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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 5 MAY 2010

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Georgetown-St. Peters.

Questions by Members

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

DMs from Charlottetown

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

DM pay compared to Atlantic provinces

I'm just wondering, Mr. Premier, then why are all your deputy ministers from Charlottetown?

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

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

I'd like to welcome the Premier back. My first question is for the Premier. Premier, I know your deputy ministers work very hard for you. Can you tell me today if they are paid on par with the deputy ministers in other Atlantic provinces?

Premier Ghiz: They're not.

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

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. M. Currie: I believe they are, Mr. Premier. Can you tell me who's not?

Premier Ghiz: I'm not sure, Madam Speaker, but I'd be happy to check that out.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

If I had to guess, I would say they'd be on par, perhaps a little bit under par.

Premier Ghiz: Keith Dewar, who's head of Health PEI.

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

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

Mr. M. Currie: It'd be fair to say, Premier, that they provide you with a lot of advice and work hard on policies within your government.

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

Do you feel, Mr. Premier, there's no one else in rural PEI qualified to be a deputy minister in your government?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: It'd be fair to say that they work hard on behalf of all Islanders, Madam Speaker.

Premier Ghiz: Not at all. There's already a lot of them from all over Prince Edward Island, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I don't believe there is, I think they're all from Charlottetown.

I just find it disappointing in the Premier. That's one of the reasons why a lot of people believe there's such a disconnect with you and rural PEI, and then one of the reasons why you do not have the pulse of rural Prince Edward Island. The Premier has felt that there's no one qualified in rural PEI to work as a deputy minister.

So, Premier, is that the case? That you don't feel anybody in rural PEI is qualified to work as a deputy minister in your government?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

We already know that the hon. member was incorrect in his first premise to begin with. We have other deputies that live in other areas of the province. I'd like to point out that under the previous government a lot of the deputies continued over. What we did, when we came to power, for rural PEI, is we realized - and the member was right. His government did concentrate all government services in the area of Charlottetown.

Our government came to power and we wanted to make sure that was spread out across Prince Edward Island. That's why we were very happy to be able to move the Department of Education and Early

Childhood Development to Summerside. We were able to take the department of fisheries and rural development and move it to Montague. We were able to take part of the paint shop from transportation and public works, move it to Tignish, and that's what our government does, Madam Speaker.

We believe in One Island Community, One Island Future.

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

Construction jobs

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, we know where the One Island Community is and it's not in rural Prince Edward Island.

Premier, you announced a couple of years ago, a 10-point plan and a billion dollar wind project, and you talked about you were going to create 850 jobs in the construction industry for this development. Can you tell me where I could go today and find some of those construction jobs?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

There was a lot done with the construction of the SUEZ development. If you talk to a lot of the contractors from up in the West Prince area, they were very pleased with the development that took place when those windmills were built. You just have to talk to the people of the Summerside area with the wind farm that was put in place for that area of the province.

So we look all across Prince Edward Island. There are jobs being created. We just have to look at our manor replacements that are taking part all across the province, the new Montague high school, other construction at our high schools. We're a government that believes in investing in all areas of Prince Edward Island and we'll continue to do that.

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

Jobs in wind technology sector

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I'll remind the Premier that the SUEZ project was left over from the previous government.

Premier, I would like to know where and how many full-time permanent jobs that were created in the wind technology sector. Can you tell me where I can find them today since you came to power?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I'm very happy to say that we partner with Holland College and there is a wind technician program now available at Holland College. There's obviously technical work that takes place with our windmills here now in Prince Edward Island.

There's also the construction that takes part when the windmills are being put up in Prince Edward Island, Madam Speaker, and all those lead to economic development in the province.

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

Mr. M. Currie: In your 10-point plan, Premier, you indicated that there was going to be \$218 million to benefit our Island communities from the construction of windmills. Can you explain today what communities benefitted from that \$218 million?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Obviously, the communities in the east, the communities in the west, the communities in the Summerside area. All the communities where windmills were put up. We're continuing now to work with the private sector to look at enhancing our wind development here in the province. We have a great wind resource.

