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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF  
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 21 APRIL 2010



Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

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

**Number of people hired to look after closed schools (future)**

**Mr. MacKinley:** Yes, the former minister of development and highways asked me: Grand Tracadie school, 36,800, grant to go with it; St. Peter's, 91,600; Dundas, 82,800; Eastern Kings, 98,000; St. Teresa's, 52,000; Rollo Bay, 79,200.

Fortune is assigned to the French school board. Traffic costs is retained by government. The custodians or the people looking after them: Grand Tracadie, Brenda Skerry; Dundas is Todd MacLeod; Tracadie Cross is Marge Fitzpatrick, who's well known to us in here; St. Teresa's is David Trainor; St. Peter's is Jeremy Lewis; Eastern Kings, Gary MacDonald. They're paid \$120 per week for the services of looking after them. I won't get into the details.

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

Questions by Members

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

**Two-tier residential rate**

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

A few days ago, the Premiers mentioned or made a statement that the reason for lifting of the two-tier residential rate was caused by

the previous government. Mr. Premier, could you please indicate or show documentation where you got that information from?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

I'm pretty sure that comes from the *Renewable Energy Act* that was passed in this Legislature back in 2004 which at that time was looking for us to reduce down our energy consumption in the province. Within that legislation was eliminating two tiers so that we'd use less energy.

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

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

Surely the Premier of the province will not stand up and make a false statement. So I have the *Renewable Energy Act* here. I'm just wondering if you could point out what section that indicated changes were being made by the previous government.

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

It's not explicit within the legislation. It talks about demand side management. If you ask Maritime Electric, that was their signal to initiate eliminating the two-tier in the province.

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** So, Madam Speaker, the Premier actually - you made a false statement, so would you stand up and indicate that statement that you made the other day was not correct?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier Ghiz:** No, not at all, Madam Speaker.

If the hon. member wants to talk to Maritime Electric, it was that legislation that initiated the process to eliminate the two-tier.

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, but the Premier did indicate in his statement the other day that this was initiated by the previous government, so I'm wondering if you have any letters, correspondence, or where you can show me in the act that makes reference to the previous government.

You put all the blame on the previous government. I just want you, now, to prove it. That's what Islanders want to hear from you, the truth.

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

I didn't put all the blame on the previous

government. The hon. member knows that. What we did was we stood up in this Legislature. The hon. minister of agriculture, myself, the previous government, Maritime Electric - it was a matter of looking at the two-tier and realizing that agriculture was a part of that two-tier.

If you ask Maritime Electric, it was the *Renewable Energy Act* in 2004 that initiated the process to eliminate the two-tier.

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, in the Hansard the Premier specifically identified the previous government as the reason for removing of the two-tier and he did not want the blame to go on his own government or his own minister.

Mr. Premier, could you please tell me when you were made aware that your government was making these changes to IRAC to remove this two-tier? Could you tell me when you were made aware by your minister?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

I do not have the specific date. I know that on a Friday evening the minister informed me that this was initiated, and by the Tuesday or Wednesday of the next week, we had the problem solved, Madam Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from

Georgetown-St. Peters.

**Mr. M. Currie:** I don't think you have the problem solved, Mr. Premier, because those changes you've made are going to cost millions of dollars to our small business people and our agricultural community.

So, on what Wednesday and Friday - was that in December of 2008? Was that when this happened?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier Ghiz:** No, Madam Speaker, it was a few months ago.

We have corrected the problem, and if we have to come in with legislation that will eliminate the agriculture sector in this province from that, we will do that.

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Question for the minister of energy. Minister when you came to this department were you made aware of these changes to the two-tier rate system by your government?

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

**Mr. Brown:** No, Madam Speaker, I wasn't made aware of it.

I was made aware of it when the minister of agriculture and the Federation of Agriculture called and said that the final 2000 block was being implemented April 1<sup>st</sup> of this year and that it's going to affect the agriculture

community. We went back to the manual, and it was small clause in the rate hearings that said farmers are included in the residential area.

