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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

TUESDAY, 13 APRIL 2010

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

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

Use of Proceeds Agreement information

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

On Friday the hon. Leader of the Opposition requested some information with respect to the Use of Proceeds Agreement. I have that information with me today and I'll be happy to table it under tabling of documents.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Assistance for cancer patients

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Canadian Cancer Society of Prince Edward Island reports that one-quarter of Islanders do not have health coverage, public or private. Prince Edward Island has the lowest coverage in the country. Prince Edward Island has the lowest number of new cancer drugs added to the provincial formulary compared to the rest of Canada. Prince Edward Island also has the longest waits to get the drugs on the list.

To the health minister: What is your government going to do today for these cancer patients and their families?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Certainly want to recognize the question that the Leader of the Opposition has given today. Our government is committed to cancer, to drugs in this province and the accessibility to drugs for Islanders. Last year our government announced, with the Premier, a new drug modernization program which will address the accessibility to drugs, and cancer drugs being part of that. Our department internally has done a lot of work, but we're now in the stages that groups such as in the gallery today, as the cancer society, will be given the opportunity to be stakeholders in that process. We will be consulting with them and looking towards an invigorated program in term of drug accessibility.

But it's important to note that our government is committed to cancer and helping families, helping individuals that have been diagnosed. But I think it's important to note from the hon. Leader of the Opposition's question the drug formulary. For far too long in the previous administration drugs were left off the formulary. From 2003, 2004, 2005, three, six drugs were added per year.

What we did, between 2007 and now, our government has invested over \$1.5 million in new cancer drugs. That is an investment. Have we much more to do? Yes we do. But we are showing a commitment. But I thank the leader for her question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Actually before the previous premier, Pat Binns, left the administration, he negotiated a federal-provincial agreement of \$25 million per year to a total of 175 million that didn't have any strings attached.

So my question to the minister is: What is your government going to do today for the cancer patients and their families on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This is not an issue relative only to Prince Edward Island. My hon. colleagues from across Canada are addressing this issue. The previous colleague in the department of health - we have a motion on the floor that is calling for a catastrophic drug program in this country and we need to support that. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition, when we bring that resolution to this floor, that she will support our government and that we can bring that forward to our hon. colleague federally, Gail Shea, and she can bring that forward to Stephen Harper, that we will get a catastrophic drug program in Canada and for Prince Edward Island.

Because this not just a Prince Edward Island issue. We need to help Canadians. Health care is about being a Canadian. I would ask for her support and for the federal

government to support us in a catastrophic drug program for Prince Edward Island and for Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

One hundred and seventy-five million dollars, no strings attached. The other area we should think about, too, is if someone needs day surgery, it's actually - health is covered by the province.

Funds for drugs

So my question to the same minister. In 2007, this government promised, and I quote: Provide the people of Prince Edward Island with the same access to public funded drugs as other Canadians. This would be done by increasing the provincial government's share of spending to match the national average from what is the lowest in the country.

My question to the same health minister is: What has your government done to increase the total share of spending to match the national average?

Mr. Bagnall: Nothing.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

On September 15th of 2009 the cancer society released a report entitled, Cancer Drug Access for Canadians. Our government and the previous minister have responded to that. We are aware of the need for accessibility to drugs for Islanders, for Canadians.

But our government is committed to putting money in to support cancer patients in this province. I've had the opportunity to tour the Cancer Treatment Centre at the QEH. It is an incredible front-line service, individuals that are working there and the work that's being done with families and with patients.

Our government has committed to the Cancer Treatment Centre expansion: \$4.1 million to the cancer treatment expansion; radiation therapists of 274-plus thousand dollars; a medical technologist (Indistinct) 47,000; nurse practitioner, nurse positions for Cancer Treatment Centre, a patient navigator -

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bertram: - which was an initiative of our Premier, which was very key in supporting patients and navigating through the system and what services are available, including getting accessibility to the cancer society or what have you.

We have further investments that are being made. But it's key to note I'm not saying that everything is completed today. Our government is striving to do more work in the area of cancer and cancer drug accessibility, Madam Speaker, and to the Leader of the Opposition.

But have we committed to a lot? Yes we have. Do we have more work to do? Yes we do.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

One hundred and seventy-five million plus, if my memory serves me correct, a surplus of 23.9 million. Almost \$200 million came into this province in 2008, a year - and 2007 towards the end.

