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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
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FOR

FRIDAY, 30 APRIL 2010

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

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

State of pond in Stratford

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

My first question today is for the minister of the environment. I received a few calls, minister, regarding the state, or the condition of the pond in Stratford. It seems to be overtaken by some sort of a weed or algae, and I'm wondering if you could send staff over to see if they can identify what's taking place, and probably clean it up and bring it back to its original beauty.

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

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

I'll have the staff look at it right away. I thank the member for his question.

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

Mr. M. Currie: I want to thank the member for looking after the people of Stratford. Thank you.

Oil spills in 2009

Madam Speaker, my question today will also go to the Minister of Environment,

Energy and Forestry. As most of us in this province are aware, we're the largest consumer of furnace oil per capita in Canada. We do have a lot of furnace tanks that are in our province. Minister, could you please tell me how many oil spills your department dealt with in the last year?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for that question, it is an excellent question.

The oil spills are, I believe, far exceeding what they should. We're getting a number of calls from around the province, we're investigating a number of oil spills. I've asked my department to check into the tanks and if the manufacturer lived up to the quality of the tank.

Some years ago there was a policy change here that everybody had to replace their tank and it was either a 14 gauge or a 16 gauge tank had to be put in. We went with the minimum tank at the time. We went, basically, with the cheapest tank for replacement. I believe, I think there may be some troubles there, but I'm having my staff look into it, and I thank the hon. member for his question.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Same question again to the minister.

Minister, could you please tell me how many oil spills you had last year in Prince

Edward Island?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, I can get him that statistic and I'll have it available by the end of Question Period.

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

Departmental inspection of oil tanks

Mr. M. Currie: Minister, could you please tell the House how many tanks in Prince Edward Island have been inspected by your department?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, I understand it's close to 40,000 tanks have been inspected, and I understand that it was a requirement of the law that all of them be inspected or you would not get your oil delivered, and I'm of the understanding that everything has been inspected.

Otherwise, the homeowner would not be able to get oil delivered to them.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, it's my understanding that we're in the vicinity, between residential and commercial property, somewhere between 50 and 60,000. So, you're saying you've only achieved 40,000 inspections?

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

Mr. Brown: Okay, Madam Speaker, I just got my briefing note here.

Over 47,000 home heat tanks have been inspected and tagged under the department's Home Heat Tank Program. Of these, 14,333 are located outside of dwellings and 33,000 are located inside dwellings, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, what I understood from the minister earlier, was that those tanks that are inspected by your department, and they're tagged for delivery, and they're good for 15 years, these tanks now are experiencing problems with leaks.

Are you looking into whether there's a warrantee or some way they can be covered, these homeowners, on these tanks?

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

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

Again, just reading my notes here, in 2009 there were 37 outdoor tank failures, an increase of 23 from 2008. The majority of these were single wall, 14 gauge and outlet tanks. I agree with the member, we are getting a lot of complaints. When the tanks were originally put in the suppliers were telling everybody 25-year guarantees on the tanks. I can assure the member, and I can

assure everybody in this House and the public, that we are investigating this. Because I believe there may be a problem out there with these tanks and we're investigating each instance and see what the problem is.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I believe what a lot of Islanders understand when they have an insurance policy for their home, they believe that they're covered.

I think that is a bit of a serious problem out there today, and I just think, and I believe, that a lot of people don't understand that they're not covered for oil spills in their home.

So I'm wondering, minister, if you could review and do sort of an educational program to, I guess, educate a lot of people out there, especially our seniors. They're unaware that they're not covered for oil spills. There's two types of coverage for inside and outside, and I'm asking if you would take that on and champion that cause to probably save a lot of people from a lot of hardship.

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

Mr. Brown: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I want to thank the hon. member for this question. A couple of oil spills have occurred in the Charlottetown area and we have been investigating them, one up at the church. It disturbs me when the residents

come out and say: I went back to my insurance company, I'm not covered for this particular tank. I've issued a letter to the insurance companies asking them to review all their policies and to ensure that every resident is aware of whether their tank is inspected or insured or not insured. I want to make sure that residents know that it is in their policy or is not in their policy. I've told the insurance industry if they do not comply with this order I will legislate that they're going to have to tell the residents or the person that's purchasing the insurance that they have no waiver. Or I may be looking at legislating that every house in Prince Edward Island will have to have oil spill insurance. This is a serious environmental issue, and I commend the member for these questions.