All along the discussions were around residential rates. Residential, that's all anybody ever talked about when it came to the two-bloc system. Every place in Canada and in North America are looking at eliminating the second bloc because we have to encourage people to reduce power usage, especially on the residential side.

For every kilowatt or megawatt of power we go over, millions of dollars have to be spent on setting up that power supply. So that's why it was always discussed - residential rate. Then when the farm community came to us and said: This is going to affect us, the Premier order letters to be written to IRAC to cancel that order and to reestablish - we're in hearings right now, Madam Speaker, over this same issue.

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

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

So a question to the minister of energy. When you went to the department, your deputy and your department lawyer did not advise you of the letters that they already made and the applications they made to remove this rate? They already removed two steps. So you were not made aware of that when you went to department?

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

**Mr. Brown:** Madam Speaker, like I said to the previous minister, he's correct.

I wasn't made aware of it because it kept saying residential rate. It didn't say - and the order doesn't say - residential and farm rate. It says residential rate. It's an oversight we saw. Maybe IRAC should have saw it. Maybe Maritime Electric should have told us. Everybody assumed residential rate.

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Well, Madam Speaker, the minister's wrong because it's my understanding that Maritime Electric did show you guys the application they were making, and which was the easy way out was just to remove that bloc instead of finding other ways to provide efficiencies for the ratepayers in this province.

You're indicating that you did not know until about a month ago that these rate changes were taking place?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

That is absolutely correct. Once the minister of agriculture saw that agriculture was going to be included in the residential rate structure he brought it to my attention. I immediately called in the minister of energy. We called in Maritime Electric. Maritime Electric did not inform us either. I let it be known to Maritime Electric that I was not happy that they did not let me know that, or our government.

In fact, after a little more research we discovered exactly how much it would affect agriculture and that's why our government worked diligently over a 48-hour period to make sure that agriculture was not included in that for the April 1<sup>st</sup> change. If, in fact, it does go ahead in the future our government will be introducing legislation in this Legislature to make sure that the agriculture industry is exempted.

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

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, the Premier still will not accept responsibility for the position you have taken.

You're blaming Maritime Electric now and you're disappointed they did not call you, but you had a minister that was actually applying for this rate change. Are you telling me now that you have a rogue minister that does this on his own and he's not going to respond to you? He doesn't contact you or Cabinet on these changes?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

The former minister went over this the other day. Myself and the minister of agriculture and the minister of energy have all accepted responsibility. At the end of the day we're the ones who have to accept responsibility. That's why we made sure that over that 48-hour period, after us finding out, we made sure that this did not go through. That's

what responsible governments do. When they find a problem, Madam Speaker, they correct it and that's what our government did.

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, it seems with this government when you have a problem you get rewarded or promoted.

Whether it's Brooke MacMillan or it's Sandy MacDonald that messed up our school system or it's the minister that failed to bid on the transmission capacity, announced a billion dollar wind dream, and now he's doing these applications to IRAC to increase the rates to farmers that's going to cost us millions, and you promote him to deputy minister. So is that what you do with your people?

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Deputy Premier.

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

The hon. member knows full well that it was the *Renewable Energy Act* that came in in 2004 that initiated this process. I sat on the floor of the Legislature at that time. He was a minister at the time. At no point did he point out or ask any questions with regards to who this would affect, the *Renewable Energy Act*. At that time the experts would have known that it would have affected the agriculture industry.

Our government, once we found out exactly that it was going to affect the agriculture industry - thanks to the minister of agriculture in this province who approached me on it - we made sure that we dealt with it in a timely manner and those changes never went ahead and we protected the agriculture industry in this province.

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** See, Madam Speaker, that's what's wrong with the Premier.

He's already made two changes. You've already made two applications to make the changes and you deny it, and you blame it on the previous government. It's your government that made the applications.

What's troublesome to the agricultural community and a lot of people out there is we have a half-hearted apology indicating: I was unaware of the reference, I was unaware of the impact this would make on the business community. What happened this morning is another letter surfaced which in December 2007, it clearly indicates that the province wants to move ahead with this two-tier rate and remove it.

So, Premier, will you stand up now and take responsibility and will you do something with your minister?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier Ghiz:** Absolutely, Madam Speaker.