My question to the same health minister: What has your government done to increase the share of spending to match the national average as you promised in 2007, well over three years ago?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Madam Speaker, I think it's important to bring a face and a personal perspective to this.

With the investment at the Cancer Treatment Centre we now have accessibility to treatment here in the Province of Prince Edward Island that otherwise families would have to go and the patient would have to go off-Island. That is very important. Families can stay on the Island, the patient can stay on the Island and have accessibility to that. So that is an investment.

Investing in nine new cancer drugs since we came to power is an important investment. But again, I am stating that we are still

committed to this, we are committed to the drug modernization program. I know we've had the opportunity to meet with the cancer society and executive director Dawn Binns and Betty Fraser that are in the gallery today. We are committed to that, and they will be included as stakeholders in the process.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This promise was made three years ago, 2007. Two hundred million dollars. Liquor store renovations, wine experts. My question to the same health minister: Why does this not have the same importance?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Madam Speaker, what's important is - I go back to the previous numbers.

We are investing in cancer. So regardless of the dollars spent, they are going in to cancer treatment in this province. The Cancer Treatment Centre, \$4.1 million being invested in that facility, and the front-line services that have been spent to supply those nurse practitioners, those RNs, that are trained in the area of cancer treatment. To have the patient navigator. Those are all key components in the delivery of cancer treatment in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Again, hon. member, I would urge you to

look at the numbers. Our government has committed over 1.5 million in cancer drugs and we will continue to strive to put more drugs on the provincial drug formulary. But I tell you to look at the numbers from when you were in the administration previous to us. There were years that there were only three, six, three drugs added to this.

We do have drugs, other than the cancer drugs, waiting to be listed under the drug formulary. We have work to be done. But the previous administration left it far too long to add drugs and should have seen the need for that investment. But we are committed to doing that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Actions speak louder than words. My question to the same health minister: Which drugs are you going to be adding to this review today?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Madam Speaker, I am the Minister of Health and Wellness, certainly, but there is a committee, there are professionals, there are oncologists that are all part - even the cancer society - that are part of that process where drugs are put on a provincial drug formulary.

So today for me to say the minister is going to say which drug is going to be put on, I cannot tell you that. We do not have our

budget, we do not have our budget down. Certainly we will be looking forward to that line item in our budget.

But again, hon. member, I would urge you - and it was funny, I was looking at the old Hansards from back when we were in opposition in 2005, asking the previous minister of health, minister Gillan at the time. At that time the drug line items on those budgets, we were not seeing growth at all. But we are committed, and not only working as a Province of Prince Edward Island, we are committed to working with the Atlantic. Because if there is purchasing buying opportunities for purchasing drugs as listed in terms of Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI working together, if there are savings to be had, we will see that and hopefully that will aid us in putting more drugs on the provincial drug formulary.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This government has been in government three years. We're a year away from the next election. Time after time after time we hear words but no action. I quote from a Hansard from a few years ago when the health minister then said: But I think it's important that at least we're doing what other provinces are doing in other jurisdictions in Canada, not just the average, but if we're looking beyond that.

You've been health minister, this government has been in place for three years. When are you going to add extra drugs today?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, since this government came to power we have added 97 drugs to the provincial drug formulary.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bertram: Ninety-seven drugs to the provincial drug formulary.

Our government is committed to our election platform. Look at the investments that we've made to the colorectal screening program, another issue that was fought in opposition. Our Premier's committed to that, and I believe there is even a breakfast of awareness tomorrow morning.

Again, our government is committed to the diabetic, the blood glucose test strips. We realized that election promise for Islanders.

We continue to be committed. We will work. We will work with stakeholders such as the cancer society and others that are committed in putting more drugs on the provincial drug formulary.

But again, I implore the Leader of the Opposition to work with us. Work with us in working with the federal government to realize a catastrophic drug program for the high cost drugs that are out there. I implore

the Leader of the Opposition to support us, and I certainly will look forward to the budget process that we will hopefully work with the drug formulary and the drug programs in the province.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Payment of consultant

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Being in government is about making choices. My next question's to the same health minister. Your department paid \$250,000 for a consultant to tell your department how many physicians the province needs. You have great staff in that department and I'm sure they have access to a computer. My question: Do you think that was an appropriate decision in comparison to putting \$250,000 towards a drug?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition should see that back in October 2008 there was a Corpus Sanchez report. Many aspects to our health care system were part of that review. Physicians, that was part of it. We have contracted the Hay Group. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, that report is not finished so I don't know what you're speaking of.