It is a problem, we've identified it as a problem. Number one, we're looking into the tanks, whether they were up to grade and whether they were the proper materials, because back then there was a major program initiated across the province. A lot of tanks came into PEI in those years and I want to make sure that, number one, the tanks are living up to their specifications. If not, if these companies went out and promised 25-year guarantee, this government will pursue those manufacturers and (Indistinct) to live up to the guarantees that they gave to the people of Prince Edward Island.

I am serious about this issue because I am tired of poor homeowners finding out after the fact that they have no insurance and they have to give up their house or move out of their house because they cannot afford to fix their tanks. The insurance companies have a

responsibility here to the people of Prince Edward Island. When a general consensus is out there that the tanks are insured, the tanks should be insured.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm glad to hear that the minister is looking after this file. Because what happens in some cases is in an inside tank in a house, you're only covered to the value of your home. So if the oil spill exceeds the value of your home, you're responsible for it. When you have an outside tank most insurance companies only cover you for \$5,000. That is the problem, because a lot of people are of the belief, or understand, that they're covered for an oil spill and it's only to a certain value, and that can be very serious. So I'm pleased the minister is looking into that.

Consequences of vandalized oil tank

Minister, the one that I think bothers me, and it probably happened in the city here, maybe even in your own riding, was in the case of an outside tank, where a homeowner is of the understanding they have oil spill insurance, and you have vandalism where somebody comes and breaks a valve off, and certainly they can't afford to pay for it, and it migrates onto another person's property and then it gets into a serious situation.

What are you going to do in that case, where that homeowner now is vandalized and can't afford to pay for it?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for that question.

There was a vandalized oil tank, out in Chestnut Street, I believe it's 51 Chestnut, that's the issue. We've looked into this situation. I've ordered that the place be cleaned up. The person could not afford to fix it. I issued a ministerial order to go in there and fix this up because it was migrating to other properties. We are in the process of cleaning up the property. We are assessing the bills. We've talked to the insurance companies, we've argued with the insurance companies, and I must say, they're coming on board. They are going to cover some of the cost, but we are going to continue to work with the insurance companies here to ensure that they cover all of the costs in this situation.

I feel for these people out there, as does the opposition, as does any member in this Legislature. They assumed that they had insurance when the incident happened. Then the insurance company comes and says: You don't have insurance. We're taking this very seriously and we're going to work with the insurance companies here, and if they don't comply I will be presenting legislation for compliance.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I'm pleased to hear that the minister is on top of this file.

Quantity of plastic and cans processed in province

Minister, my next question for you is: When you changed over from glass to plastic and cans, can you tell me how many pieces of plastic and cans were processed in this province over the last year?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, a substantial amount of cans or bottles have been processed.

It is a success story, going from bottles to cans with our beverage container bill that we've put in here. We collect over \$6.5 million in that. We pay out about four, four and a half million. The Province of Prince Edward Island is taking in a substantial amount of money under the *Beverage Containers Act*. I can assure each and every member here in this Legislature that that money is going toward environmental cleanups. The ALUS program, the watershed groups, are benefitting from the *Beverage Containers Act*. I'll get him the full details of how many were processed last year.

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

Money to watershed groups

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, Minister,

out of the 6.5 million, 4.5 was given back to the consumer that returns the cans and the processor.

So there's \$2 million left, and that went and was dedicated for the watershed groups. Is that what I understand from you?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, I'm proud to announce that since the government has taken over here the watershed groups have gone from \$120,000 grant in 2006 to over \$750,000 grants to these watershed groups.

I and the members of the opposition also knows how important these watershed groups are to Prince Edward Island. My hat goes off to them, my thanks goes out to them, because they are working diligently. A lot of them at no cost to the taxpayer of Prince Edward Island. We provide some assistance, some equipment, some chainsaws and trucks and that. These individuals are out there fixing up our waters and streams. I want to take this opportunity to really thank them for the tremendous job they're doing. This government is committed to supporting them in the future, Madam Speaker.

