Flanagan as we look at the new opportunities and new partnerships as we move forward.

We recognize, when we look at access and we look at the importance of access, we recognize very clearly that child care needs in various areas of Prince Edward Island are different. For example, if you have a workforce in the community of Tignish, seasonal workers, single parents, we recognize that the supports need to be different in that community as opposed to some other areas of the Province of Prince

Edward Island.

These are all issues that are being flushed out and being worked through as we look at the impact analysis, as we look at the investments that need to be made as we move forward, keeping in mind that the zero to four sector is a priority in our department and we're doing very good work, but most importantly we're listening to the sector and we're listening to the issues around the lack of subsidies, wage enhancements, training opportunities. These are issues that we look forward to bringing forward through the budget process.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

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

I'm going back to the minister of fisheries and rural development with my question. Don't forget, the prosperity plan was supposed to be for all Islanders. Tourism 2000 was supposed to be for all Islanders. The Rural Development Strategy is supposed to be for all Islanders, especially in the rural areas. My question to the minister: Is Kids West going to be receiving a grant equal to C.H.A.N.C.E.S. this year?

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

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

Madam Speaker.

Our government is embarking on one of the most historical investment in education in the Province of Prince Edward Island. We recognize that being the last jurisdiction in Canada to bring the five-year-olds in the public school system, we recognize the impact that has had for lack of having a program for five-year-olds in respect to drawing people to our province. We also recognize that the investments today are going to be substantial as we move this province forward.

I want to remind the Leader of the Opposition that the reality of - when you take 1,400 children out of the kindergarten - the early childhood sector - of five-year-olds, which is the way it's been functioning for a number of years, there's obviously going to be a serious impact in respect to the ability for the sector to move forward.

Our government realizes that investments have to be made. We've had some very frank discussions with the sector on wage enhancements, the inability to put a salary on the table, to keep and to maintain and retain a workforce to provide child care for families in this province. We also recognize that training opportunities and the lack of, and we were able to implement the accelerated program for students that are in the workforce this year, which has been very well received.

So we're making positive steps and we look forward to moving things forward. The reality of it is jurisdictions have passed us in respect to the investments, other jurisdictions in this country are moving to a

standard four-year-old programs. We're not quite there yet because of the lack of attention that the sector has received in the last 15 years.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

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

Since it's the only minister that wants to answer questions, maybe we'll go to him.

**Premier Ghiz:** It's his department.

**Mr. Bagnall:** He hasn't answered anything yet.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Interesting in terms of - this is the government that promised a fully integrated child care strategy, integration of all departments, but only one wants to talk today so that's okay.

Many parents are confused because they would have expected a lot of this work to be done for the child care centres prior to the actual change in the kindergarten age and the school entry age. Can you respond why that happened in 2008 and none of this work has been done to date, Mr. Minister?

**Mr. Bagnall:** Nothing's done.

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

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

Part of the investments that we made in this process has been the work that the fiscal impact analysis - very important piece of work if after we take the five-year-olds out of the sector, in respect to the impact that will and has had on the zero to four sector - the impact analysis took some time. We also had to address the issue on human resources with work being done in that particular area, but most importantly, we've got a framework that will be brought forward to me in the days ahead in respect to the work of Kathleen Flanagan.

The feedback on her work and the discussions that she's had with the sector has been very positive. Coming in as the minister of education and early childhood development since the middle of January, I'm pleased at the commitment and have been very impressed with the dedication by the staff of the department of education and early childhood development. They're extremely passionate about the sector, but most importantly they're passionate about the children that are going to be impacted as we make the investments and move forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

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

Back to the minister of education. In this

particular sector, core funds that used to be there to the tune of \$3 million are missing. If you make one small change to the wages for 200 early childhood educators it could work out to 2.5 million, if you were actually increasing wages so people would be paid \$15 an hour.

Do you have from your Cabinet colleagues and from the Premier and the minister of finance support to actually have investment? Because it looks like none of them want to give you support to have an integrated childcare program for the province, Mr. Minister.

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

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

I do want to clarify a point. I do have tremendous support. The province is facing some fiscally challenging times, but my Cabinet and my caucus colleagues are very supportive of the investments in our five-year-olds as we transition them into the public school system. There's tremendous support for the zero to four investments that need to be made.

It would be premature for me to make any fiscal commitment prior to the budget announcement. But we do recognize that our priorities are on access and quality as you move forward. We know that we have and will continue to have discussions on subsidy issues - which is a pressure point - issues on wage enhancements, training opportunities.

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The reality of it is, the sector will look differently post-kindergarten five-year-olds out of the system so we know that investments need to be made. The reality of it is, as we embrace Kathleen Flanagan's report and document, this will be a vision as we move forward, Madam Speaker.

In discussions -

**Speaker:** Thank you, minister. We're out of time.

**Mr. D. Currie:** Thank you.

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

[End of Question Period]