Furthermore, it's going to be very critical to fulfilling this, that piece of information that the Hay Group - but the hon. Leader of the

Opposition should realize that drugs such as cancer drugs and other high cost drugs, if we are to provide equitable access to Islanders, many of those drugs cost over and above \$1 million if one drug is added to the provincial drug formulary. So, hon. member, yes dollars are dollars but it's important that we provide equitable access to Islanders.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Funds for drugs (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

You cannot put a cost on a person's life. To the Deputy Premier. Mr. Premier, what is the problem here? Your government promised Islanders in the 2007 election. You already had one health minister who couldn't deliver on the drug issue for the cancer association.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Leader of the Opposition: And now you have the second. Do you not brief your ministers and tell your ministers what your priorities are, Mr. Premier?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Deputy Premier.

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question.

I would venture to guess there probably isn't

a person in this room that hasn't - their family has not been affected by cancer in some way or other. We take the pride and care of family members very seriously within this government. We have put a significant amount of money into the health situation. We've opened a heart and stroke unit. We've made a lot of gains. We've added 96 drugs, for cancer treatment drugs.

We have moved the agenda tremendously in three years. Much more than the previous government did in the previous 11 years. We've made some gains and we're pretty proud of those gains. As the minister has said, we have a ways to go yet, without question. I had a family member that had to go to Halifax for their treatment, and that was a significant effort to get over there with family members and have accommodation and so on.

We want to introduce those services on Prince Edward Island for people which are diagnosed with cancer, which is a dreaded disease. We want those people to be home on Prince Edward Island where they can have the support from their families.

So we've made some gains and there is more to do, yes, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister, Deputy Premier. Mr. Premier, what message do you give to your

ministers on expectations? This is a promise your government made well over three years ago. You've been in government for quite a while now. There's an election next year. What are you going to tell the people of Prince Edward Island in terms of when are you going to deliver? I remind the Premier, you received \$200 million with no strings attached in 2007-2008. So why didn't you put money directly here?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Deputy Premier.

Mr. Webster: Certainly, Madam Speaker, the health of all Islanders is extremely important to this government.

I'm not up to date on the actual numbers that were injected into the health system, but we take a lot of pride in the health of our Islanders and providing the services that we can provide. We'll go forward on that basis.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's disappointing. This government pays money for liquor store renovations, office renovations, wine experts. Had \$200 million that they could have put money directly here but chose not to.

Timelines for drug formula

To the minister of health. Your government promised to speed up access to medications

approved by the Canadian Common Drug Review process by legislating timelines under which decisions are made to add approved drugs to the formula. Madam Minister, are you bringing this legislation forward this spring session?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I certainly will reply to the Leader of the Opposition by saying no, it is not going to be brought forward in this session. But again, we will stay committed to the drug modernization program and all of that will be part of, or could be part of, that type of legislation. We're not going to politicize the drugs being put on the provincial drug formulary. Again, there is a committee in the province that looks into what drugs with oncologists, again, stakeholders. We value the professionalism that is on that committee that brings forward the drugs that should be put on that drug formulary.

Do we want much more in that drug line item in our budget? Certainly we do, but there are realities as a province. I have lots of calls from families, whether their loved one is a cancer patient or other sicknesses, and you feel for those individuals. But again, if we provide one drug for one individual it has to be accessible to every Islander with the same sickness or disease. We have to ensure equitable access so we, as a Liberal government, have to do that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's interesting that it's not going to be a political item yet it was an item you promised in your election campaign of 2007, well over three years ago. My question to you is: If there's no legislation being brought in this spring, why not?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, I think the issue is around the drug modernization program and working again as a government with community stakeholder groups and realizing a drug program in this province that will indeed lead to a more accessible drug program on Prince Edward Island.

Again, I urge the Leader of the Opposition to voice her concerns to the federal government, to her federal Conservative colleague the hon. Gail Shea, in terms of a catastrophic drug program for Canada. That is critical. We saw no announcement in the last federal budget this spring. We are calling for that as a province. I would like to see the Leader of the Opposition's comments when that motion comes to the floor to see if she will indeed support the province's plea for a catastrophic drug program for high cost drugs in Canada and for Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam

Speaker, as everybody knows, it's the provincial government's role to meet Islanders' needs for health care.