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

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

Question for the minister. Minister, it's my understanding that there was a promise made when this changeover happened, there

was a commitment made that the watershed groups, the 32 groups, were to receive the full amount of money, \$2 million. So there's some slippage here, from 750,000. So there is roughly \$1.2 million that has gone somewhere else. Can you indicate to me where this money is going?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for his question.

He's been doing his research. I can tell him where the other 1.1 million is going. It's not slippage. If it's slippage, it's slipping to the farmer through the ALUS program, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brown: We have a program in place, the Alternative Land Use Services, that farmers are paid to take their environmentally sensitive land out of production and set it aside for the public, Madam Speaker.

This government believes that society owes it to the farmer out there, as a whole, if they are willing to give up some of their property and put it into environmental protection, that we as a government, we as a society, owes that farmer some compensation for taking that land out of production. I also want to thank the farmers for participating in this. I encourage each and every farmer that if they have any land that they want to take and put it under protection, the minister of agriculture is more than willing to sign up an ALUS agreement with any farmer that's

willing to do that.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Minister, it's my understanding that the ALUS program is already funded under the department of agriculture, so you don't hold water with that statement.

So, minister, I think there was a commitment made. These people are volunteers, they work extremely hard across Prince Edward Island. There was a commitment made on behalf of your government, a promise, and certainly I hope that you'll not break your promise in offering more financial funding for them. Because a lot of the streams have filled up with silt and they're getting a lot more shallower, and they're a lot warmer, and it's not very good for our trout and stuff.

Will you commit today that you will take the balance of that funding and dedicate that to the watershed groups across Prince Edward Island?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, the beverage container law was made and the money goes into general account.

The commitment was made that it was going to go back to environmental projects. We consider that the ALUS program is one of our major environmental initiatives here,

when you combine that with the changes to the land protection act we made to allow farmers to increase their land holdings for any other land they take out of production and put into the environmental thing.

So the plan is coming together. We have rivers and streams throughout Prince Edward Island that had been chocked off for a number of years, that has allowed to siltate. This government came in and said: We have to do something about this because it's a major issue on Prince Edward Island. We have a lot of watershed areas and these watershed areas supply the water that we drink on Prince Edward Island. We don't have any big lakes here on Prince Edward Island that we get our water supply. We get it all from groundwater and that supply comes from the rivers and streams and watershed area. So it's important that we protect those areas.

So we've done a number of initiatives. Number one, the ALUS program, to allow agriculture operations to take land out and set it aside in watershed areas. We've increased the land protection to allow them to get more land. We gave money to the watershed groups and we've increased the buffer zones from 10 meters to 15. We are working diligently and hard with the farmers on Prince Edward Island, with the agriculture community, and with the environmental groups.

This is a good news story. We have the environment and the farmers working together for the first time in history, Madam Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

Hiring of personnel re: watershed groups

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, it looks like the minister has shortchanged the watershed groups across this province by \$1.2 million.

Minister, you made an announcement sometime late last year that you were going to hire 12 environmentalists from Charlottetown to look after these watershed groups. Can you tell me: Are you still going ahead with that \$600,000 cost?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, we had put a plan forward to the watershed groups.

The watershed groups have come along. They have formed a watershed alliance. There is 32 watershed groups out there and they are now working together under the watershed alliance. We will be working with that group in order to further improve.

I did make a commitment that we'd hire some, not from Charlottetown, spread it evenly across Prince Edward Island, and the people that would know the watershed groups will be hired.

They have come back with alternative plans, they've come back with things that they think we can do better. This is a government that listens. We just don't make a decision and stick to it just to prove ourselves right. Somebody's got a better idea than our idea,

I'm willing to sit down with that person or that group. If they have a better idea than I have, I'm willing to be a big person here and take their idea, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I don't think he's listening to the groups because they already did sit down with the 32 watershed groups and they were promised that they were to receive all of the funding from the collection of the bottles to the tune of \$2 million and you're shortchanging them by \$1.2 million.

Then you come up with a scheme to create 12 jobs here in Charlottetown for the 32 watershed groups across Prince Edward Island. That certainly is not going over very good with all these volunteers across Prince Edward Island.

