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FOR

FRIDAY, 16 APRIL 2010

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

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

Negotiations with Hydro-Québec

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

My first question today is for the Premier.

Premier, you have positioned yourself as the great negotiator with Hydro-Québec on bringing cheap electrical power to the people of Prince Edward Island. Can you tell me how many times you have met with Hydro Quebec officials?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Our negotiating team has now met with Hydro-Québec on two different occasions. We're going to continue to have talks with them. This is really a unique opportunity for Prince Edward Island, because what we have to realize is Hydro-Québec produces in the vicinity of, I think, somewhere around 40,000 megawatts of electricity. Prince Edward Island is in the need of about 100 megawatts. So we're a very small player and it's difficult for Maritime Electric to even get heard. This is an opportunity, government to government, for us to have an opportunity to be able to sit down with Hydro-Québec to see if there is an opportunity for us to buy cheaper renewable

energy.

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

Negotiating team members

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

Could the Premier please divulge who is part of that negotiation team?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

We have Gordon MacKay, and also an expert by the name of Bill Marshall.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Is that the same Bill Marshall who designed the sale of the assets for New Brunswick Power that fell apart? Is that the same Bill Marshall?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Yes. He's done work in New Brunswick, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. M. Currie: So there's no one else on that team, just Gordie MacKay, Bill Marshall and yourself? No one else?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you.

No. That's it.

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

Sell-off of assets

Mr. M. Currie: A question for the Premier.

Are you planning in your negotiations to sell off our assets? Our underwater submarine cable connection to New Brunswick, our wind farms in North Cape and East Point, and our hydrogen village. Is that part of your negotiations with Hydro-Québec?

Premier Ghiz: No, Madam Speaker.

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

Wind development

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

In your negotiations, is there anything there in regards to wind development? What are you negotiating with Hydro-Québec on the wind development?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Just to perhaps update the hon. member a little bit, from Georgetown-St. Peters, currently right now what the Province of Prince Edward Island is looking for is a

power purchase agreement. That is an opportunity for us to purchase up to 100 megawatts of electricity from Hydro-Québec. Right now Maritime Electric really puts out a request for proposal where they look to buy electricity from different sources. The problem is, Maritime Electric, Prince Edward Island, is a very small player. Our max capacity is somewhere around 200 megawatts. It's been told to me many times that Prince Edward Island uses as much electricity as one pulp-and-paper mill in New Brunswick.

So we're a very small player, and that's why Maritime Electric sometimes has trouble going out and looking for that cheaper energy, because really, we're not on the radar screen of many large suppliers of electricity. So what we're trying to do is take it from a government perspective, and go government to government and look for an opportunity for a power purchase agreement.

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

Hydro-Québec demands

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, is Hydro Quebec, as they demanded with New Brunswick - a complete control of the distribution and generation - are they demanding that in these negotiations, that they have the rights to all of our underwater cables and the distribution lines?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: No, Madam Speaker.

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

Negotiations with Fortis re: Maritime Electric

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, is the Premier in negotiations with Fortis to buy Maritime Electric?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: No, Madam Speaker.

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

Risk to sovereignty

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

I'm just wondering if the Premier, that you have placed all your faith in Bill Marshall - and he's the one that messed up the New Brunswick deal - are you going to allow our sovereignty to be put at risk with him negotiating this deal?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I could give a really short answer there, but I might as well explain it out a little bit. Bottom line is Prince Edward Island, really, when it comes to electricity has no sovereignty. Our problem here in Prince Edward Island is that we do not have an abundance of nuclear energy or natural gas.

We do have wind. Unfortunately the wind doesn't blow all the time. So we need to find ways for us to be able to find backup energy for us to be able to import that here to the Province of Prince Edward Island.

That's what we're out trying to do, talking to Hydro-Québec, talking to Newfoundland - Nalcor, I believe it's called. We're looking for any possible opportunity for us to lower down electricity rates. Is it going to happen? Are our negotiations going to be successful? I don't know. I'm not going to get up Islanders' hopes, but what I can say is that we are working very hard for it to happen.

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

Transmission path through New Brunswick

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I'm sure the Premier as the chief negotiator in these negotiations with Hydro-Québec, that you have negotiated a path for the transmission of that electricity through the Province of New Brunswick.