Different drug coverages in hospitals

My next question to the same health minister. Madam Minister, each of the seven hospitals in Prince Edward Island make their own decisions on whether or not to fund a new drug. It has to be funded from the hospital's global budget. My question to the health minister: Why would there be differences in our hospitals across PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

With the new departments and the restructuring, we are now the Department of Health and Wellness. Previously it was health and social services. Social services, at the time, had the drug program and now that will be turned over to the Department of Health and Wellness. Our director, Faye Martin, under the drug program, we've had many briefings in regards to that. We are, again, hon. Leader of the Opposition, working towards a provincial drug formulary and equitable access to medications for Islanders.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sheridan: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, this government's been in government three years.

We've already determined well over \$200 million that were not tied to any specific item.

My question is: Why would there be different drug coverages at different hospitals across PEI? Isn't health care supposed to be equal?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I will take the Leader of the Opposition's question under advisement and go back to our staff and discuss her question. But I want to - our front line professionals in the health care system are doing great work. It's incredible, the front line, what they're doing. Going to the hospitals and seeing what work is being done is incredible.

But again, going back to the issue around drug accessibility, hon. Leader of the Opposition, I will take your question under advisement and report back to the Legislature.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Funds for out-of-province organ transplants

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the health minister. On the weekend, another personal story, of a lady by the

name of Melissa MacPhail on her requirements for a double lung transplant. When is your department going to have a policy in place with financial resources for people who require organ transplants and have to go out of the province? When will this policy be put in place?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I am not at pleasure to speak of individual cases in the health care system, but certainly read the *Guardian* news story on the weekend. But was very aware of the situation around out of province for patients that are going out-of-province for a lung transplant.

Thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. Again, we do have a new budget coming down, and we'll take her question under advisement, but to let her know that, as a department, we are working on that.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Briefing of minister

Leader of the Opposition: My question to the same minister. When you had taken over from the previous health minister, did he not brief you in terms of what were priorities? This issue was brought up in December and at that time we were reassured that people were going to have a policy in place and that these individuals would be covered. We're

only talking about a small amount.

My question: Did the previous minister of health not brief you in terms of what the priorities were?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, I'm not at pleasure to discuss individual cases, but I think what's very important is this certain issue brings a face to this. It brings a face of a young individual in our Island community. I was very made aware of this at the onset of becoming minister, of out-of-province travel for lung transplant patients in the province, and the timelines that they might experience outside the province.

Again, hon. Leader of the Opposition, we are working towards that. It will take extra dollars in a budget, but again, we are working on that and it is the time of a new budget time, and we'll look into that.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Funds for out-of-province organ transplants (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you Madam Speaker.

To the health minister. Whether it's a double lung transplant or if it's actually provincial travel assistance for kidney transplant

donors, who want to donate their kidneys to patients, but they find it's a financial burden, PEI's the only province that doesn't cover this. Will that be in this year's budget too, Madam health minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I believe the hon. Leader of the Opposition, if I recall, that's part of a renal - when Islanders experience renal failure, and if they have, perhaps, a family member, that would like to provide a kidney, and it's not a suitable donor to that family member, they can put it on a registry across the country. From what I can understand, from going to staff, is that we will have to enact legislation, I believe. But again, I will come back with information to the Leader of the Opposition.

It is a very good question and I will come back with more information to her.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

New health legislation

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

Will this legislation be brought forward this spring?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Madam Speaker, if this is

information - if this legislation is more of a - not recreating the wheel, so to speak, in terms of other jurisdictions having similar legislation - and again, I bring this information forward just because of an individual who had contacted me in bringing forward information.

We are looking into it as a department. I would tell the Leader of the Opposition that we will certainly look into that. If it can be brought forward and it's something that we can do, we will do it this session.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors.

Warnings on hand-held communication devices

Mr. Greenan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. In January of this year it became illegal to use hand-held wireless communication devices while driving. Could the minister update the House on how many warnings were issued during the initial grace period?

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

Mr. MacKinley: I'd like to thank my department at this time. Also the local media stations, because there's definitely a lot of advertising put into these cell phones.

Islanders, as you know, when you bring in a law, 95, 96% of people immediately obey

the law. So I believe less than 40 warnings were given out.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors.

Mr. Greenan: A follow-up question to the same minister. Are enforcement agencies now issuing tickets to drivers who break this new law?

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

Mr. MacKinley: I might clarify that, too. That was under the RCMP. I don't have the numbers for, like, the city or Summerside or those places.