Consultant report on watershed groups

It's my understanding that you had a study done last year, a consultant was hired to look at the watershed groups. Can you please give us an update on that study?

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

Mr. M. Currie: (Indistinct) how much it cost, and who was it?

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, there was a professor at UPEI that did it, I'll get the name for him and I'll also get the study.

It was presented at the watershed alliance meeting in New London a few weeks ago, which I attended. This person was hired - I think through the watershed alliance and with the help of the University of Prince Edward Island - in order to come up to take government's plan and their plan and see what we can do together.

I am going to listen to the watershed groups. I can commit to the member that I am going to listen to them. We don't know everything in Charlottetown that goes on across Prince Edward Island, I'll admit to that. A downtown Charlottetown boy is willing to listen and I'm going to listen to the watershed groups and the watershed alliance. (Indistinct), Madam Speaker?

I'm not going to bury my head in the sand and say: I'm right, I'm right, I'm right, I'm right, just to be right. If somebody has got a better idea that I got, I'm willing to sit down with them and listen to them. If it is better, we'll implement it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. M. Currie: See, Madam Speaker, that's what's happening here with the minister and the government is they're trying to run it from Charlottetown and that's certainly not going over very good with the watershed groups.

Full funding for watershed groups

Minister, will you please commit today that you are going to maintain the promise that

you offered these watershed groups and they will receive full funding this year for their endeavours that they worked very hard on across PEI? Full funding.

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, I can commit to the member and I commit to all the watershed groups here that I will work my hardest in order to make sure that they have the resources and the materials to clean up our rivers and streams that have been suffering for a number of years.

That's my commitment. I will work with them. I will go back to my caucus and Cabinet colleagues and get as much money as I can for them because I think the work that they do is vitally important for the environment of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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

It sounds as if the minister now is going to provide full funding for the watershed groups across Prince Edward Island, and I'm glad he's made that commitment and he's going to keep his promise here to his watershed groups.

Protection in case of oil spills

I forget to ask one question regarding the oil tanks with the case of commercial properties

or apartments. It's my understanding, minister, that an outside tank with apartments is not covered. There is an inclusion on the insurance policies there. I'm just wondering what you do to protect homeowners that live next door to these apartments if there is an oil spill. What is government going to do in that case?

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

Mr. Brown: I want to thank the member for the question, Madam Speaker.

I agree, there are a lot of problems around these oil tanks. The previous administration - and they've done a good job there.

An Hon. Member: I don't think they did.

Mr. Brown: Well, they did. They did a good job in terms of bringing in that every resident should have an oil tank that's inspected and that no oil shall be delivered to those houses unless it's inspected. That was a good piece of legislation for PEI. It substantially reduced oil spills on PEI at the time.

I believe we have a problem. We are looking into this problem. We are going to work with the insurance companies. I've told the insurance companies that they've got to work with us here. That everyone knows whether their tank is inspected or insured or not insured. It's a shame that a homeowner thinks that their tank was insured and at the end of the day it wasn't insured. We've got to fix that up in some terms.

Personally, I believe that every tank should

be insured on Prince Edward Island and it should be mandatory. But I'm told that that's infringing upon some people's rights in terms of it's their right to buy insurance or not to buy insurance.

Look, if we legislated car insurance, maybe it's time to legislate oil tank insurance, Madam Speaker, and we're looking into it.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

QEH ER

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Lately there has been more and more stories in the media about people and professionals crying out for some help, especially because of the growing issues in health.

I quote - this is an open letter from a Dr. Whalen, and he says: My name is Dr. Whalen. I'm an ER physician at the QEH. This week at work there were 19 patients admitted, lying in stretchers and hallways or crammed two to a room awaiting a hospital bed.

I talked with Dr. Whalen this morning and this seems to have come to be common practice. So to the minister of health, what is going on at the QEH emergency?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I do have the letter from the *Guardian* yesterday that the hon. member is quoting. Certainly this is from one of our ER doctors at the hospital. As Minister of Health and Wellness there are some realities that there are some challenges in the system right now at the QEH. As a department and as the new health board, the Health PEI authority, we're going to be working towards realizing some changes there over the next few months to see some improvements to that. Because we do recognize there are issues there and we want to provide the best health care system to Islanders.