Thank you very much to the Minister of

Agriculture and Deputy Premier of this province -

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

**Premier Ghiz:** - for pointing out that the agricultural industry was involved in this two-tier and for making sure that he brought it to Cabinet's attention so that we were able to stop it from going ahead to make sure that the agriculture industry was protected in this province.

I thank the hon. minister of agriculture for being a great minister.

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, with this government, when you make mess-ups you get rewarded and promoted.

This letter clearly indicates that you started and initiated this process. Why won't you take responsibility for it? You say the minister made you aware of it. There are two letters in two years went to IRAC to raise the rates and you think now you want to pat him on the back for taking credit.

You raised the rates in this province by 42% in three years and now you're going to raise the rates again to farmers. When are you going to start standing up and provide some leadership and remove this minister?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

The former minister of agriculture knows full well that the information he is coming forward with is not correct. We indicated all along that everyone was unaware that agriculture was included in this two-tier structure. We thought that there was an exemption for agriculture. When we found out that there was not, we corrected the problem.

If you look at the long-term reason why we had higher electricity rates in this province, it has to do with the former minister and his government that were in power for 11 years. They got rid of New Brunswick plus 10 and promised Islanders electricity rates will go down by getting rid of this. What happened? Electricity rates went up. Then they came and they said they were going to buy natural gas from Deep Panuke and lower down electricity rates. We're still waiting for that natural gas. That was a pipe dream.

Then they said Meteor Creek was going to solve all our problems, we got natural gas here on Prince Edward Island. What happened there? There was no gas down there. In fact, it was nothing but a sham, that the former minister was taken advantage of in this province, like many other times.

What our government's doing, we're working constructively by sitting down with other power distributors around eastern Canada and trying to find a way to lower down electricity rates in this province for Islanders.

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

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, there is a Premier that's going to go down in history as the only Premier that ever raised the rates 42% in two years, that will be your legacy.

The province is supportive of the elimination of the declining bloc rate structure. That's your letter, you wrote that. Why don't you take responsibility for it instead of doing these half-hearted apologies? Deal with the issue. You knew about it and you let your minister away with it.

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier Ghiz:** Absolutely, he's right. We did know about it. We did not know that agriculture was a part of that.

In many other jurisdictions across Canada agriculture is exempted from that. They have their own exemption. As soon as we found out that there was not an exemption in place for the farmers we made sure that we protected the farmers in this province. If we have to come forward with legislation to make sure they're exempted in the future, we will do that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Madam Speaker, the Premier has already allowed two blocs to be removed.

Are you going to reimburse for that, to the ratepayers in this province?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

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

What the hon. member doesn't realize is that this comes from the *Renewable Energy Act*. What this is trying to do is to get all Islanders to use less energy. The refund that he's indicating is already passed on to the rate payers in the lower categories. So that's already taking place.

The former minister of energy and development and the former minister of development and technology should perhaps go back and review his notes when the *Renewable Energy Act* was brought forward and he might have a better understanding of what he's talking about, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** (Indistinct) it's terrible.

#### **Health PEI assets**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, my first question is to the minister of health today.

Minister, last week you informed the province that Health PEI board was operational. You announced the 11 members. Can you table for us the complete inventory of assets that would have been transferred to Health PEI?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Under the legislation that was put forward during the last sitting of the Legislature for Health PEI, I will not transfer a responsibility until I feel that at that time they are ready to do that. There is a transition, obviously, with the new chair of the board and the new board members. So until they're prepared - and I foresee that in the next month to two months - that we will see the transfer of operations within health being transferred over.

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

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

To the same minister. At the time that the transfer happens, will you make that information public, Madam Minister?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I probably will be very clear to the public when I do come on the floor with the budget, the new budget that will be presented. Very similar to the old budget that's been presented for health in the past. Very open, very transparent, and it's very much so the operations of health that will be transferred over to Health PEI.

But again, the Leader of the Opposition and any members in the opposition or members of this House will have an opportunity to ask questions during budget estimates.

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

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

To the same minister. It's your intention to have all the assets transferred to Health PEI before the House closes? Is that correct?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Ms. Bertram:** Madam Speaker, again, I don't know how long the House will sit.