Mr. Brown: No tickets in Charlottetown.

Mr. MacKinley: Are they - actually, they could have issued tickets right from January the 1st. They used their discretion. There was a notice not too long ago saying that they will be ticketing people from now on. Probably in circumstances like - I don't - we make the laws. The police, the RCMP, the justice department, they enforce them.

Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Evangeline rec centre

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question is to the hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

As I know, the minister is aware of the

community of Abram-Village was devastated on the weekend by the loss of the Evangeline rec centre. Can the minister let us know if the government is able to help the community in their efforts to rebuild?

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

Mr. LeClair: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I thank you for that question, hon. member. It's certainly a tragic loss that the community was dealt on Sunday morning. I have to commend the volunteers, the fire department, the community, and everyone who pulled together to -

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LeClair: I think there were eight fire departments involved from across the end of the province, from Summerside west, and they all did a super job in protecting the infrastructure that was surrounding the arena.

We, as a government, will certainly be there when the time comes to rebuild. I understand that there is a committee struck already to look into rebuilding. So this community is certainly a great group of volunteers. They don't sit back and wait for things to happen, they make things happen. We'll be there to work with them when the time comes.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the

Opposition.

PCH surgeon

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is to the minister of health. Madam Minister, on Sunday I heard from a person from the Summerside area. She felt that Prince County Hospital is now down to one general surgeon, and I know the complement's to be three. Could you tell us what supports have been put in place to help Dr. Bannon out?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We have put the proper means in place, as we are short a surgeon right now at the Prince County Hospital, as the Leader of the Opposition has stated. But there are surgeries taking place that will now be taking place at the QEH until the surgeon comes back from leave.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

My understanding is Dr. Bannon is actually working every day. If you're helping out by some surgeries coming to the QEH, what supports have you put in place to help lessen his workload?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We want to ensure patient safety and doctor safety in all of this. Again, the means have been put in place in terms of Dr. Bannon being able to realize his specific timelines, and also, as I said, those surgeries to take place at the QEH until the other surgeon has come back to work.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

Madam Minister, do we have extra surgeons at the QEH?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The non-invasive surgeries, a lot of those (Indistinct) taken place at the PCH, and major surgeries at the QEH. The retention and recruitment office is working to find locum surgeons for this time. We believe it'll only be till the end of April. We are working as a recruitment office to find supply. But, hon. Leader of the Opposition, I want to assure you that what has been put in place will ensure patient safety, and doctor and front line service safety as well.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from

Georgetown-St. Peters.

ITSS contract (further)

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

On Friday the minister of finance promised he was going to bring back information on information technology contracts. I'm just wondering if you brought that information back today.

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

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The contracts that the hon. member has asked for have been requested and will be coming forward as promised.

Thank you very much.

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

PEITF vote on kindergarten teachers

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, my question is for the minister of education.

In January of this year, minister, it was announced that the PEI Teachers' Federation was supposed to vote on an agreement to accept the kindergarten teachers into their union. Can you tell me if that vote has taken place?

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

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

That vote will be taking place to ratify the (Indistinct) in the Memorandum of Agreement with the PEITF this Thursday.

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

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

Are you confident that it will be ratified?

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

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

It would be a little premature for me to make an assumption on that. It will be a vote that will be given to the entire membership. I believe there are 1,568 approximate teachers in and across schools across Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

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

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

Would the minister care to reveal what exactly they are going to be voting on?

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

Attorney General.

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

As the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters is well aware, we are moving forward with a policy direction, a historical educational decision, to bring approximately 1,400 five-year-olds into the public school system, which is the last province in Canada to provide public education for five-year-olds.

We certainly have embraced this challenge. In preparation, they will be voting as a membership to ratify the contract to bring the approximate 112 kindergarten teachers into the contract and the PEITF.

Thank you.

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

Job security for teachers

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, what I am well aware of is that this government has closed eight schools, and last year there was a promise made that you would not lay off any teachers for one year.

It's my understanding that there is going to be a cut of 30 teachers. Can you tell me, have you promised job security for the teachers in this province?

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

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

This government has proven over the last three years that education and the future direction of education in this province is a huge priority.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D. Currie: Over the last three months, Madam Speaker, I have had the fortunate ability to meet with all of the boards across Prince Edward Island, I've had an opportunity to meet with the PEITF, I've had an opportunity to meet with and speak at the semi-annual meetings of the membership.