I'm very pleased, though, that we were able to put extra dollars into our budget for the QEH. We are doing expansion at the emergency room.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bertram: Madam Speaker, all this will ensure better service into the future at the QEH and across our entire health care system on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, when I talked to Dr. Whalen this morning, what he describes as a growing practice, that these emergency beds are meant for emergency but in actual fact have people admitted there.

In one case he told me a patient was there for their five-day stay at the hospital, putting all kinds of stress on emergency. So my

question to the minister of health: What exactly are you doing to alleviate this issue?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, we are working as an entire integrated health care system. I want to thank, also, all the front line staff at the QEH, and our administrator Rick Adams, for the hard work that they do day to day.

I've been out there to the emergency room. I have seen the challenges that they are experiencing. I commit to this Legislature that this government is committed, whether it be in terms of capital to see the changes that are taking place. Those that are driving by the QEH can see the changes to the expansion that's going to provide space.

It's not just about bricks and mortar, too. We're investing into the front line and we're putting the professionals that are needed to help the system and look across the health care system across PEI and how we can best suit the needs of every Islander.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Paramedicine in West Prince

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question, too, is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Recently I had

constituents come to me with questions surrounding the profession of paramedicine. Can the minister provide us with an update of the initiatives this government is undertaking surrounding paramedicine in the West Prince area?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, Member from O'Leary-Inverness, for that question.

I thank you for the opportunity to share that. I think what's important for everyone to realize is that this a very positive announcement as part of the treasurer's speech in the Budget last Friday. We're exploring those options and certainly there has been some misconceptions out there over the last few days about how this perhaps will unfold. But we're at the exploration stages. It's within this Budget this year.

We're really pleased because we value the skill sets of every health professional in our system, working to full scope of practice. We feel that this is going to be a positive initiative for West Prince, for the Tignish area. We will be working with stakeholders into the coming months to see this pilot to reality.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

Mr. Henderson: Yes, supplementary, Madam Speaker.

Will this pilot have any impact on home care workers and their budgets?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and again, thank you for the opportunity, Member from O'Leary-Inverness.

This will have no impact on the home care budget. In our home care budget in the our budget that's presented, it is home care and support as that budget line. This government is committed to an additional \$750,000 this year to home care, which totals 13 million. In addition, \$115,000 for this pilot project.

So this is not about taking away jobs from individuals. This is using people that are in our health care system, our valued front line people, to full practice, whether it be our paramedics, our registered nurses, our RCWs, our LPNs, Madam Speaker.

Our government believes in seeing all our health professionals working to full scope of practice.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford.

Access to river for fishers

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

My question's for the Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development. Along with the great news tomorrow that the

lobster season is opening is even more great news because the oyster fishery's opening as well. However, there is an issue, as the minister's aware, in part of my riding on the eastern section of the Hillsborough River, and that has to do with access for the fishermen to the river.

There was a problem last year on the north end of the Mason Road, Starling Crescent and East River Drive as well, with the backlog of fishers lining up there. I know this was led by David and Jane Johnson. As late as last night at supper I was approached by Mrs. Reeves wondering if there has been a solution to this and if the minister can inform the House and the residents out there what that solution may be.

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

Mr. LeClair: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

That issue was brought forward certainly by yourself and the town of Stratford and citizens along that area. We work with the town of Stratford, with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. We came up with a parking lot, actually, that is on Duffy Road right now and able to be accessed starting with the seasonal opening.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Vernon River-Stratford.

Mr. McIsaac: To the same minister, there's some concern with regards to monitoring. Will your department continue to monitor the parking arrangements there and watch on Mason Road? There was also a request to

do some posting of signs. Do you know if that's going to possibly take place?

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

Mr. LeClair: It's my understanding that a request was put into the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal by the town of Stratford and they're working on that right now to monitor or come to a decision about putting up no parking signs.