Unfortunately, probably our only downfall is we don't have a lot of sparse areas where no one lives like in Newfoundland and Labrador, perhaps in Quebec. But we're continuing to work with the private sector to look at ways to expand our wind capacity here in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, the Premier announced a program two years ago and there's certainly been nothing done.

It's just stalled. So I'm wondering, Premier,

could you tell the Holland College wind technology students this year where they're going to find work this year?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I don't tell students where to go to work. The students are smart enough to take the courses themselves, and then they go on to find employment after. As the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters knows, the placement rate for all Holland College graduates is very high and it's a great spot to get an education.

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

Mr. M. Currie: See, Madam Speaker, there are 12 students over there that have invested a year of their life and a lot of money on tuition to take this course on a promise the Premier made to bring wind development to Prince Edward Island.

Premier, I'm just wondering if you would go to the graduating class this year and give a rousing speech on what you've done for wind energy?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I always love to talk about the great advancements that we have here in wind. You look at the Province of Prince Edward Island. We are a leader in North America in

terms of the amount of electricity we consume, based from wind resources - at 20%. Our target is to get to 30%.

We're exporting approximately 100 megawatts of wind as well over to New Brunswick, into the New England market. We're also looking at new opportunities to bring in new developers here to the Province of Prince Edward Island to expand wind. We're also looking at it from a private sector development as well.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, the Premier talks a lot, he makes a lot of promises and he puts out these glossy brochures, but he never follows through.

Now there is one individual that made a promise and kept his promise. That was Mayor Basil Stewart. He said he was going to look after his people in Summerside and he did build windmills and he did put them up. So can you tell me, Premier, how many windmills went up under your government in the last three years? How many did you put up under your policy?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I'd ask the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters to perhaps give Mayor Basil Stewart a call and ask him where a lot of those funds came from.

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

Copy of lease process

Mr. M. Currie: I believe we know where the idea came from. Basil usually follows through when he keeps his promise.

Premier, in that 10-point plan there was talk about a standardized lease process to be put in place to protect our landowners. I'm just wondering: Could you table a copy of that standardized lease process that would protect the landowners in Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Good question, Madam Speaker.

One of the difficulties that we discovered after we came to power was that a lot of thought had not been put into the processes with regards to wind development in the province prior to us taking power. So we did a lot of community consultations. We looked at ways that we could improve on the processes that were in place and one of the areas that we wanted to protect was communities in this province.

Unlike the previous government, our government believes in communities all across this province, ranging from West Prince to the east. You can see that with all of our policies. We wanted to find a way to protect the landowners, protect the communities, so that they could enjoy the benefits of wind development in the province.

Any future wind development that will be approved will have to meet a strict criteria when it comes to helping out the community, Madam Speaker, and protection of our landowners in the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, that didn't sound like he was going to table any kind of standardized lease for our landowners, and especially those that live within the wind regime that's been marked out by the province.

I think, since the Premier announced this \$1 billion wind project, there's been a scramble by developers to come to Prince Edward Island and tie up the land. They're getting five- and 10-year leases, but if they don't win the contract or the RFP, they still hold the land, and that is a problem. Premier, I think there are probably 25,000 acres that are leased today that is going to stifle further wind development because you have not put in place a standardized lease. Can you tell us when that lease will be tabled?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I guess there have been wind developers coming to the province now for the last five or 10 years, under the previous government as well. What landowners choose to do with their land is their choice, as long as it's in the overall best interest of the quality and

environmental attributes of our land.

What we're trying to do, under the RFP process, is make sure that any wind developers that come to the province now, that there are provisions put in place to make sure that the landowners are hopefully properly compensated, and to make sure that money that is made is also contributed back to those communities. Those are provisions that were not put in under the previous government. I'm not sure why they didn't believe in communities. Perhaps that was their mantra, but our government does believe in communities, and that's why we have that in the RFP process.

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

RFP on wind power

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, the previous government owned the wind farms, and it was the PEI Energy Corporation.