We're committed to building and strengthening the public school system in the Province of Prince Edward Island. Case in point, we're bringing our five-year-olds into the public school system. Not only the 112 teachers that are coming in to provide play-based learning, but we'll be bringing in approximately 20 teachers on top of that cohort to provide additional resources, art, music, phys ed, to make sure that we provide the best quality five-year-old program that we possibly can.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I don't believe that I heard that you're promising job security. Are you promising

job security for all teachers in this province?

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

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

As I have said earlier, our government strongly believes in the public education system. As the minister responsible for education and early childhood development, I'm tremendously confident at the state of the public school system here in the Province of Prince Edward Island. We're looking forward to working with the key stakeholders and creating stronger partnerships as we move forward.

We know the challenges on classroom teachers in respect to class composition, but the reality of it is we are faced with declining enrollments, and certainly as we adapt and strengthen and build -

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. D. Currie: - build the public school system, we'll be very conscientious and very respectful of the workforce, and that's the great teachers in this province, Madam Speaker.

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

Role of kindergarten teachers

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

There's been a staffing and funding model for teachers that has been sitting on the minister's desk for almost a year now. I'm wondering, in that model that's been presented, that report that's been presented to you, are you going to allow kindergarten teachers to teach more than kindergarten in the schools?

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

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

Right now, as the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters is certainly aware of, there are discussions going on with the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission and the University of Prince Edward Island. They're working through a process to bring in and to embrace the 112 kindergarten teachers that will be providing top-quality public kindergarten in our schools.

We are looking forward to embracing the 112 teachers, we are well into our planning as we've put together approximately 150 new buses since coming in to government -

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D. Currie: - with the approximate investments of over \$14 million for capital construction to welcome those five-year-olds into the school system.

I do want to remind the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters that this government did exceed the enrollment complement of

the Gar Andrew model last year by approximately 20 teachers, and we're certainly excited to continue to look at ways that we can strengthen public education in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, clearly the minister did not answer the question.

It was very clear. Of the 112 teachers that are coming in in kindergarten, are you going to allow them to teach anything more than kindergarten within our schools?

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

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

As I did allude to, we will be embracing 112 kindergarten teachers, new teachers to the public school system. We will be hiring 20 additional teachers above and beyond. We have respected and exceeded the Gar Andrew model last year by 20 positions, and my objective as the minister is to continue to find ways to strengthen the classrooms in this province.

I look forward to the budget as we roll down, and I look forward to the decision that is made by the PEITF and its membership this Thursday, ratifying the agreement, and I look forward to the decision by the Standards and Ethics

Committee in partnership with the University of Prince Edward Island in developing the direction that we go in.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

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

I believe that's what's on the minds of a lot of teachers, minister, is the fact that they want to know clearly if you're going to allow kindergarten teachers to go farther than their own classrooms and teach within the school system. So will you get up today and tell us what your plans are?

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

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

As I alluded to, the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission will be working and is working through a process with the University of Prince Edward Island. Our track record is fairly strong and consistent in respect to what we're doing in public education. I've had the opportunity to meet with the PEITF. I've had an opportunity to meet with teachers all across the Province of Prince Edward Island. As a former educator I certainly value the work that they do and respect the challenges in respect to classroom composition in schools all across Prince Edward Island with the social and economical challenges that

various areas of the province are under.

So we're certainly committed to working with the PEITF and the boards and the superintendents to create strong partnerships as we move forward to strengthen the public school system, Madam Speaker.

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

Contract for closed schools

Mr. M. Currie: Final question, Madam Speaker, would go back to the minister of education.

It's my understanding, minister, since you so cold-heartedly closed eight schools in our province last year that you have issued a contract to an individual of your party colours to go out and look after these schools. Can you tell me the name of the individual and how much that contract's for?

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

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

Obviously the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters is trying to (Indistinct) a direction and certainly knows very well - he's been sitting in this House for three years and clearly has been part of the announcements that this government has made.

Over the last number of years we've invested over \$12 million in 51 new school

buses to accommodate the kindergarten children -

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D. Currie: We've invested over \$7 million to implement kindergarten. We're bringing in an investment of \$2.5 million to bring kindergarten teachers into the school system -

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D. Currie: - we've invested in 112 kindergarten teachers on top of 20 new, we respected the Gar Andrew model, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D. Currie: We basically are spending money on new curriculum in literacy, numeracy, math programming. This government is embracing the challenge of moving the public education system forward and building it into the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]