



Session: 3/63

Date: 11 May 2010

No: 34

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

TUESDAY, 11 MAY 2010

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Liquor commission (further)

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, I'd like to table questions asked by the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir on Thursday regarding head office renovations and Stratford liquor store.

Questions by Members

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

Ban on year-round Sunday shopping

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

My first question today is for the Premier. Premier, you promised to place Islanders first. You promised, also, to have an open and accountable government. I'm just wondering if you could tell Islanders today what was the logic you, and you alone, used to ban Sunday shopping in this province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Obviously, in the Province of Prince Edward Island, we have a system in place now where Sunday shopping does open after the May long weekend, which is coming up in a couple of weeks. Of course, it's opened up all the way until after Christmas, right

around Christmas time.

We know that prior to two years ago Sunday shopping in the province was, I believe, the first five or six weeks prior to Christmas. We changed that. Myself and the hon. member, actually, together. I was in opposition. He was in government. We changed that together and made it so that it's opened up during the tourist season. We heard from a lot of tourist operators in the province with regards to arriving here and not having access to stores. So we think that it's a very fine balance between preserving a day of rest and making sure that our economy is able to handle that.

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

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

I would like for the Premier, I guess, to help Islanders understand why you made this decision. Certainly there must have been - somebody lobbied you to not allow year-round Sunday shopping. Could you tell us were you lobbied by anyone to stop year-round Sunday shopping in this province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Interesting you asked that. I had the privilege the other night to go out to dinner with the Pages. We went to a restaurant around the corner. There was a group of about probably 15 people at a table on the way out. They all asked me to stop. They wanted to ask me a question and they wanted to ask me a question on Sunday shopping.

They said: What's the story with Sunday shopping, Mr. Premier? I said: What's your opinion on Sunday shopping? Being a typical politician I wanted to hear from them. They indicated to me that they have to work on Sundays now when Sunday shopping is open. They don't want to do that. They said that they want to spend time with their family on Sundays and they're not happy, in fact, that we're even open for the eight months that we're open now.

I had to explain to them that it's a balance. That I realize that, for them, it's not the most opportune legislation that's in place, that they work on Sundays. But for others it's something that's very important. As a government we believe in striking a balance and we believe that the legislation that is currently in place - that I voted for, the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, that the Member from Montague-Kilmuir voted for - Madam Speaker, is a balanced approach.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, the Premier did not answer the question and what I think is - he said our government made this decision.

I understand it, you made the decision. So I'm wondering. Were you lobbied by any group or individuals to ban Sunday shopping in this province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: I just indicated to the hon. member that I was lobbied by a group of 15

people at a restaurant last Thursday night, I believe, when we went out, Madam Speaker.

When it came to Sunday shopping in the province there was a lot of individuals that had a lot of strong feelings on Sunday shopping, both ways.

Prior to Sunday shopping being in place after the May long weekend, when it was only the six weeks before Christmas, I will admit, I was lobbied extensively by the tourism industry in the province with regards to families or individuals arriving here in the summertime for their summer vacation, saying that they get here on a Sunday - if they're at a cottage, they're unable to go get groceries or they're unable to go get their case of beer or whatever they want to get.

That's why I supported the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters in voting in favour of legislation that I believe is a compromise, where we now have it in place for eight months a year.

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

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

What the Premier has actually done - and you did it alone, Premier, it was your decision - what you have done is deprived Islanders of millions of dollars of revenue and also a lot of jobs for our business community across Prince Edward Island.

You went against the wishes of Islanders, against the wishes of the business

community and against the wishes of the standing committee who went across this province to hear from Islanders. It came back very clear that they wanted year-round Sunday shopping. So will you give us some sort of any idea or your logic - yours alone - why you made that decision to ban it?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

For any tourist that might be in the gallery, I think it's important to point out that the hon. member who's asking me these questions was actually a member of the government for 11 years prior to moving over to the opposition benches. He had 11 years to enact legislation to be able to introduce year-round Sunday shopping. He, for some reason, didn't do that.

But I will admit his government did come in with a compromise, and that compromise was that they opened up Sunday shopping from the May long weekend all the way through to Christmas. When I was in opposition, similar to what they do now - very rarely - but I supported the government of today on the changing of that legislation. Or I'm pretty sure I did. I think it's a good idea and it's a good compromise and I think that the compromise that is currently in place is something that's very important.