The Premier wants to go with the private sector with his, but what we see from you, Premier, is we have no windmills, we have no green power, we have no cable, and we have no jobs. So when are you going to issue the results of the RFP that was put out three or four months ago, or five months ago. That was supposed to be closed in April.

Premier, can you tell us, has a decision been made on the 30 megawatts of power?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I guess when the department's ready to release that information. Let's just point out how the hon. member, since he stood up today, is really not doing very good research. First he thought every deputy minister was from Charlottetown. We know that that's not true. Then he said that we didn't do any development whatsoever when it came to wind, that they did it all. But then he just said that they did all the public windmills in the province. Well, there are 50 megawatts when it comes to public windmills. There are 100 megawatts when it comes to private. So if we didn't do any, how can there be 100 windmills?

Unfortunately, this is what happened: when that member was the minister of business development in this province for eight years, he did not do his research, he did not go through the processes. We've discovered that we've got Polar Foods, we've got Dunderave, we've got other deals where this province is being sued for millions and millions and millions of dollars based on poor decision making by the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

So our government is going through a process, and we're going to make sure that process is in the best interest of Islanders.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, we see here a Premier that announced a \$1 billion dream, and he never even had a cable, nor did he have a market, nor did you have transmission capacity, and still he goes out and makes this announcement two years ago, and I guess we are where we are today

because there's no development.

It's my understanding that the decision has been made - it was in April. This is the middle of May, almost. So can you please give us the results of the RFP for 30 megawatts of power and the 100 for export?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I have not seen the RFP process. I have not received a brief on it. When I do, and when it's ready to be made public, I'll be happy to do so.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Question then to the minister of energy.

Minister, could you please tell us the results of the RFP that was issued six months ago for 30 megawatts of power and for 100 megawatts of power for export?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, the Province of Prince Edward Island did go out with a 130 megawatt tender - 100 megawatts for export, 30 megawatts for domestic use.

We hired a fairness auditor that would look after issues like the hon. member has mentioned, about the leases to property owners. That fairness auditor was available to any landowner that wanted to call him to

talk about their lease. We put that in place.

We weren't going to issue a standardized lease because then wind developers would have said: That lease, I don't like it, so I'm not coming. Then the person that owned the property would say: It's my property, I have the right to know about it.

We set up a fairness auditor that these people could call in order to ensure that they could talk about their lease and see if it's good for them. If they did sign a lease, our recommendation to anyone was: If you're going to sign a lease for your property, make sure that if the contract is issued to that person, you get payment. If the contract is not issued to that person, then that option ceases to exist at that point in time. That was our recommendation to anyone that called. Okay?

As for the tender, Maritime Electric was in charge of the tender. We had a fairness auditor in place to look at that. It is my understanding that they've gone through the proposals and they have issued letters back to the wind developers, and now we're back to negotiating with the wind developers. There are some issues around what we can do and what they can do. So there are ongoing negotiations right now, Madam Speaker, in terms of these wind farms on Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Question for the minister of energy.

Could you please tell us today: Has Maritime Electric accepted the bids that were put forth by the developers?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, the proposals that went out were received by us and by Maritime Electric.

They reviewed the procedures. They have now come up with some ideas to say: If we took this on or we did this, maybe can we get a lower price? Because that's what this is about -

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. Brown: - a lower price. Okay, madam Speaker?

I want to ensure -

Premier Ghiz: Why (Indistinct) set the higher price for Islanders? You would.

Mr. Brown: - that wind farms are benefitting Islanders. No way are we just going to go out and give some big multinational company our wind regime. We want the most benefits for PEI. I can assure this member, Madam Speaker, that Maritime Electric is now out negotiating with the companies to see if they could reduce their prices.

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

Mr. M. Currie: So, minister, we're starting to pry some more information out of you.

What you're indicating today is that Maritime Electric has not accepted any of the bids from any of the developers for the 30 megawatts of power.

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, in the current state that they were in, in the proposals that were submitted, no.

This process is, number one, getting affordable energy for Prince Edward Island. We're not just going to go out and make an announcement on a 30-megawatt wind farm and increase power rates on Prince Edward Island because of it.

