Session:	3/63
Date:	9 April 2010
No:	17

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

OF

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD (PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

FRIDAY, 9 APRIL 2010

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Use of Proceeds Agreement

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My first question this morning is to the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning. Minister, the Auditor General reported that the province implemented a Use of Proceeds Agreement between businesses and IIDI in October of 2007. Would you please update the House on how many of these agreements were actually signed?

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

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

I'd have to go back to staff to get the exact number. I think it was somewhere in the neighbourhood of 600 or 650, but I will get that number and bring it back for the Leader of the Opposition.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I look forward to having that number back by Tuesday. Islanders continue to be quite disgusted with the mismanagement in this program. The Auditor General mentions that there was different wording in these agreements that were on file. Mr. Minister, why would you have different wording in agreement?

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

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

Certainly, we're pleased as a government to actually have an agreement and have a Use of Proceeds Agreement, and I compliment the staff for their initiative.

As any program evolves or changes, changes are made. Yes, we take the work of the Auditor General very seriously. He's made a series of recommendations. We're responding to those recommendation. Each and every one of those recommendations are being implemented.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's ironic. This tool could have been a good tool to enforce accountability, but it appears it became another tool to help provide prosperity for a very privileged few. My question is: Why was there different wording on those agreements?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation

and Advanced Learning.

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

I'm not sure what that Leader of the Opposition's referring to as providing prosperity to a chosen few. As I indicated, I believe there's in excess of 600 to 700 Use of Proceeds Agreements. I don't see how that's a chosen few.

But again, as programs change and programs evolve, changes are made. We've reviewed all the recommendations of the Auditor General, take them very seriously, and those recommendations are being implemented.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

You were briefed on the Auditor General's report and these particular issues in January of 2009. The report's been out for a long while. Everybody agrees that it'd be nice to get to the bottom of the issues so perhaps we might be able to move forward. But my question to you this morning is: Why did you have different wording on the agreements? Why would you do that? And what's in the different wording?

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

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

As I indicated, it's great to have a Use of Proceeds Agreement attached to this file. It brings accountability, and we're very pleased and very appreciative of the work of the staff at IIDI to bring that forward.

Again, as programs evolve and change over time, changes are made and changes were made. Again, the Auditor General in his recommendations asked for a consistency and that consistency has been put in place. All policy changes are being approved through the board at IIDI. We very much value the work of the Auditor General and are fully implementing all of his recommendations.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I quote directly in 3.88 of the Auditor General's report: "We noted additional inconsistencies in the wording of certain Agreements." My question to you, Mr. Minister: What is the different wording in the different agreements among those 600 files?

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

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

I believe what the Leader of the Opposition

is referring to is changes in the Use of Proceeds Agreement with respect to payments to shareholders. Use of Proceeds Agreement has been standardized across the board as per the request of the Auditor General.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. To the same minister: Out of the 600 files, how many files have different wording?

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

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

Again, I'll have to check with staff on that. I'd be pleased to do that and to bring the information back for the Leader of the Opposition.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister, this is a minister that often talks like his Premier about open, transparent and accountable government. They continue to shut down Public Accounts. My question now: Will the minister bring back to the House an unsigned copy of each Use of Proceeds Agreement that has different words?

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, I'll check with the senior officials at IIDI and if that information can be brought back, I'll be pleased to bring it back.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: My question to the minister: Why would it not be possible to bring it back?

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I didn't indicate that it wasn't possible. I said I would check with staff and if we can, we'll be pleased to bring the information back.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: To the minister: Are you not the minister of this department?

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

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

The last time I checked, yes, I am.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: To the same minister then. We're asking for you to bring back an unsigned copy of each agreement that's used, a blank copy with no names of each business that you had different agreements on, just what the wording's like. It's up to you as minister, who keeps promising open, transparent and accountable government. Will bring back a copy or not?

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As I indicated, I will check with the senior officials at IIDI. I don't anticipate there's a problem bringing one back, and if that's the case, I'll be pleased to bring one back.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. To the same minister. Mr. Minister, why would there be a problem? You're the minister that keeps talking that you'd like to move forward. In fact, in today's paper it sounds like you're starting negotiations on a new program. We know it's about a year since you talked about the first fantasy that you had. You told us at that time that you were in discussions with the federal government, which that proved false.