Can you tell me if you have that agreement signed, and will you table a copy of that?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Perhaps the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters is forgetting that back, I think it was 10 or 15 years ago, yes, you used to have to negotiate the transfer of electricity, and that's what's happened to us in the past. If

we've had a deal with Quebec before, trying to get the electricity through New Brunswick, they've charged us rates that did not make it feasible. Fortunately for us, now the transmission capacity around North American is now an open market. So once that electricity is obtained we just have to bid to be able to get that electricity to go through, and we're waiting to find out if we're able to purchase electricity from the Province of Quebec.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I'm a little bit surprised, and I think probably this is the second time that the Premier announced something of this nature.

He also did this when he announced that billion-dollar dream to build a wind farm, and you had no capacity to get that across. I was in the New Brunswick legislature a few months ago and the question was asked about capacity, and the New Brunswick energy minister indicated that there was no more capacity on those lines. So I'm wondering how you're going to get that cheap hydroelectricity from Quebec to Prince Edward Island if there's no capacity through New Brunswick.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. M. Currie: Surely you must (Indistinct).

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Obviously they were able to get the electricity from New Brunswick now to Prince Edward Island now, so there is capacity there. It's an open market. You're able to bid on the capacity that's available there. So, unfortunately, the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters just needs to get a little bit up to speed on that. But it is a very confusing process and I will forgive him for not being up to speed on that.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I think all Islanders are anxious to hear.

It's seven or eight months since the Premier made an announcement that he's going to supply Islanders with cheap electricity from Quebec, and he's only had two meetings, in seven or eight months. So I don't think he's the great negotiator he pretends to be.

Vermont deal with Hydro-Québec

I'm wondering if the Premier can tell us today if he's going to achieve the same deal that Vermont did, in achieving a negotiated deal with Hydro Quebec for 4.5 cents a kilowatt. Do you think you're going to bring the same price to Islanders?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Just for everyone's information in here, at no point did I indicate that I was a great negotiator. At no point did I say to Islanders that we were going to lower down electricity

rates in this province.

Just to put things in context a little bit, there was a New Brunswick plus 10 that was in place here about 10 or 15 years ago. The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters was the minister at the time. He got rid of the New Brunswick plus 10, and he did make a commitment that this could bring down, lower electricity rates to people in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

The same minister indicated that Meteor Creek was going to be an opportunity -

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Premier Ghiz: - for Islanders to have natural gas in the Province of Prince Edward Island. The same minister indicated that Deep Panuke -

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Premier Ghiz: - was going to bring natural gas to the Province of Prince Edward Island to lower down electricity rates.

I'm not going to go out like that and mislead Islanders. What I'm going to tell Islanders is that I'm working very hard on their behalf to look for any possible opportunity to lower down electricity rates, and I'll continue to do that as long as I have the privilege to be the Premier of the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Negotiations with Hydro-Québec (further)

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I think this is the same Premier that promised lower rates from Churchill Falls, he promised a \$1 billion wind farm, he promised us tidal power from Nova Scotia, and he promised us cheap electricity from Quebec.

I believe that the Premier, as a Canadian - you would think that a fellow Liberal premier would give you even the same deal as he gave an American state. Do you not believe that we should get the same rates at 4.5 cents a kilowatt for our province and our people?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. M. Currie: I'm sure you can get that for us.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Unfortunately, I know in the last session of the House the hon. member indicated to me that after the New Brunswick deal was announced with Quebec - that didn't go through - he actually said that I let down Islanders because I got to the table too late. Now he's telling me that I should be getting the lowest possible rates that ever existed.

We know that this member has a history of misleading Islanders when it comes to electricity rates in the province. What I'm going to do is I'm going to be honest with Islanders.

Mr. M. Currie: (Indistinct).

Premier Ghiz: I know our electricity rates are too high, Madam Speaker.

I'm working very hard to lower them down, and as long as I have the privilege of being Premier of Prince Edward Island, I will continue to work towards that goal.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, here's a Premier that has burdened the people of Prince Edward Island with a 42% rise in electricity rates.