I might add that this new parking lot is a great advantage to the fishers, but they can also have access to the water through the Mason Road. But the Duffy Road provides a great access for them to park their trailers and trucks.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

QEH ER (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, going back to the health minister. According to Dr. Whalen, this week alone at the QEH 19 patients were admitted to the ER. My question - and they have to stay there on stretchers - to the minister: What are you planning to do today to alleviate this issue at the QEH?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, I reiterate my comments as I previously have stated, that we are committed to an integrated health care system on Prince Edward Island. We have invested over \$24 million into the health care budget and the QEH alone this year will see an investment of over \$8 million more added to their baseline, which will bring them up to over \$121 million as part of the QEH budget line.

Our government was pleased this week to open the new stroke care unit at the QEH, two units that will help with stroke care patients and the rehabilitation of those patients. We have unit 3, which is the showcase unit at the hospital. We certainly recognize that there are pressure points at the emergency room. I'm not going to deny that. We are going to work collaboratively together to see this improve over the next few months. We value, again, all our health care professionals working on the front line.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Let's take a closer look at these 19 beds that are emergency beds which are meant for patients when they come in with an emergency. If they're all filled because they're acute care patients, the hospital gets in a position that they have to divert ambulances.

Madam Minister, what are your intentions to help today to alleviate this issue at the

QEH?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

There is a whole host of issues surrounding that. It's about ensuring that when people are medically prepared to be able to be discharged that they're getting out in time in terms of being able, if they have to convalesce, they can be- perhaps if they're from the West Prince area, if they're from Kings County area, that those patients can then go to those community hospitals to convalesce.

That's what important in our system, that we work as an integrated health care system to open up those beds that are needed at the emergency level, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Pressures at QEH

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

Back to the health minister. The doctor here challenges a number of us to go to emergency and take a look at what it's like to be in a johnny shirt on a stretcher in a loud area with no privacy. The doctors have no place to even check the patients.

Nurses that work in emergency, for example, are trained for emergency support.

Their specialty is not on orthopedics nor is it on acute long-term care, etc. My question to you is: The nurses and the physicians are under such pressure at our number one hospital in the province. What are you going to be doing today to alleviate this problem?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

If you look at the budget line in this new budget year for salaries at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital - because I think this is what it's all about too, is the front line - if you look at the previous budget, which was 78 million for salaries, it's moving up to 83 million.

We are investing in the emergency department alone, under salaries, emergency room department with \$986,000 - almost a million dollars under salaries for the emergency room department expansion, which will happen later - mid-summer. So it's an exciting year for the QEH. We do realize that there are present challenges, but it's going to be an exciting year for the QEH and delivery of health care in this province. We value that and we are working collaboratively as a government.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

In the ER department there are 19 beds. In your new proposal with the expansion, there are still only 19 beds. But we have more

people getting older. We have more chronic conditions. Right now, the practice has become, at the QEH hospital, that they have to divert ambulances because there's no physical space to actually assess and treat patients.

My question to the health minister is: What are you prepared to do today to alleviate this position at the QEH?

Mr. Bagnall: Bring back Chester Gillan, he'll know what to do.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I have a document here that everyone should be very aware of, and that was the Corpus Sanchez report that was done in October 2008, about a year after we came into government, which is a very valuable resource in terms of looking at our health care system across the entire system.

We are realizing challenges and improvements, because we're investing in home care, we're investing in the drug program, we're investing in capital construction relative to our health centres, primary care health networks.

Let me reiterate to the Leader of the Opposition. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition, when she was in government, they laid off and gave notices to 330 employees in the provincial health services.

Some Hon. Members: Shame, shame!

Ms. Bertram: They should remember that, Madam Speaker.

We are investing in the front line and we value our front line professionals.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Order, please!

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, this is about the -

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: I can't hear.

Mr. Bagnall: Did you have a good sleep?

Speaker: Order, please! Order, please!

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This is actually about today. This is about three years. This is about a number of the people in the ER that are lying there on a stretcher, are admitted as a hospital patient, and receive all their care for five days in emergency. This is about our physicians that are there. It's about our nurses that are there.

My question, to the minister, who apparently doesn't understand how critical this situation is, Dr. Whalen has invited yourself and myself to go spend some time

with the ER. Are you committed to do that, Madam Minister? Will you come with me and spend some time in the ER so you'll understand how critical this situation is? Will you commit to that, Madam Minister?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

A whole chapter in the Corpus Sanchez report, chapter three, the hon. Leader of the Opposition should read, and it's on translating the emerging vision into reality, enablers for change. We're looking to quality, to equity, to optimal efficiencies within our system, and a sustainable health care system here in this province.