But anyway, we'll give you the benefit of the doubt. Will you bringing back those copies, the unsigned, on Tuesday to the House?

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, I didn't indicate that there would be a problem. Only, in fairness, that I would check with staff. If we can do that, I'd be very pleased to bring it back.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It looks like, once again, there's no open, transparent and accountable government here.

Review by DM of PNP files

My next question. In the fall of 2008, in the investment category of PNP, it was closed down. Surely you've had your staff, especially Dr. Michael Mayne, go back and review all the files of MLAs, deputy minister MacMillan, senior staff in your own department that participated in the program, to ensure there was no preferential treatment here, that their Use of Proceeds Agreement was not different than all the other 600 businesses. Did you have Dr. Michael Mayne do that work?

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

Mr. Campbell: Thank you very much,

Madam Speaker.

Actually, I believe that work was completed by the Auditor General. He did a fine job and we're very satisfied with his work. Again, as I indicated earlier, he's made a series of recommendations and we're implementing those recommendations.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm sorry, Mr. Minister, but that doesn't work anymore. The Auditor General has actually said that he did not get to review all those files, and again it comes back to you. You're the manager of this program. It's worth a lot of money to the people of PEI. It was a good program. You're trying to encourage the feds that you're going to have confidence in the people of PEI and the federal government that you can move ahead.

My question to you is: Did you have Dr. Michael Mayne, your deputy, look at these files in particular to ensure there was no preferential treatment? Did you or did you not?

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

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

Again, I think it's fair to say that we've gone over and above that. We had the Auditor General, who is the most senior person responsible for checks and balances here in this province, he reviewed the files, he made recommendations, and we're implementing the recommendations.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. Madam Speaker, to the same minister.

We all know the Auditor General did less than 4% of the files. All we're asking is the in the particular files of your MLAs that participated in the program, in your senior people in your own department that participated in the program, on Brook's files, etc., did you have Dr. Michael Mayne go back and review to prove there was no preferential treatment? Six hundred good businesses are in that mix. They'd be quite upset to find out if the agreements for this select few are quite different than their own. Did you have that done?

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

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

The Auditor General in his report indicated that he reviewed the files of all MLAs and deputy ministers. I'm not sure, maybe the Leader of the Opposition didn't have a chance to read the Auditor General's report. I do have a copy here, and if she'd like one I can provide one for her.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Once again, this government really demonstrates open, transparent and accountable government and really demonstrates how prosperity's for everybody or prosperity for a very few people.

Process of ensuring compliance with Use of Proceeds Agreement

My question is: In October of 2009 the minister informed the media in a public statement that the process was underway with IIDI receiving files from businesses to ensure compliance with the Use of Proceeds Agreement. Would the minister be able to tell us what that looks like?

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

Mr. Campbell: I'm sorry, Madam Speaker, I missed the first part of the question.

I ask the Leader of the Opposition to please repeat the question.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the minister. In October of 2009 you informed the media in a public statement that the process was underway with IIDI receiving files from businesses to ensure compliance. My question to you this morning, since you said that back in October: Please describe what that process looks like.

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

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

The process basically is that two years following the final investment with respect to use of proceeds, a letter goes out to the company requesting their financial information to evaluate how the use of proceeds has been followed. Those letters have gone out to the files where that investment has matured, where the two year period has lapsed. We're waiting for information. Now, what we have to remember, too, is that different companies have different financial year ends. There may be some that don't have their financial year ends and their information completed. We expect that we will be receiving information when those financial details are available.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Mr. Minister, would all the letters that are going out have the same wording? Because if you have your

original Use of Proceeds Agreement with different wording, would they be consistent or would there be some people with Use of Proceeds Agreement that didn't actually have to comply at all?

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

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

I would expect that the business community in Prince Edward Island would be in compliance of the Use of Proceeds Agreement. The letter that goes out simply is requesting the financial statements for year end and then those financial statements would be evaluated to make a determination as to whether the Use of Proceeds Agreement has been complied with.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Use of Proceeds Agreement and The Stone Depot

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

In a few minutes we'll get to the numbers of people that are actually receiving the letters and complying. But first, Mr. Minister, you promised, again, open and accountable government. Did the company The Stone Depot sign a Use of Proceeds Agreement?