You should be embarrassed over that. So I'm wondering: What rate do you expect to achieve for Islanders in your negotiations? What rate?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Again, we're going to try to get the best rate possible for Islanders. Are we going to get a lower rate? I don't know. Unfortunately, Prince Edward Island is a very small user of electricity in the grand scheme of things. Our leverage is not what it is in other provinces where they buy huge quantities of electricity. Prince Edward Island uses max capacity, and that's the maximum, which is probably around Christmas time, around 200 megawatts. We're looking to buy about 100 megawatts from a company that produces upwards of 40,000 megawatts, if not more. They're looking for big contracts out there, and we're just fortunate that we're actually at the table.

I know that the former minister was also responsible for energy at one point. At no point did I know if they were sitting down with Quebec Hydro. The only thing they were doing was chasing natural gas between Deep Panuke and Meteor Creek. What did Islanders get? Absolutely nothing.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, the Premier talks about leverage.

I believe I read in the media where he was going to leverage a deal with Hydro Quebec because of the close proximity to the Magdalen Islands. I'm just wondering how you're negotiations are going on with running a cable to the Magdalens? Is that part of your negotiations?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. M. Currie: You did mention that in the media.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, (Indistinct), that could be part of the negotiations, Madam Speaker, anything could be part of the negotiations.

Right now what we're looking for is a power purchase agreement from the Province of Quebec. If they indicate that at some point that they may want to ship electricity to the Maggies, we'll do everything that we can to help them out, as long as we get a good power deal ourselves. That's part of negotiations. I can't go more into than that.

What I can indicate to the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters is that we are working very hard on this side of the House, to lower down electricity rates. We know what the previous government did. I'm not making any commitments that I'm going to lower them down. The commitment I'm making, and the commitment that I've always made, is that I will continue to work hard to try and lower them down.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, the Premier should be demanding that a fellow Liberal premier, and you a Canadian, that you should and deserve the same price as Vermont.

If they're going to give a price to Vermont for 4.5 cents a kilowatt, why wouldn't you demand the same price for your people here in Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. M. Currie: He's the chief negotiator.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

That'd be a very good negotiations, for anybody who's been involved in negotiations. You're a province that needs to buy 100 megawatts, you're dealing with another province that produces over 40,000 megawatts, and I'll walk into the room and say: Give me 4.5 cents or I'm walking out.

What are they going to say? They're going to say goodbye. We know probably that's

how the previous government negotiated, and that's why under their leadership electricity rates continued to rise in this province for a long period of time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, we're not going to sleep very good in this province from now on with this Premier negotiating with Hydro-Québec.

It's fearful what's going to happen. He's already put the prices up 42% and we don't see anything coming in the future.

Submarine cable negotiations

The Premier indicated that he was in negotiations with Ottawa for a new submarine cable. Can you please update us on your negotiations?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

We're working very hard on that file. We hope that there'll be an announcement in the near future. I sat down, actually, with Minister Ashfield just last week, or the week before. We discussed it again. I know our minister has been in contact with his counterparts. I'm hoping at some point that I'll have an opportunity to sit down with the prime minister again to raise that issue. It's very important, in this province, that we receive some funding for this new cable. It

will lead to our ability to not only import the electricity we need, but hopefully to export some of our excess wind energy as well. So we're continuing to work on that file.

I encourage the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, anything that he's able to do to help, we welcome it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Future wind developments

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, it's seven or eight months since the Premier made this announcement that he was going to achieve cheap power rates for Islanders.

I think what's puzzling a lot of Islanders is the fact that we don't know where we're going with wind, we don't know if the wind farms are going to be able to be built in the future if Hydro-Québec has monopoly over all our distribution lines and everything. So maybe, Premier, you could get up and clarify some of the issues that are out there today. Are there going to be future wind developments? Are you going to be able to fulfill that billion-dollar dream you promised?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

If the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters would like a briefing at some point, I'm sure I can get our department to provide

it for him.

Just so he knows, Prince Edward Island, currently right now produces around 150 megawatts of electricity from wind. We're about to use 50 of that here in Prince Edward Island. We'd like to use the whole 150. Unfortunately, the wind does not blow all the time. We export the other 100 with the private sector. Also we have an RFP that's out now, that's coming back in, to build more wind projects in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Just so the hon. member knows, he talked about distribution rights and Quebec having a monopoly on them, I've explained this to him in the past. There's a new process called FERC where transmission is now open. There's no one individual that owns transmission. So we feel very confident in the new system. We're very confident, moving into the future, that Prince Edward Island will be in a good situation.