But I want to know for sure that the transition period has happened, that I feel as minister that our board, our chair, our CEO are comfortable with the transition and have had time to meet. Obviously, just like as a new minister of health, I had to have a transition time to learn the portfolio and get used to the files.

Madam Leader of the Opposition, certainly we will give due process, but it'll be in the short term obviously, Madam Speaker.

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

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

#### **Health PEI hiring process**

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

To the health minister. Madam Minister, Keith Dewar is the acting CEO of Health PEI. How long have you asked Mr. Dewar

to stay on and when will the health board making this position permanent, and what will the hiring process be?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Ms. Bertram:** Madam Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, the *Health Services Act* was tabled in this Legislature and was passed and has been given Royal Assent.

Under that legislation, the governance model is part of that and also the CEO appointment. The first CEO is being appointed by government. But now we have a board in place. After time passes, our next CEO will be appointed by a board but now it will be appointed by government.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Same minister. So does this mean Mr. Dewar's position is then permanent? He is the CEO of the health board.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Ms. Bertram:** Yes, Madam Speaker.

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

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

**Work of Nova Scotia consultant**

To the same health minister. Madam Minister, we understand your department is doing some more work with consultants in the health field. Could you explain to the House what work the Nova Scotia consultant is doing?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I'm pleased to let the House know that the Department of Health and Wellness has undertaken a whole scope of consultation, whether it's been internal within the department or consultants that have been used in the past relative to the Corpus Sanchez Report back in 2008 that looked over the entire health care system. We're using that as the template for now and for the future of health care delivery in the province.

One of the biggest pieces right now is the physician service work that's being done by the Hay Group and that report, we're awaiting that. I don't know if that's what the Leader of the Opposition is alluding to, but that's probably one of the biggest research projects that are undergoing right now.

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

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

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

Would the health minister please table the contract given to this company as well as the

terms of reference and the cost of that piece of work?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I will go back to the department and anything that I can provide back to the House, I will.

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

**Work of Alberta consultant**

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

There's also another piece of work being done in health. We understand it's with a contract with a consultant firm from Alberta. Would the minister expand on this work?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Ms. Bertram:** I'll just ask the Leader of the Opposition if she can allude further into her question to give more detail of what in particular she's looking for.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, last year in this health department there was actually - for consulting fees to the tune of \$495,000, and another one of \$799,000.

These are important dollars that could be used in front line delivery service. So my question to the minister is: What is this consultant from Alberta doing, and could you table the terms of reference, the contract, and the cost?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Ms. Bertram:** Madam Speaker, again, there are many pieces of work that are being done with the department of health.

I will certainly take the leader's question under advisement, go back to the department. I'm unsure of different locations of all our consultants, but again, there is work that's being done internally within our department.

Our government has undertaken the Corpus Sanchez report. We have evaluated and looked across the system. We have done a healthy aging strategy. We have looked at surgery practices across the province. We're looking at the primary care networks in this province. We're looking at physician services across this province and how health care can be better delivered across this province in a fully integrated one Island health care system.

So hon. Leader of the Opposition, I will go back to the department and fulfill as much as I can with your request, but again, you must understand, there is a lot of good work that's being done to obviously improve the front line.

Madam Speaker, thank you.

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

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

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

We understand that in one month this firm from Alberta was paid \$38,000. At the same time, last week I asked the health minister to report to the House what the department was doing in the area of assistance for people requiring transplants. What I got back from the department was:

The Department of Health and Wellness is working on a program to meet the needs of Islanders in need of transplant services off the Island. Our government is currently looking at priorities for spending in the coming year, and we're hopeful that the program will move forward.

Well, that's an awful lot of money in consultant services. We have one woman in Ontario, in Toronto, requiring a lung transplant because she needs to live.