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

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

Again, I can review that file and if that information can be provided, I'd be happy to provide it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Mr. Minister, a lot of time's gone by since you were shut down because of the mismanagement in this program. Surely to heavens, Mr. Minister, you would have checked in particular with this Stone Depot which happens to be an MLA's company. Did they sign a Use of Proceeds Agreement?

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

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

It's a shame that the Leader of the Opposition continues to misinform the House. She talks about the program being shut down because of mismanagement when she is fully aware that in March of 2008 the federal government changed the regulations with respect to the Provincial Nominee Program. We signed a new agreement that those new regulations came into effect in September of 2008 and that is why the former PNP - we were no longer accepting applications in the partner category.

She's aware of that. She went to Ottawa, I believe, herself, to lobby for an extension on the program that she is being so critical about.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. In regards to the MLA, the Stone Depot, the Auditor General actually said that that company did sign a Use of Proceeds Agreement. My question to you, though: Was the wording in that agreement the same as in other people that had other businesses? Was it the actual same?

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

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

Again, as I indicated, and the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out, that the wording did evolve and change with respect to Use of Proceeds Agreement. I'll check with staff to see what the wording was in the Use of Proceeds Agreement and if we can share that information I'd be pleased to bring it back.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Once again, it's unbelievable that you haven't checked. It's April 9, 2010. We're trying to move on and yet you've never done the management job that you're supposed to do for the people of PEI in this program.

My question: Did this MLA that owns The Stone Depot, did he get one of the letters asking if he complied with the Use of Proceeds Agreement? Did he get a letter?

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

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

As I indicated earlier, the Auditor General reviewed the files of all MLAs, deputy ministers under the previous administration and the former administration. He's made recommendations and those recommendations are being followed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: (Indistinct), Madam Speaker.

The Auditor General pointed out a number of mismanagement areas. It's up to the minister to follow through and make sure the checks and balances are in place to discover just how much problem is there. You still haven't done that.

Use of Proceeds Agreement and Pat's Retail

My next question to you Mr. Minister is: Did the company Pat's Retail sign a Use of Proceeds Agreement?

An Hon. Member: Yeah.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I guess we have some information that recently - we've received some information very recently that yes, that is the case. Again, as I indicated, the Auditor General viewed the files of all MLAs. He has made a series of recommendations and we are implementing each and every recommendation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Going back to the same minister. Again, this Use of Proceeds Agreement could have been used as a tool to enforce accountability. On the other hand, because there is different wording in the agreements, it appears it's another tool to provide prosperity for a very select few.

Premier Ghiz: How? You're making things (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: My next question to the minister of innovation is: In the agreement that was signed by Pat's Retail, what is the wording? Is that consistent with the wording in other retail businesses that were approved? Is it consistent?

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

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

The Leader of the Opposition refers to bringing accountability to this great program. Maybe she can tell us about the Use of Proceeds Agreement that her government had with respect to the PNP.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is to the same minister. Mr. Minister, I'm not sure if you heard my question. The question is: In Pat's Retail business, was the Use of Proceeds Agreement similar and the same wording as in other similar businesses? Was it?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation

and Advanced Learning.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, I'd be pleased to review the Use of Proceeds Agreement with respect to the file. I'd be pleased to bring the information back if it can be provided.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Review by DM of PNP files (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, it's deplorable that you haven't done this work. Again, I go back and the Auditor General's report talks a lot about Treasury Board guidelines being broke and accountability. I am surprised and shocked that you have not had Dr. Michael Mayne check these files. Is that correct, Mr. Minister?

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

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

I guess I'd categorize it as disheartening that the Leader of the Opposition has such little faith in the work of the Auditor General.

An Hon. Member: Shame!

Mr. Campbell: It's not new news, Madam Speaker.

She certainly attacked his work last fall in the sitting and apparently she's prepared to do that again. I think the Auditor General has done a fine job. He's made his recommendations. As I indicated, each and every recommendation is being implemented.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Use of Proceeds Agreement and Pat's Retail (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Use of Proceeds Agreement could have been a great tool to enforce accountability. However, this minister has obviously put it into the category of a tool to provide prosperity for a very privileged few.

My question to the minister: In Pat's Retail business, was the wording the same as in other agreements? Was it, Mr. Minister?