We need a renewed model of community based primary health care which we are investing in in this Budget year. Over half a million dollars added to that budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bertram: We are investing, and this is the report. To invest in home care, Madam Speaker, our government has committed 60% more dollars into home care than the previous administration.

Sixty per cent more, \$13 million. We need to focus integration of acute and related facility care, which we're doing. What I already said to the Leader of the Opposition, almost a million dollars in the emergency expansion in terms of salaries. That will be a great investment this year.

We are realizing many other great news stories across the province. This week alone was the opening of the stroke unit, which is going to be so supportive to stroke care patients and their families in this province, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's obvious this government like to pay money and invest in consultants. Instead of reading that book, my question to the minister of health: Will she commit to spend time at the ER? Dr. Whalen has told me, as recently as this morning, he would arrange and take care of all the legal requirements, etc. Will you come with me to the ER to understand what it's like to be a patient there every day, lying on a stretcher, no place, no privacy, and really sick people? Do you understand that, Madam Minister?

Mr. Bagnall: She won't go because she'd get chased (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: I understand it fully well, Madam Speaker.

I've been there (a) as minister of health, and (b) as a family member taking another family member. I understand it fully well, and I'm not dismissing that there are challenges out there.

We are realizing improvements in the system. We are working to make improvements in the system. This year we shall see great improvements in the QEH and delivery of service, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[There was a commotion in the gallery]

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

(Indistinct).

Although we welcome the students in the gallery, we'd ask you to refrain from banging and clapping, because we'll leave that up to the members.

Thank you.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Order, please!

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, to the minister of health I will ask the question once again.

Are you committed to come to the ER as minister to understand what these professionals face every day, and also, to understand, from a patient perspective, what they face every day? Are you committed to that, Madam Minister?

Mr. Bagnall: No, she isn't. She's scared she'll get run out of the place.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Madam Speaker, with your indulgence, I would like to list the wonderful things that are going to be happening with the emergency department expansion.

Thirty-seven patient care spaces are as follows: four critical care spaces; two trauma; two safe and secure spaces; 29 general examining rooms; 24,000-square feet in area; safety of patients and staff as the number one priority; a satellite diagnostic imaging room; \$3.9 million dollars in new equipment, which is going to be supported by the QEH Foundation. The new design allows for flexibility in the delivery of care. A cart system for supplies will enhance the flexibility of the
(Indistinct).

We are scheduled to do this in June, Madam Speaker, so there are great things that are going to happen.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Bagnall: She's scared to go. She's scared to go.

Leader of the Opposition: It's obvious this

government has invested in consultants and spin doctors for that answer.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Leader of the Opposition: I'm going to the minister of innovation.

To the minister of innovation, Dr. Whalen also asked to invite you to come along with the minister of health to the ER to show you how money could have been invested from the Provincial Nominee Program into health care.

Will you come, with the minister of health and myself, and spend some time in the ER to understand where this important opportunity could have been, with the money that came into the province through the Provincial Nominee Program that you wasted?

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

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

I'd be more than happy to visit the emergency room at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Obviously, through the comments of the Minister of Health and Wellness, it's quite obvious that this government, as opposed -

Mr. Bagnall: At least you're not scared to go.

Mr. Campbell: - as opposed to the previous administration, values the benefits of our great Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and we

made significant investments to both infrastructure and front line service in this province.

I don't know, with respect to PNP and investment in the province, obviously this is private investment between private investors and private companies. But I'd be more than happy to take a look at the emergency room at the Queen Elizabeth.

Through IIDI we have generated a lot of revenue, through both our immigration programs and also in respect to our century fund lending. We're very pleased to be able to pass that investment along and invest a lot of it into health care. I believe, this year, it was an \$11 dollar investment this year alone.

This government and the hon. Premier have identified health and education as the priorities of this government. We're very pleased to see that our health minister has things well in hand here in the province. We've made significant investments to both health care and education. We'll continue to invest so that PEI has an integrated health care system that provides top quality service to each and every Islander.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]