Let's take a look at Ontario. They went out on all the renewable energy stuff and said: We're going to (Indistinct) of 14 cents. We're going to do all this stuff. Power rates are going up in Ontario. We're not going to do that for Islanders. Wind production on PEI has to benefit Islanders first, and we'll continue to fight for Islanders first in terms of this, Madam Speaker.

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

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

I'm hoping that you're going to start looking after Islanders some day soon because you've already put the price of electricity up 42%. Could you please tell us when you expect this other, second round of negotiations to finish?

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

hear!

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, on the 42% increase in power rates, that all goes back to 2004.

Speaker: Order, please!

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Ms. Bertram: Yes, the real story.

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

Mr. Brown: That all goes back to eliminating NB plus 10. That's when power rates when up 42%.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Order, please!

Ms. Bertram: Shame, shame!

The hon. Member from Georgetown -

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Brown: And you know what, Madam Speaker?

Mr. M. Currie: If the minister knows so much about energy, how come the Premier failed to put you on the negotiation team with Hydro-Québec?

I remember that when the bill came for the floor of the Legislature -

An Hon. Member: He was.

Ms. Bertram: You fought on it.

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

Mr. Brown: - I told the government of the day: power rates are going to exceed 40%. On the weekend Maritime Electric and the government got together, had a Sunday afternoon press conference, and said: This person is absolutely wrong, he does not know his facts. They issued a press release guaranteeing Islanders power rates won't go up.

Mr. M. Currie: Was not. You stood up and took him off.

I told them 42%. It was going to go over 40%. It has gone 40%. I knew what I was talking about then. I know what I'm talking about now. I'm in it for Islanders, and Islanders come first, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, we are involved in the negotiations.

These are high-level negotiations. These are premier-to-premier office negotiations. I can assure the member that we are providing our Premier with all the information he requires. We are working day and night to provide all the information that the Premier needs in order to get the best deal for Islanders.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear! Hear,

Again, it's about Islanders. It's about the best deal for Islanders. We're going to put

Islanders first and not some big multinational company that comes here and takes our wind and sells it, Madam Speaker, for a profit, and takes those profits offshore.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Lottery system for kindergarten teachers

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Islanders are aware of the mess and the mass confusion in education, especially in the last three years. We've now heard reports that they've resorted to using a lottery system to hire our kindergarten teachers. To the minister of education: Can you explain this lottery system?

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

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

I rise today, and am very excited about the opportunity and the leadership by our Premier. It's one of our major policy initiatives to bring kindergarten into the public school system.

Through that process we have listened to and talked to the sector. I know that in December and January of this year interviews were done. People were identified. As I indicated on the floor of the House yesterday, I would bring forward

information to the Leader of the Opposition in respect to the final selection process of hiring. I was not directly involved with that, but I do know that the department was extremely involved in respect to the interviews and the opportunities for individuals that were coming in to teach kindergarten, to have some input and say in respect to opportunities where they saw themselves working in communities across Prince Edward Island.

We're excited about the opportunity. We've just completed our early year evaluations and assessments. We've just announced yesterday that we'll be extending, by two days, the opportunity to bring our five-year-olds in, to give parents and schools time to adjust to the transition with the double cohort of children coming in the system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the minister, we're talking about a lottery system, a lottery draft system that you're using to chose kindergarten teachers. Explain: Why would you do this?

Mr. Bagnall: That's shameful, shameful.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

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

Order, please!

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

Two weeks ago the PEITF ratified their contract. I know that I did get a lot of feedback from kindergarten teachers who were very anxious about the process after the department had conducted interviews with the health human resource staff in all the boards across the province.

I know that the feedback that I've gotten from kindergarten teachers, they're extremely excited and very happy to be embraced and welcomed into the public schools. I know that the school principals that I've talked to, most recently last week, are very excited about the new staff that will be coming on board to introduce and provide quality kindergarten education.

We will be bringing in approximately 112 kindergarten teachers, with 20 teachers to accommodate support programming for them. I've got tremendous confidence in the department and the boards across the province that that process was done equitably and fairly and treated Islanders with respect.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister. We're talking about this week. This week you guys used the

lottery and a draft system to hire kindergarten teachers. Who decided to use this method and why?