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

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

Yes, all Use of Proceeds Agreements signed at the time of the file she mentions would be the same.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the

Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Minister, how would you know that when a few short minutes ago you told me no one reviewed the files? How would you know that they're the same?

Premier Ghiz: Because they're all the same.

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

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

As indicated, the program change and evolved and the wording of the Use of Proceeds Agreement did change. But it's clear that the Use of Proceeds Agreements that were signed at the same time as that file -

Mr. Bagnall: (Indistinct).

Mr. Campbell: - sorry I can't. The Use of Proceeds Agreement with respect to that file, Madam Speaker, all Use of Proceeds Agreements that were signed at that time would have been the same wording.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Well, now, Madam Speaker, to the same minister.

Last year in April you told this House that you were in full discussions with the federal government on a new program. Just a few minutes ago you told the House that you didn't know because no one had checked the exact files to find out whether the agreements had the same word or not. Now you're telling us in the House that they all have the same when the Auditor General that you just -

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Leader of the Opposition: - referred to had said there was inconsistency.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: Can you explain, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Bagnall: Caught him again.

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

Mr. Bagnall: Caught him again.

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

Here we have the Leader of the Opposition splitting hairs again. I didn't say that the wording in every Use of Proceeds Agreement was the same. I wish the Leader of the Opposition would stop providing false information to the House and misleading the House. What I said was that with respect to that file, when the Use of Proceeds Agreement was signed, the Use of Proceeds Agreement wording at that time would have been the same as the other files that had a Use of Proceeds Agreement at that time.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Would you like to tell the House that statement again? Because just a while ago you were telling us that you hadn't had the chance, and Dr. Michael Mayne hadn't gone to review any of the files, to know what the wording is. The Auditor General has suggested that there's issues that in the files the wording of the agreements are actually different for different people. What are you telling the House now?

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

Mr. Bagnall: Caught again.

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

What I'm telling the House now is that the Auditor General reviewed the files. He made a recommendation around standardizing the wording of the Use of Proceeds Agreement, and that recommendation, as per all of his recommendations, are being implemented by IIDI.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Use of Proceeds Agreement and Dumville Restaurants

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

Did the company Dumville Restaurants sign a Use of Proceed Agreement?

Premer Ghiz: Ask him.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

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

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm not sure if the Leader of the Opposition had a chance to glance over her right shoulder, but certainly the Member from West Royalty-Springvale has indicated that yes, that is the case.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

If Public Accounts was allowed to have witnesses we wouldn't be here, but that's your definition of open, transparent and accountable government. Going back to Dumville Restaurants, my question: Did he actually get a letter asking him if he complied with the Use of Proceeds

Agreement? Did he, Mr. Minister?

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

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

As I indicated, the Use of Proceeds Agreement comes into effect two years after the final investment. As I've said to the Leader of the Opposition, and as she's well aware, that investment is a private investment between a private investor and a private company. So as to when that final investment took place, that's not information that I'm going to share with the Leader of the Opposition here on the floor of this House.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Use of Proceeds Agreement wording

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's quite the definition this government has of open, and transparent and accountable government. Can the minister explain to the 600 people -

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: - who participated in the program, received units, can you offer reassurances that for a select few people with - were gaining or appeared to have gained, preferential treatment? Because the wording in their agreements may be different than the wording in everybody else's. Can you assure those businesses that that's not the case, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Absolutely, Madam Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition likes to stand up in this House and try to mislead the general public in terms of exactly what the process was here. The process was plain and simple. Before we came into power the PNP process was in place. There was no Use of Proceeds Agreement that when a company received it they were supposed to invest in their company but you didn't know for sure.

When we came into government we implemented a Use of Proceeds Agreement to make it more accountable. That Use of Proceeds Agreement, the first one that went out, we've discovered that we could make it even better. It changed along the way, perhaps two times, as the Auditor General pointed out. In no way did it have anything to do with who was applying and who wasn't applying. It had to do with specific dates on when those letters went out. Whether or not it was the Member from Alberton-Roseville, the Member from West Royalty-Springvale, the member from Sherwood, Paul MacNeil, John Jeffrey, we didn't care who applied. We were doing what was right for the people of the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Sheridan: Right on. Great program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Transfer of jobs from Milton to Tignish

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is to the hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Minister, I've received a copy of a letter to your department from the Miltonvale Park Community Council in regard to the transfer of jobs from Milton to Tignish. Could you explain the rationale for this move?