Are we going to be a dominant player? No, we're not. If we get to our 500 megawatts we'll use as much as we can here in Prince Edward Island, the rest we'll export. But when you have Newfoundland and Labrador that are hoping to produce 5,000 megawatts of wind energy, it just puts it in perspective what a small player Prince Edward Island is. But we're going to continue to do the best we can with the resources that we do have.

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

Negotiations with Hydro-Québec (further)

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, if I understood the Premier right, all you're asking for from Quebec Hydro is a purchase agreement for 100 megawatts of power.

Is that all you're asking for?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

In the general vicinity, yes. I'm not going to put all our cards on the table, since we're in negotiations, but we are looking for a power purchase agreement, yes.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Question for the Premier, Madam Speaker.

When, Premier, do you feel that you will have these negotiations completed?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I hope we'll have them completed soon. We may never have them completed. The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters likes to stand up and say that I've made a promise to Islanders. The promise I made to Islanders was that I was going to try and find lower electricity rates. I'm going to continue to do that. If things do not work with Quebec Hydro, I'll go look somewhere else.

But what I can say, is that I am at the table looking for lower electricity rates. I'm not out working on boondoggle projects or makeup projects like Meteor Creek or Deep Panuke. I'm working on concrete solutions for our electricity needs here in Province of Prince Edward Island.

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

Transmission capacity agreement with New Brunswick

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, this is the same Premier that promised cheap power from Churchill Falls, he promised power from tidal facilities, he promised a \$1 billion wind farm that's been cancelled, it's been re-announced, and cancelled again.

He does not have any transmission capacity to go anywhere. I am surprised that he'd stand up there and make those announcements.

Premier, when will you have a transmission capacity agreement with the province and New Brunswick signed? When will you do that? That'd be the first piece of business you should do.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Obviously, I will, again, offer the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters a briefing, if he so chooses, because he's very mixed up in a lot of his facts.

First of all, we made no commitment with regards to Churchill Falls. We do have an RFP in place. There is a FERC regulation now where we do go out and bid for these transmissions. Once we get more things finalized we'll have more announcements to make.

But the hon. member should try and get his facts straight, and I'd be more than happy to provide a briefing for him.

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

Negotiating team members (further)

Mr. M. Currie: One final question for the Premier.

Is Billy Dow part of your negotiation team?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

His firm is involved through Gordon MacKay, but he is not -

Mr. M. Currie: I knew he'd surface again.

Premier Ghiz: He is not at the negotiation table, and, Madam Speaker, I look for the best people.

Billy Dow is the best that I know. He's not at the negotiation table. Gordon MacKay is, and we're very proud of that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

One English school board

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Many people are wondering if the government's planning on going to one English school board. To the minister of education: Have you had any discussions with the Western School Board going to one English board?

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

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

That question - during the last few months, I've had the opportunity to meet with boards all across the province on a number of occasions. That question has been put to me by boards and right now it is not an immediate priority. Right now our priority is the investment that we're making in the early childhood sector and the investments that we'll be making with the transition of the five-year-olds into the public school system, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. Mr. Minister, when you were having one of these discussions

with the Western School Board, did you perhaps tell them that the discussions on one English school board would start after the next election?

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

Mr. D. Currie: No.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Funds for Eastern School District rezoning plan

Leader of the Opposition: That's an interesting answer.

My next question to the same minister. Mr. Minister, a few years back, money was given to parents for the Souris Family of Schools to do some work on rezoning. My question to the minister: Will you entertain a request from the Eastern School District to have resources to have resources to do a comprehensive rezoning plan, starting right away?

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

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

During discussions that I've had with the Eastern School District we've had some very positive discussions. If you look at the discussions that we have had, I've made it very clear to boards all across the Province

of Prince Edward Island that our two immediate priorities right now in the department of education are the investments in our zero to four-year-olds that have been neglected and ignored for 15 years in this province. Also, the investment of the historical announcement of bringing our five-year-olds, as the last province in Canada I must add, into the public school system.

Our priorities right now, as myself as minister, are going to be focused on instruction and learning. We're going to look at continuing to make investments to strengthen and build our public school system here in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. A number of people are saying things like it seems like there's a lot of attention on spending a lot of money in your department maybe on expansion of schools in your own riding. My question to you, Mr. Minister: Is it true that you're delaying rezoning, especially in your own riding too, until after the next election?