### **Transplant policy**

My question to the health minister: When are we going to see in the House - when is the public going to see? - actually a policy for the - over 10 years three people that required this transplant? When are we going to see action?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

As I shared last week or two weeks ago in this House, I will not disclose information on individual cases. But, it is the time of budget and we are looking at programs across our department. Like I have previously told the Leader of the Opposition, we will be taking that under consideration for this budget process. We feel for families across Prince Edward Island that are being challenged in health care outside of our province. But, hon. Leader of the Opposition, it has been taken under advisement and we are working within our budget.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

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

To the minister of finance, then. Mr. Minister, you guys were able to find dollars for expansion for city schools. You were able to find dollars for liquor stores. You were able to find money for wine experts. Here are three people over 10 years - no names associated - that really need to have dollars for life-threatening reasons. Will there be dollars in the budget and are you working with the health minister to ensure Islanders with health needs are actually put first for a chance?

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

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

Madam Speaker.

I'm very happy to stand on the record of what this government has done with regards to funding health care here on Prince Edward Island. Our record is very fine in the way that we have advanced Islanders' needs for many years. As the Leader of the Opposition spoke about, 10 years of total disregard for Islanders and their health care needs. She spoke volumes in that one sentence. As you know, it was her administration that did exactly that, did not answer any of Islanders' needs with regards to health care.

We've come forward, and with our Corpus Sanchez plan in place we have put millions of dollars more toward Islanders' needs and will continue to look at exactly what the priorities are inside health care. We'll take all of our lead from the professionals that lead that cause. We will not make it political.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

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

### **Transfer of tax room**

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

My question is also to the hon. Minister of Finance and Municipal Affairs. Commissioner Thompson, in his report on land and local governance, recommended the provincial government consult with municipalities on a process to implement

transfer of tax room. Can you provide an update on what is being done to respond to this recommendation?

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

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

Yes, I would very much like to update the House as to what's taking place with the commissioners report. As you know, it was tabled in December, and we overall have accepted the recommendations that the commissioner put forward. We said that we would go through them one by one.

What the hon. member is asking about is the actual sharing of tax room with municipalities here in Prince Edward Island. It is a very complicated system that we have to review. There are a number of models right across the great Canadian country, and we're going to look at that. What we did was started with a meeting with the mayors of the four largest municipalities, along with the president of the federation of Prince Edward Island municipalities.

I met with them I think it was on March the 23<sup>rd</sup>. We have made a point that we will reconvene every quarter to review what our working committee is going to work at each and every month. We have named those folks from each of those municipalities, and one from the next size municipality down. That working group of our senior officials, both provincially and municipally, will meet once a month to look at all different models, to bring all the different instances to the table.

What's very complicated in this is when we trade off tax dollars there has to be costs picked up by the municipalities, and that is going to be on the table as we start to negotiate. Very complicated, it'll take quite a long time, but I'd like to thank the mayors of these municipalities, along with the president of the federation of municipalities, for their great cooperation. I would expect that we'll make some great inroads here very soon.

Thank you very much.

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

### **New municipalities act**

**Mr. Dumville:** Supplementary question, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Minister, the commission also recommended that the provincial government consult with the federation of municipalities, the cities of Charlottetown and Summerside, and the towns of Stratford and Cornwall, on a potential new municipalities act, that would enable the municipalities to be more accountable and responsive to the residents they serve. What is being done in this area?

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

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

At the same meeting that I talked about convening on or about March 23<sup>rd</sup> with those mayors and the president of the federation,

we also talked about the *Municipalities Act*. They have great interest as well in providing the very best service they can for their constituents. So we have offered to do the same thing, put a working committee forward. Along the same lines, they will continue to meet monthly. We'll review it quarterly. They know it's an 18- to 24-month process just as the first tax sharing room is.

But the greatest thing that they brought forward to that meeting was that they said very clearly that this government is the most municipal-friendly government that they've seen in the past 40 years, and they point very clearly to fully funding equalization, giving back the GST clawback that the previous administration did, and making monthly payments instead of quarterly payments. The three greatest pieces that the municipalities could ever ask for.

They said that they're very excited about having the opportunity to sit with provincial government and make these decisions on both the *Municipalities Act* and with regard to tax sharing.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

### **Kildare bridge**

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

My question is to the hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. A while ago, earlier this year, there was a request for proposals issued from your

department regarding the Kildare bridge, locally known as the Gillian bridge on Route 12 in Kildare. I'm just wondering if you could offer the House a time frame or timeline on when that big bridge might be replaced?