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

Mr. MacKinley: Actually what we're doing, we're transferring the paint shop and the people, jobs that go with it if - we're hoping that we'll be hiring a lot of people in the Tignish area, but we've got to work through the unions and everything else.

What we could do when we're moving the paint shop up there, because number one is we want a new, modern paint shop. We're bringing the department of highways into the future. We're not doing what the previous government did, letting everything get all wore down and then sell it off to their friends.

What we're doing is we're taking, for instance, the plows, worth something like $290,000, if the rust or something takes over, we want to send that complete unit, two or three of them on a float, send them up to Tignish. If they're in the Summerside area maybe drive them up to Tignish, whatever. There's going to be a bay there for welding and rebuilding, and then there's going to be the sandblasting area, and then there's going to be a paint shop there, etc.

But you've got to remember this. That if you get a fender bender in one of our trucks in Souris or Georgetown, for that matter, or anywhere, they're not going to be going to Tignish to be painted. They'll be painted in another place here in the province of PEI close to Charlottetown or maybe in Bridgetown. We're not quite sure where that's going to be, but we've got to move ahead. We're spending millions of dollars on equipment. A problem with rust in the Province of Prince Edward Island - and anybody with a car knows that - but this equipment is not wearing out, it's rusting out.

I know the member from Georgetown when he was minister sent some school buses down to his cousin's or something down there, trying to fix it. Well, it didn't work.. It cost a fortune. What we're trying to do is help Tignish out.

From one end of PEI to the other, you've got to remember, the people in Tignish are just as important as the people in Cornwall, Charlottetown or Souris. They deserve so much government presence there. Look at the place in Montague. I was down there the other day. It's a booming town. We've got a new fisheries building down there.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. MacKinley: Look, there's people

criticizing this, but if you go to Tignish - and I've been up there lots of times - if you live in Cornwall or anywhere in the Cornwall area - let's look at my own riding. If you've got a young person going to college or something, they can get a job at a restaurant, jobs at motels, (Indistinct) there delivering papers, whatever. You go to Tignish, they don't have the opportunity for that.

We're trying to give these young people trying to get a start an opportunity to get work in their own riding where they prefer to live. That's what we're trying to do.

You talk about the traffic problems. We're trying to tie this all in together. Here we're spending millions to get the traffic around Charlottetown, millions of dollars, we want to keep some of it up west and some down east.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. MacKinley: So this is what we're trying to do is we're bringing the department into the future.

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Dumville: A supplementary, Madam Speaker.

They also made note of the potential future zoning issue for this vacated facility. In regards to fender benders and stuff, does the department have any use for this facility in the foreseeable future?

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

Mr. MacKinley: It's a good question. We're not quite sure. The question we have with Miltonvale Park, and I stand to be corrected, but I don't think they have an industrial park. What we're trying to do is we had problems - a young fellow in Crapaud had a sandblasting unit. He had to move out because of noise levels. We're trying to avoid these situations. That's why we're moving up to that end of the Island, for instance. I'm trying to make sure - I said: Make sure it's not near any homes, that it's going to cause any trouble for anybody, for an area. That's what we're trying to do.

That particular building in industrial, out there in West Royalty, it's been there for years. It used to be a fertilizer building. So I just can't say if we'd be utilizing that or not. I don't think we need quite that much space to put the decals on the trucks and that, but Charlottetown, look what we got Charlottetown. We can't add here, they want us out of Charlottetown. They want that for the exhibition and everything else. We've got to try to make sure when we build these expensive buildings that we're not pushed out by more development, That's what we're trying to avoid. We're trying to make a thing that these young people here aren't going to be paying for moves 20 years after from today. We want something to be there for a long time. We're trying to plan ahead, more than that previous government did. They couldn't plan a roundabout -

Speaker: Thank you, minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacKinley: They couldn't even look after the roundabout down there in Pooles Corner.

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacKinley: The former minister -

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

Assessment tools for new kindergarten system

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and Attorney General. Minister, in September 2010 over 1,200 children will enter the new public kindergarten system on PEI. What assessment tools are in place to identify learning disabilities and other special needs for those children?

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

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

The question is a great question from the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Linkletter. Our government has set a huge priority in the investment of children in this province, with the bringing in of kindergarten to the public school system.