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

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

As I indicated, our government and Islanders are excited. I'm getting a lot of calls from families who are very pleased with the kindergarten transition. This month we will be hosting welcome to kindergarten sessions in all our elementary schools across Prince Edward Island. I know that the kindergarten teachers have been introduced to their school principals and their staff. There's a lot of positive discussions going on right now. Families are excited.

We are ready. Classrooms have been built, buses have been purchased, materials, resources. We basically have listened to and respected the report by the former member of the Leader of the Opposition's party, Pat Mella, as we brought her in and asked her to commission the work on the kindergarten. Have followed that, and have tremendous confidence in the hiring part of the process. I look forward to bringing our kindergarten teachers into the school system next September.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, Pat Mella certainly didn't introduce a lottery system, but you did,

minister.

Can you explain why you're using a lottery and a draft system to hire kindergarten teachers?

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

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

As I indicated yesterday on the floor of the House, I did indicate to the Leader of the Opposition, I did respect her question yesterday, and have asked my staff to clarify the final process.

But this process has started months ago and kindergarten teachers have been identified. The feedback that I'm getting, as I've indicated, has been very positive. Schools and staff are ready to welcome kindergarten teachers in. The sessions will be held over the next number of weeks in schools all across Prince Edward Island. We're pleased to finally be the last province in this country to allow our five-year-olds the same opportunity as every five-year-old in this country, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Teaching positions

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of

Education and Early Childhood Development and Attorney General. Minister, you recently announced that your department is maintaining teaching positions. In light of projected declining enrollments in the province over the next two years, can you inform the House what is the total number of positions that will be retained?

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

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

We were pleased, and our government did support the investment of teachers into the public education system. Last year we were fortunate with the staffing allocation model. We exceeded that model by 20 positions last year. This year we were very pleased to announce in the budget process that we will be holding 40 more positions over the next two years, for a total of 60 positions over a total of three years.

We're pleased with our kindergarten teachers and our 20 additional teachers on top of this. We'll be bringing the teacher workforce in this province to a total of 1,668 positions, the largest number of teaching workforce in the history of this province, and we'll look forward to strengthening and building our public system into the future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne

Valley-Linkletter.

Ms. Biggar: Supplementary for the same minister, Madam Speaker.

How will these positions be distributed to strengthen our public education system?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Good question, real good question, and you'll get a good answer, too.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The question from the hon. Member from Tyne Valley-Linkletter is a good question. Right now with the investments that we've made in early literacy in grades 1, 2 and 3 we're seeing some tremendous results and gains by children in literacy. We are looking at a number of key areas now. We're working very closely with the boards across the province to look at key areas of investment. Those discussions are ongoing and hopefully we'll have some clarification in respect to where those investments.

The early literacy investments came, obviously, from the task force on education which did a positive job over the last five years of strengthening our system. We want to make sure that we continue to make the investments. With the investments that we make with the additional resources, we can challenge and attack the issues in the public school system to make it stronger for future Islanders.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Literacy in grades 4, 5 and 6

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Minister, you mentioned you were focusing right now on grades 1 to 3 in literacy. I want to know, please, if you would inform the House, how you're going to focus - or will you give consideration on strengthening the grades 4, 5 and 6 in literacy?

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

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

The focus in the early literacy years has been with the investment of literacy coaches and Reading Recovery Programs and (Indistinct) programs - the direct investment has shown direct results in respect to the improvements in bringing literacy rates in the province.

Right now there is a lot of discussion going on with literacy investments in grades 4, 5 and 6. So we can capture those 1, 2s and 3s as they move forward to make sure we support them and sustain them.

We certainly know across the province, and the PEITF has come out strong in respect to the challenges with class composition. But we are pleased today that our ratios are stronger in the classroom than they've ever been. We'll continue to work with the

boards across the province as they target and identify where they see the investments need to be made in the weeks ahead.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Coyote bounty

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is for the Minister of Environment, Energy and Forestry. Recently Nova Scotia instituted a bounty on coyotes as a means to control the population. For the safety of our residents in rural PEI, does your department have any plans to follow their example?