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

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

What we have is a bridge that has been neglected for a number of years under the previous government. I need \$22 million this year to replace the bridges. I only got \$11 million in my capital budget so I'm short about \$11 million.

But the bridge you talk about there, yeah, it's going to be replaced, probably in August. We have to put out tenders, probably go out in June, and they should be started. It'll be shut down for about four months. We're going to have a detour. The price is about \$2.5 million. Also, in my own area, we've got the West River, the causeway, one section of it has to be replaced. There's all kinds of bridge work to be done here in the province. It was left in an awful mess.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

**Mr. Murphy:** Thank you, good minister.

Earlier, the Montrose bridge, when that one was replaced, there was an information session held for the public to inform them about what was being planned and that.

Would there be such a session held again prior to the replacement of this structure?

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

**Mr. MacKinley:** That would be left up to the member in the area that's elected, if he wants one or not. Or her, him or her.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

**Mr. Murphy:** Yes, the member would like to have a public information session.

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

### **Budget funds for Alzheimer Society**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Minister, last year you received \$613 million from the federal government. My question to the finance minister: Will there be dollars available for Alzheimer Society of Prince Edward Island in this week's budget?

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

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

We have worked very collaboratively with our federal partners over the last year and a half when this economy, as well as every

economy across the world, needed to have stimulus. What the hon. Leader of the Opposition is referring to is the number of dollars that have flowed from the federal government that were there to partner with our dollars to make sure that our economy boosted along, did not go into an actual recession. There's no question about that. We have partnered greatly on it.

As to what's in Friday's budget, Madam Speaker, we only have two more sleeps.

Thank you very much.

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

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

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

PEI, like other places in Canada, the incidence of dementia, the incidence of Alzheimer's, is continuing to rise. We pointed out the issues in the fall session. At that time the former minister of health was going to try and do something. All winter long the families, the people that suffer from this illness, the caregivers, this is a really important issue. We're still disappointed why you could renovate liquor stores and couldn't do this work last year. Will there be, finally, \$30,000 for the Alzheimer Society of Prince Edward Island?

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

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

There are a number of priorities within health care. You've seen our numbers balloon with regard to health care here in Prince Edward Island during our three budgets that we've put forward. It has been clearly the priority of this Premier and this government to ensure that Islanders get the very best health care there is possible.

What we do is we don't make political decisions on this side of the floor. We work on facts. We get all of our information from the professionals that know the very best use of our health care dollars. That's what we'll continue to do. We are looking at each and every ask right across Prince Edward Island.

Thank you very much.

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

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

#### **Allocation of funds**

**Leader of the Opposition:** To the finance minister. You had no problem renovating liquor stores. You had no problem doing expansions of city schools. My question to you, too, Mr. Minister, is: When are you going to actually take the politics out of your decision and give some money to lung transplant people, to people that need organ transplants, to people that are desperate in the area of dementia, in Alzheimer's? Will there be money in the budget?

It's not about two sleeps. It's been three years since you've been in government, you've had more money than any other government in the entire history, probably,

of the province -

**An Hon. Member:** (Indistinct) Queen Elizabeth Hospital (Indistinct).

**Leader of the Opposition:** You continue to spend. When are you going to put money where the resources really should be, Mr. Finance Minister?

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

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

The dollars that we have spent in health care are very clearly laid out in our past budgets. They're spent on priority areas that the professionals that are inside the department are putting forward as to what we need to invest in.

Again, there has been dollars spent. We make sure that all of the dollars - we look at just in drug programs alone, we introduced 20 new drugs last year. In the last three years of the previous administration they had seven new drugs in three years, and last year alone we brought in 20 new drugs, 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.

This government's been in government for three years, \$1.3 million in consultants in health alone, but we'll go to the Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour.

### **Change to dental policy**

To the social services minister. Will there be a change in policy for social service clients and seniors who cannot get services when they need to get fillings in their teeth and the province does not pay for that service? Will we expect a policy change here?