This spring we'll be implementing, for the first time in the province, a universal screening tool called the Early Years Evaluation. It'll be done in two components. It will be administered in the direct assessment. We've just recently brought in 25 educators from across the province that will provide that support. It's a research tool that was developed by Dr. Doug Willms out of the University of New Brunswick. That assessment will give us an overview of cognitive, developmental, and intellectual development of all our four-year-olds in schools across the province over the next two months.

The second part of the Early Years Evaluation is the teacher assessment. That will be administered in the public kindergarten system next fall and next spring. Once the direct assessment is done it will be given to parents, and that information will be shared with the educators, the kindergarten teachers, the resource teachers, to help us create individual educational plans and to address the needs and supports that need to be identified for children who do require supports in our province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms. Biggar: Thank you.

Minister, we all know that early intervention is very important in children who are assessed with special needs. So what resources are you going to be putting in place to assist those kindergarten children that are identified?

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

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

Our government does realize the importance, and best practice and best research indicates that early interventions are crucial in supporting children with unique needs.

Right now in our province we have identified 112 kindergarten teachers that will be placed in the public kindergarten program across Prince Edward Island. On top of those 112 kindergarten positions, we'll be bringing in 20 new teaching positions in respect to supporting those students in the areas of art, music, but most importantly in the areas of guidance and resource and special education.

Presently in the province today we've got approximately 350 educational assistants. We will also be bringing in approximately 30 new educational assistants to support that cohort of 1,200 five-year-olds coming into the province.

The magic of the Early Years Evaluation is that it give us a universal standard assessment tool which will allow the kindergarten teachers and educators in this province to support and implement specific plans and IEPs for all those children across the province.

We also are in negotiations with -

Speaker: Thank you, minister, you've run out of time.

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ITSS contract

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

My question today is for the minister of finance. Minister, last fall, it was uncovered that you gave a contract to an individual from New Brunswick to overview the IT services in this province - a six month contract for $900 a day for $118,000 to Mr. Allan MacDonald.

Can you tell me today, has he completed his work, and is he still - is he gone now?

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

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

Allan MacDonald was brought in to oversee the transformation of ITSS. The previous administration brought the ITSS idea forward a number of years ago, and it was the right thing to do to coordinate all IT work right across government. But what

they did was cut the program to a quick because they didn't realize how important it was to the system overall to run government.

So what we have done, after looking at the program over the first two years, we said we had to make some monstrous investments in our ITSS system in order for the government to go forward. We needed to find someone that could oversee this full process. I would say that there would be three individuals in the region that could do this.

Allan MacDonald was one of those, and he has worked out in spades. I make no issue of the monies that we have paid Allan MacDonald. He has done an amazing job for us, and is right now fulfilling a three-month program to make sure that the full implementation will take place.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. M. Currie: So, Madam Speaker, you're indicating that you gave Mr. Allan MacDonald $900 a day again for another three months?

Did you get Treasury Board approval for any of these contracts?

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

Mr. Sheridan: Yes, Madam Speaker, I certainly did.

As the hon. member would know, I am chair of Treasury Board and we brought this all forward, not only to Treasury Board but also to Cabinet, to ensure that everyone was very well aware of what we're doing with the transformation of ITSS.

Inside of Treasury Board and Executive Council we're more concerned with making sure that the mechanisms are in place that we can enable this government to go forward and provide services for Islanders that are needed. We'll make sure that we do that in fine form, and Mr. Allan MacDonald has done that exactly for us.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

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

Could the minister please tell us today, did you or Mr. Allan MacDonald, did they give any contracts back to Accreon, the company he used to work for? Did they achieve any work out of this since he's been employed with the Province of Prince Edward Island?

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

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

Accreon was one of the companies that has been applying for different contracts throughout the process. Anytime that Accreon is involved in any of the

contracting of any of the work to be done on Prince Edward Island, Mr. MacDonald is removed from any of the proceedings and make sure that anything else goes on.

We have made it very clear that this is going to be very well documented. Allan MacDonald has conducted himself as the pure gentleman that he is, and we have been very pure in any of the competitions that have taken place.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, a lot of people are concerned about is his close relationship.

So you hired this individual, he comes over and he gives his former company a bunch of work. How much work did they receive since he's been employed with you at $900 a day?