Mr. Bagnall: Well, of course he is. (Indistinct).

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much,

Madam Speaker.

I do want to clarify. My riding is Charlottetown-Parkdale and there has been no investment other than general maintenance improvement in schools in the District of Charlottetown-Parkdale.

Basically, right now, I've made it very clear across this province as I've travelled, meeting with the early childhood sector, the kindergarten teachers that we're embracing into the public school system, I've met with the PEITF, the membership - our priority is going to continue to be looking at investments that we can prove today to strengthen our system into the future.

I do want to clarify that rezoning is the priority of the Eastern School District and this government has a strong track record to respect the autonomy of the boards in this province.

I do want to clarify. Back in 1996, which was approximately 14 years ago, the government of the day, which came in, was the Binns government, and there was a report. It was called the Coles-MacAulay Report. That was a report that was done to look at school rezoning and potential renewal of schools in the province. That report was shelved.

In November of 2005 the Binns government was asked to carry out a study on declining enrollment. Government refused the request. In August (Indistinct) we respected the autonomy of the Eastern School District and we gave them the ability to look at a school reorganization plan to build and renew themselves into the future.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

Update on Seniors' Home Repair Program

Ms. Docherty: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question this morning is for the Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour. A number of Island seniors across the province, including those in Kellys Cross-Cumberland, have benefitted from the seniors home repair program. I'd like to find out from the minister, if she's able to provide us with an update on how many of the seniors actually accessed this program in the last fiscal year?

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

Premier Ghiz: Don't cancel it like the previous government.

Ms. Sherry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

That is an excellent question coming from the Member from Kellys Cross-Cumberland. Certainly it gives me great pleasure to address the issue, and I may have to ask for your indulgence, Madam Speaker, because the seniors in this province are a very important part of our population.

Sad as it may be, the previous administration cut this very important program to assist our low income seniors here in Prince Edward Island. But I'm very happy to stand in the House today and

assure the seniors in this province that we are committed to them and we will always be committed to the issues in order to make our seniors here in Prince Edward Island to be able to live in dignity and comfort.

Certainly, this administration, I think in the year 2009-2010, we committed \$500,000 to the seniors repair program, allowing our seniors to fix windows and doorsteps and a lot of other things so that they can live in comfort in their own home.

Mr. Bagnall: Is this a member's statement?

Ms. Sherry: To answer the question to the hon. member, I'm proud to stand and say that we have helped 900 seniors -

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Sherry: - have repairs done to their homes, Madam Speaker, and this year alone the number was 425.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Docherty: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'd also like to find out from the minister, as a member of this Legislature that's proud that we brought this program back: Are we going to continue it in this upcoming fiscal budget?

Premier Ghiz: That's a good question.

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

Premier Ghiz: Don't cancel that.

Ms. Sherry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As we know, the budget will soon be brought down in this province and certainly at that time we will know the full answer to that question.

I also just want to mention, I think it's very important to note, as well, the commitment of this government to our seniors. I want to commend the Member from Charlottetown-Sherwood who worked diligently with his colleagues to increase the threshold from \$30,000 a year to 35.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Affordable housing agreement

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is also to the minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour. Minister, I understand that the affordable housing agreement is administered by your department. Can you advise the House how many projects have been approved and how many units have been created?

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

Ms. Sherry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I would like to say to the Member from West Royalty-Springvale that I'm very proud to say that it's our department that looks after the affordable housing agreements here in the province. I think we can all recognize the fact that affordable, accessible housing for our Islanders makes a difference in being able to live a quality life here on Prince Edward Island.