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

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

In response to the question by the Leader of the Opposition, all of the issues that you have mentioned are very important to our seniors, and two days away from budget day all those things are being considered and put forward from our department.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you. To the health minister, then: Are you helping support the Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour to have dollars put in budgets for seniors and for social service clients that require fillings?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

We value the dental program here in the Province of Prince Edward Island. I did a statement here last week where we have the best dental program in this country. We provide services to children under the age of 18 in Prince Edward Island, and since the early 1980s that has been viewed as a leader in Canada.

**Mr. MacKinley:** Your government cut it out years ago.

**Ms. Bertram:** This previous government, what they took away from that dental program our government, Madam Speaker, continues to be supportive of it.

I would urge the hon. Leader of the Opposition, it is budget time, hon. Leader, we are fighting on this side of the House for all our programs across government, and we will be on the floor to debate our budgets. I am pleased with the leadership of our Premier and the budget process under the leadership of our treasurer.

Thank you.

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

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

**Blood work at Ellis Brother mall**

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

Then we look forward to having dollars in social services' budgets for fillings, as well as for seniors. But to the health minister, a question.

Madam Minister, this week we received a call from a gentleman who is a client of the diabetes centre out at the Ellis Brothers mall, and what he was telling us is the fact that you used to be able to get blood work done out here to keep his diabetes in control. As of last Friday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, you cut out that service. Why?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

That service was not cut out. Under the diabetes program, which has different locations across Prince Edward Island, which are located in Souris, Montague, Charlottetown, Summerside and the newly opened program in O'Leary, they are all continuing to provide service. There was a duplication of service within Charlottetown. The QEH continues to do this.

Because of numbers, because the previous program that was referred to by the Leader of the Opposition was only being accessed twice per - being able to be twice a month, the services are continuing to be offered at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and all other areas of the province continue to have access.

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

**Ms. Bertram:** The program that's being offered in the hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness's district is being well received in the community, Madam Speaker.

We are reaching rural communities with services across PEI.

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

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

**Funding to get to blood work sites**

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

To the same health minister, then. Madam Minister, will there be dollars then available for seniors who require these services to get transportation to reach these facilities? With the Ellis Brothers shopping centre it's been a real convenient location for many people in Sherwood, Parkdale, around Charlottetown, and it was a way that they could actually walk there. So will there be dollars available to help seniors get to these other areas for this blood work?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Ms. Bertram:** (Indistinct), Madam Speaker.

Again, the service is being offered in Charlottetown. The individual patient, whether senior, whether middle-aged person, what have you, still has accessibility in Charlottetown, Souris, Montague, Charlottetown, Summerside and O'Leary. The service continues, and we continue to offer a valued service.

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

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

**Family physicians**

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

The last several weeks there's been all kinds of people protesting for health services in the public and in the media. My question to the health minister. One of the families, while they were in the hospital, was a person that didn't have a family physician. When will government be living up to their promise of one physician for every Islander that actually needs a family physician?

**Speaker:** Sorry, hon. Premier.

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

I find it absolutely amazing how the Leader of the Opposition can ask these questions when she knows full well the amount of support that our government has provided for health care since we've come to power. Whether or not we're talking about a \$3 million new budget for the Office of Recruitment and Retention, the new family medicine residency program that will help provide a family doctor for every Islander that the previous government said: No, we couldn't do, but we've done it. We've increased the physician complement. We've also introduced the accelerated nursing program at the University of Prince Edward Island. We've also implemented a \$2 million wait time strategy. Colorectal screening program, mammography screening program, Tyne Valley Health Centre, palliative home care drug program, eliminated air ambulance fees for out-of-province transfers, 11 million to the QEH foundation.

You might wonder why we're able to do all this. Well, Madam Speaker, I'll tell you why.

When we came to power, we didn't fire 800 people at a cost of millions of dollars, like the previous government did. We were able to take millions of dollars and put it into health care. We didn't go out and spend millions of dollars and build a golf course, we took that money and we put it into health care.

Our government will continue to make sure that health care is the number one priority for this government as long as we have the privilege of remaining in power.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

[End of Question Period]