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

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The expertise of a couple of firms have been used extensively during this transformation. One of which is Accreon and the other is DeltaWare. We have two other companies that have worked extensively on this program. All of which have been tendered, all of which have been put to the public. We want to have the very best individuals and companies coming forward to help us with this transformation.

This isn't something that is dreamed up and put together overnight. We need expertise, we have received it, and the transformation has been amazing. The feedback that we have from our biggest clients, with health, now community services and education, are overwhelmed with the changes that are taking place. I make no apologies for anything that we have done. To this point they've all been covered off very clearly through the tender process, through Treasury Board, and then vetted through Executive Council.

Thank you very much.

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

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

A question to the minister of finance. Did you hire any other IT specialists outside of this province to come and work on this file also?

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

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

If the hon. member has been following we have a full transformation taking place. There are five directors now overseeing the different portions of our IT system inside of government. One of the things that we struggled with with the old format was that there were three different directors, and all three worked in silos of their own. We needed a CEO, a COO, of the transformation to take place, so that we

could have them all working in that fashion. Very important that we would do that.

Out of that five directors we have had two new directors hired from outside sources. They are going to be great pieces of this puzzle for us as we move forward. We have one opening still to be filled and we're excited by the prospects of what that might be.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, the minister has skated all around the question.

I guess the question was very simple: Did you hire any other IT specialists? It's my understanding that you hired one Jean Yves Poirier, and he gets $150 an hour, that's $1,200 a day. He flies in here on Tuesday and he flies out on Friday. You pay all the expenses on top, so that's $1,200 a day. How long has he been employed with this province?

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

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

Jean Yves Poirier is an expert out of Montreal for our infrastructure piece and that is the one directorship that we have not been able to fill yet. As I've said, these kinds of positions do not fall off trees. Jean Yves Poirier is an expert out of Montreal that we're very fortunate to be able to bring forward.

As to what the actual dollar value is, I can bring that to the House. I don't know what that is as to how much he is paid. He comes forward and does this work for us -

Mr. Bagnall: Twelve hundred bucks a day.

Mr. Sheridan: - that the dollars couldn't be put toward a better use.

Mr. Bagnall: Can't believe it, $1,200 a day.

Premier Ghiz: Well, do you want the computers to fail?

Mr. Sheridan: Madam Speaker, so when we brought forward Jean Yves Poirier -

Premier Ghiz: You messed it up. You saw what happened with e-Health.

Mr. Sheridan: - when we found this individual in Montreal to be able to come forward and do the job -

Premier Ghiz: Because you cut everything.

Mr. Sheridan: - until we can find an individual in this area - we have been searching, Madam Speaker, we haven't been able to find a replacement yet.

He has been with us for probably about a four month period and the work that he has done is just getting kudos from across all government. We're very proud of the investments we've made in the ITSS.

Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters. Final question.

Mr. M. Currie: Final question. Madam Speaker, the final question then would be to the minister of innovation.

I'm wondering, minister, if you would share with us today your opinion with the minister of finance that he does not believe that there's the expertise in the IT industry in this province to implement a $47,000 study in this province. Do you agree with your minister that there's nobody in this province that can implement those services? And he has to go outside the province and pay $900 a day and $1,200 a day for IT people. Do you agree with that?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced -

Mr. M. Currie: You're responsible for (Indistinct). I didn't ask you.

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

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

Mr. Sheridan: As the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters is very well aware, we have tremendous IT people here in the province. We have tremendous IT people working for us inside of government. Inside of ITSS we have tremendously talented individuals. But the problem with it is that we need certain pieces of expertise and they are over the moon inside of ITSS with the leadership that's been brought forward.

When we talk about Allan MacDonald, the respect that has been brought forward inside this division, because of his bringing forward, has been fantastic. When we bring in someone like a Jean Yves Poirier from Montreal, the overwhelming respect for this gentleman has been outstanding and has provided great leadership right throughout that division.

The type of people that we have here on PEI with IT is fantastic, and all of the work that the hon. minister of innovation has brought forward in his time, it has been wonderful. But there are two or three positions -

Speaker: Thanks minister, we're -

Mr. Sheridan: - that we have to fill -

Speaker: - we're out of time.

An Hon. Member: Great job.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sheridan: - with great positions.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]