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

Mr. Brown: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

No, we're not going to put a bounty on coyotes on Prince Edward Island, for two reasons. In Nova Scotia they have a big wilderness area where no hunting or trapping of coyotes is allowed to go on. So the coyote becomes less and less fearful of human beings. We have a great association here on Prince Edward Island, the trappers association that can go out and trap these coyotes or (Indistinct) or get rid of the coyotes.

As the head of the wildlife federation said one day, coyotes will not go to a place where they're going to get shot or trapped. He put it more less in terms of people go to

Florida, they don't go to Afghanistan. So coyotes aren't going to go to places where they're going to get shot. That's what he said, Madam Speaker.

So we're not going to put any coyote bounty on them at this point in time.

Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Gallant: Supplementary question to the same minister.

Is there a person in your department who people can contact if they do see coyotes?

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

Mr. Brown: Yeah, Madam Speaker, Randy Dibblee is in charge of that.

We did have three sessions across Prince Edward Island in terms where people came, and there was a great session. There was over 100 people attended some of these sessions. There was a great discussion over it.

Just one bit of advice. If you do see a coyote, don't run away from it. That's what the advice is. Because if you run away, then -

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Brown: - well, it's - that's the professional advice and I'm going to take the professional advice.

What happened in Nova Scotia is the person

ran. I know there was an incident in Nova Scotia. The person ran and they were in a wilderness area. It was a devastating thing in Nova Scotia. If you do see a coyote, the first thing you should do is stand firm, look at it, try to make yourself look big, or carry a stick if you're out walking, carry a whistle or carry some mace. But my advice to you: if you see a coyote don't run, because they'll catch you. They're a pack animal and that's what they'll do, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Lottery system for kindergarten teachers (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm sure this is the only education minister all across Canada that's ever used a lottery system to hire kindergarten teachers.

Minister, in this system, a teacher from Charlottetown could end up working in Souris, and a Souris teacher could end up in Charlottetown. To the minister of education: Was geographic location of teachers taken into account here at all? Was it?

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

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

As I did indicate - this will be my third time

I'm indicating to the hon. Leader of the Opposition - that I am very comfortable with bringing in specifics. I as the minister do not get involved with the hiring process of kindergarten teachers. That is left up to the Western School Board, the French language school board and the Eastern School District. They do work closely with my HR people in the department.

I do not have discussions on hiring of teachers in this province, but am very excited about this government's commitment to five-year-olds in this province. We're hiring 112 new kindergarten teachers. We've invested in a total of 151 new school buses over the last three years, a million dollars in equipment and infrastructure to bring in play-based instruction, the only province in Canada to do that, and certainly I'm excited.

There's a lot of positive discussions going on. Parents are pleased that their children are going to get the opportunity that other children are getting across this country to implement - one of the only provinces in Canada - a full-day kindergarten program for next September, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

You can rest assured no one's pleased over your lottery system. But my question to the minister: Were teachers at least given a choice, at least at a number one or two preference, where they'd like to be located, at which school would hire them? Were they

at least considered for a choice?

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

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

I have great confidence that the process was very respectful. Any time you bring in a major hiring process there are details to that process. I have not been privy to that discussion, nor should I be privy to any discussion on the selection process for hiring. The decisions were made by the school principals and the boards did interviews with the potential new teachers in the system.

I don't have any indication who those people were who were sitting at the table, but as I indicated, I'll bring specifics about the hiring process. But I have great confidence that the staff that are being brought into the public school system have been treated with the utmost dignity and respect, and there was fairness and equality through the whole process.

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 same minister, you are the minister of education and you are using a lottery

system. Teachers should be chosen on merit and not who drew the first number in the lottery draft. Minister, this is not the NHL. We're talking about the education of our children, and they are using a lottery.

Explain to us, and explain to these poor kindergarten teachers, why you're treating them like a number and not a professional person. Why?