I know there's been a couple of projects that have been near and dear to my hear in the Summerside area: the project with the community connections, an independent place. I'm also proud to stand and give those numbers to the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale. To date, there have been 19 projects across our province with 155 units provided.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Sherry: Just to kind of break that down a little further, there were 49 family rental units, four units for family home ownership, seniors 14 units, and 88 units for persons with disabilities, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Funds for Eastern School District rezoning plan (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question's to the Premier. Premier, this is three years that you've been in government, you keep talking, talking,

talking, consulting, consulting, consulting. This is the second education minister we have, education is still in chaos, you have an \$87 million deficit, and my question is: People are worried about value for money. Are you going to commit to have dollars if the Eastern School District put in a request for a comprehensive rezoning plan? Do you commit to that?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Here's what I can tell the hon. Leader of the Opposition, that our government has been more active when it comes to the future education in this Province of Prince Edward Island than any government going back a generation. We just have to look at our commitment. We were willing to tackle the difficult issues like school closure in this province. We were able to tackle the difficult issues like moving kindergarten into the school system. We're able to tackle student-teacher ratios in this province. We're able to say yes, we can to building new high schools in our rural communities in this province, unlike the former government that just wanted to renovate old high schools.

If there's a government that has been committed to education in this province, it's been our government, whether or not it was the former minister of education or the current minister of education. As long as I have the privilege of being Premier of the Province of Prince Edward Island, education will remain one of our main priorities in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Tenders for Souris school

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This Premier is really good at being selective with all that activity. But to the minister of education: Have the tenders gone out for the construction of the new green \$35 million K-12 school for Souris? Are the tenders out for that facility?

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

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

I can't speak specifically whether the tenders have gone out. I know that through the \$500 million five-year capital investment, education has been a strong beneficiary of those investments of approximately 120 million.

We're excited to be opening this September, we'll be officially opening the new \$22 million school in Montague, a state-of-the-art facility. We'll also be adding and opening the new facility in Glen Stewart, which is a \$9 million facility -

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D. Currie: - new school. Plus we've also supported the Eastern School District

with their request to accommodate five-year-olds with new additions to schools at West Royalty, L.M. Montgomery and Westwood Primary.

So we're excited about the investments and we're excited about the investment that we will be making our long term capital budget with the new facility in Souris.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Back to the education - Madam Speaker, I can't hear myself. Sorry. Thank you.

To the education minister. Mr. Minister, this week you had in your minister's statement on education that you're going back to the planning committee with the school for Souris and you'll have a report in 2011 and the construction's supposed to be done by 2014. So my question to you, Mr. Minister is: Have the tenders gone out for the construction of the promised, re-promised, and promised again, green school for Souris?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Thank you very much,

Madam Speaker.

One of the initiatives that we've decided to take on in the great District of Souris-Elmira is that when this government looks at making initiatives and using taxpayers dollars to make investments, it's a priority and we have an impeccable track record, to make sure that we consult and we listen to Islanders.

One of the things that we're doing now is that we've invited the stakeholders to the table to help us be part of the design and the construction of the new Souris high school. Because we want to understand and hear from the communities across Prince Edward Island what the educational needs are, specifically if it's in the trades and technology areas.

So we're going to sit down and we're going to consult and we're going to listen and make sure that the residents and the communities of Souris are part of that discussion, Madam Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's interesting that there seems to be selective priorities all the time with this government. This year, within weeks of taking into your new portfolio in education, new additions were approved for many of

the city schools, however, this week you continue to delay Souris. The parents have worked, they've consulted, they've come up with the plan and you've promised several times that there was going to be a construction. When are you actually going to construct this school?

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

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

One of the realities, if you look at the decision, the \$22 million new school investment in the town of Montague, I had a chance to speak to the architect. They're claiming that facility will be probably be one of the premier high schools in Atlantic Canada.

Premier Ghiz: Canada?

Mr. D. Currie: Part of the discussion that was had in that construction - we engaged with the community of Montague. The reality of it is, the request to add new additions to schools in the Charlottetown area came directly from the Eastern School District as part of their reorganization plan to accommodate the kindergarten.

At West Royalty Elementary we're seeing an increase of 54% in enrollment at L.M. Montgomery. Both of these schools encompass rural areas. So these are investments that we're making due to the impact of rising enrollments. That was a request that came to me from the Eastern School Board.