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

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

The selection and hiring process, interviews and screening, started back in December of last year. Kindergarten teachers were all given an opportunity, and a fair opportunity, to be screened and interviewed. Obviously, their criteria, there was an interview process, they had to reach a certain mark, an evaluation, just like any other interview.

We're excited to bring these teachers in. Their income will be substantially increased. They'll be part of a learning faculty, an environment in elementary schools all across this province. The feedback that I've been getting, kindergarten teachers are extremely excited about their new opportunities and that they took a program. We are investing in 2.7 million, with the support of the Department of Innovation and Advanced Learning, to provide programming training at the University of Prince Edward Island to give them an opportunity, while they're working full-time in the public school system, to get their

degrees at the University of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, we know the treasurer always rolls a dice to see how the budget's going to end up, but we're shocked to hear the education minister's spinning a roulette wheel to hire kindergarten teachers -

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Education Minister, will you please explain to the people why teachers were not considered in any way, shape or form here? You used a lottery system to hire them. Why?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

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

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

I, as I indicated, have a tremendous amount of confidence in the system. I spent 20 years as an educator, and through that process witnessed and watched school boards in this province be very professional and very ethical in respect to their hiring processes.

Kindergarten teachers were very much part of the discussion and very much part of the dialogue. The feedback that we're getting -

we're excited as a government that finally, after a long time, that we're making the investments in teachers, in school buses, in classrooms, in schools, to strengthen our public school system, to make sure that our five-year-olds have the same opportunity as every five-year-old in the rest of this country. Because we are putting Islanders first, and most importantly, we're putting our kids first as a priority, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

They used a lottery system to hire kindergarten teachers.

An Hon. Member: Oh, oh!

Leader of the Opposition: My question to the minister: Why would you give 24 hours for these teachers to actually make up their minds? Why were you coercing them into signing right away? Why?

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

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

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

Once again, I'm not directly involved in the hiring process. The Western, and the Eastern, and the French language school

board have human resource staff. I was part of a day-long discussion, I did meet with all the kindergarten teachers across the province, where the process was explained. There was an opportunity for the kindergarten teachers at that point in time to have questions asked. We spent a full Saturday, right from Summerside through to Charlottetown meeting with kindergarten teachers, and the feedback was very positive.

There were a lot of questions, and the Eastern, the Western and the French language school board did an incredible job of getting the information out, and it settled any anxieties there were at the time.

But we're excited about embracing - this is another step forward to bringing 1,400 children and their families into the public school system. We're excited about the infrastructure and the capital investments. We're excited about the curriculum. We're excited about the teachers who are getting to be part of schools across this province. We'll look forward to that transition and we'll look forward to welcoming 1,400 children on the first day of school next September.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the education minister: So you agreed

with this lottery system. Kindergarten teachers are not part of the union. There's no - not yet. There's no one to stick up for them. There are members in this House, there are teachers going from Charlottetown to Morell, there are teachers from Morell going to Souris, there are teachers from Murray Harbour going to Souris.

You'd better start checking as MLAs who you're working for. But my question to the education minister is -

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Leader of the Opposition: - why are you treating people like numbers instead of people?

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: One Island community.

Speaker: Order, please!

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

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

In respect to kindergarten teachers working in Souris or Charlottetown, we have doctors that live in Charlottetown that work in Montague, we have lawyers that work in Charlottetown that live in Summerside.

We're a population of 140,000 people. We're One Island Community with one

Island future. We made a decision to move a department. It was a bold decision by our government. Because we believe in communities in this province, and we believe that communities deserve the best, and we are delivering upon those promises.

I can't speak specifically about where staff are being employed and what they're doing. I know as an educator, when I was at schools, whether I was working in Charlottetown, we had teachers that were living in rural Prince Edward Island, whether it was in Summerside or whether it was in Souris that were coming to Charlottetown. We had teachers that would drive from Charlottetown to Murray River, to Morell, to Souris, to Summerside, to Kensington, to Kinkora.

That has gone on for decades and I'm sure it's going to continue to go on as long as this government's in power, Madam Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]