As I said earlier, we respect the autonomy and the independence of school boards. My objective was to come in and build a strong partnership with all boards across the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the Premier. Mr. Premier, it seems that this education minister was really quick to have the city schools on a priority. In terms of Souris they've been promised, you've had report after report, postponement after postponement. My question: Is there a double standard here in education across the province? Is there, Premier?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: There could be, Madam Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition could be right, there could be a double standard. Because anybody in PEI who has the opportunity to head down east and head to Montague, if they want to take a drive by the new high school that is going up down in the Montague area for the constituents of Belfast-Murray River, for the constituents of Vernon River-Stratford, for the constituents of Montague-Kilmuir, for the constituents of Georgetown-St. Peters, they will see - and my minister of education was wrong, and I'll say when one of my ministers is wrong. It is not one of the nicest high schools and best high schools in Atlantic Canada, it will be one of the premier high schools in all of

Canada. If that's a double standard, I'm willing to accept it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. To the Premier then: Then will you commit to have dollars for rezoning for the Eastern School District so a comprehensive plan can be put in place so all the students and all the parents and all the people in the school system will be treated equally across the province?

Because Souris is delayed once again, and it's not even going to be started in construction until probably 2013 or 2014. You promised on a regular basis that this school was going to be a priority. It's certainly not any more. Explain.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Madam Speaker, we'll just go by our track record what our priorities are.

Since we've come to power education has been a priority of this government. We'll continue to do it. We were the ones that met with the parents down in Souris, made sure that they were listened to. We were the ones that announced the new high school was going to be built, or new K-12 school down in that area. That new K-12 school will be built in that area and it will be another state-of-the-art institution in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Let's look at the records. If I was a constituent of Souris and I wanted that K-12 school, I would go and ask the constituents of the people of Montague-Kilmuir, when they wanted to have a new high school there. They could just ask: What did a Conservative government do? They said: We'd go out and renovate a school. What did a Liberal government do? We built a state-of-the-art institution in the community of Montague that will be one of the nicest high schools in all of Canada.

You look at the record, who do you want to trust? The Conservatives that want to renovate in rural PEI or the Liberals that want to build state-of-the-art? Let's go with the Liberal government, you'll get the best possible school.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

One of the things that we constantly notice is the fact that you're actually the Premier, you've actually been in government for three years. You've had to go through two ministers of health, two ministers of education, two ministers of innovation, the list goes on. How many apologies this week in the House alone?

My question to you, Mr. Premier, is this: How come the city schools got rezoned and the city schools had an opportunity for expansion and you're still refusing the people of Souris a new school? Why is that?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Totally untrue, Madam Speaker, what the Leader of the Opposition is saying.

The reason why there was some additions made to some schools is that finally, after 40 years in this province, we've had a government with the foresight to say kindergarten should be in our school system. Full-day kindergarten.

No government in the history of the Province of Prince Edward Island before this government was willing to make the decision, and most likely for political reasons, that kindergarten should be moving into the school system. We made that decision. It's creating a lot of investments in education. One of those investments is that some schools needed to be added on to. We could have put our head in the sand and said: No, we don't want kindergarten in the school system because (Indistinct) we'd have to add on to some schools and it will cost more dollars.

Our government believes investing in education is an investment in the future of this province and we'll continue to invest in education as long as we have the opportunity.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Actions speak louder than words. This government's been in government for three years. There is a definite difference here between what's happening in the Charlottetown school system compared to the Souris school.

So I'll go to the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning, since the kindergarten to grade 12 school's been promised in your district for a long time. You stood up in the House on several occasions talking about how wonderful this is.

Are you comfortable with the fact that everything's back on the drawing board and you're going back to consult again about this school?

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

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

Yes, I'm absolutely comfortable. The hon. Leader of the Opposition says that everything is back on the drawing board. I'd like to inform the Leader of the Opposition that it never left the drawing board. In the eastern part of the province, that part of the province was neglected for 11 years by the previous administration. I know, because I and all of my constituents suffered through those 11 years with no investment by the previous administration.

Now we see unprecedented investment in the first district. I refer to the replacement of Colville Manor, \$9 million. The revamping of water, sewer and the main street in Souris with sidewalks, another \$10 million.

In the capital budget the commitment is there for a brand new state-of-the-art high school in the Souris area - or a new K-12 school in the area. That recommendation was put forward by the Eastern School District and we as a government have shown that we do respect the autonomy and follow the recommendations of that Eastern School District. They have made the recommendation -

Speaker: Mr. Minister, we're starting to run out of time. I'd ask you to wrap up your answer.

Mr. Campbell: - the commitment is there. I have the commitment of the minister of education, I have the commitment of the Premier, and there will be a new state-of-the-art education facility in the first district.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]