The hon. member also raises an important issue when it comes to tax revenue in the province. We are going to do an analysis to look at the revenue that we gain over the months where Sunday shopping is in place vs. the months that it's not in place to see if,

in fact, we are losing a lot of business. If we are, we'll revisit it.

But I've been told by a lot of businesses that essentially what happens is you take the six days that they're in operation, you move to seven days, and really you just spread those six days over into seven. So the extra day doesn't add anything at all.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, what I heard from the business community and the chamber was just the opposite.

They wanted Sunday shopping, they encouraged Sunday shopping, and they were open to be competitive against the other provinces. So, Premier, will you offer some hope to the business community and to Islanders that you will announce year-round Sunday shopping in this session of the Legislature?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: No, I will not introduce it in this session of the Legislature, Madam Speaker.

I'll tell you what I tell a lot of the individuals that are in favour of Sunday shopping year-round. They come to me and say: Why can't we have - Wayne Thibodeau, wherever he is, I don't see him here. He's a huge proponent of year-round

Sunday shopping. He loves asking that question -

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Premier Ghiz: - every time he gets the opportunity. I'm complimenting the media. This is a very important issue for Wayne Thibodeau.

But I tell the people that want year-round Sunday shopping that up until three years ago we only had it for six weeks. We came in, supported the previous government when we came in, and we maintained eight months a year of Sunday shopping. So essentially we went from six weeks to eight months. So people that are looking for an improvement, I think they have it.

The people out there that don't think we should have Sunday shopping whatsoever, I say to them that every other province in Canada has it, but here in the Province of Prince Edward Island we have four months where we do not have Sunday shopping in place. I think it's the responsibility of a government to make sure that we come in with a balanced approach and that's exactly what we're doing here.

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

Mr. M. Currie: But, Madam Speaker, the people have spoken.

You already went out with a standing committee and went across Prince Edward Island and heard from tens upon tens of Island businesses and people. The recommendation was that they wanted year-

round Sunday shopping. They wanted to be competitive. They wanted to be part of the business community in this province and they did not want to see those revenues drive over the bridge to Moncton and other places.

So, Premier, will you please introduce year-round Sunday shopping in this province in this session?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I find it quite ironic that the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters is now asking for year-round Sunday shopping when he had 11 years to introduce the same legislation when he was in government and he didn't. Because he realizes that government must take balanced approaches. That's exactly what we're doing, as our government is doing. That's exactly what we're going to continue to do.

Now we're going to look at it from a tax perspective. Look at the sales taxes that we've taken in during the months that we're open vs. the months we're not. We'll prorate it based on the tourists that come in at that point of year and we'll see exactly whether or not government is, in fact, losing revenue to people moving to, or shopping in, Moncton or Halifax.

If there is a huge discrepancy in place, it is something that we will look at in the future. But for the immediate future, Madam Speaker, we believe that the legislation that is in place is a very balanced approach for

Islanders.

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

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

As you can see, we're not getting very many answers from the Premier, and he wants to see Islanders to go shopping off this province.

ITSS contract (further)

So I'll go to the minister of finance. Back a few weeks ago, minister, you promised you were going to bring information back from Accreon, a company in New Brunswick that's doing some IT work in this province. Did you bring that information back today?

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

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

I think he's alluding to the contracts that we were talking about with the individuals we've hired to help with our renovations inside of ITSS. I have those in a file at my office, as a matter of fact. Today they just sent them across. I have those contracts and I'll bring them forward.

It gives me a great opportunity to speak about the renovations that are taking place inside this division of my department. We have had some tremendous inroads made with regard to the larger clients in our portfolio, with ITSS, under the guidance

Allan MacDonald. We are so fortunate to have someone of his ability to bring forward all of these changes that we had to put in place so that we could make ITSS a very viable and strong entity.

Thank you very much.

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

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

Minister of finance, could you please tell us today, then, how many contracts Accreon got since Mr. Allan MacDonald has been retained by you to work in this province?

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

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

The number of contracts that Accreon has actually bid on and won, I can bring back and provide that to the House. Be very happy to do that. There has been one major contract that has come out, Accreon bid on it. Were not, unfortunately, the winners of that. But it's very nice to have another competitor here on Prince Edward Island to ensure Islanders that we are getting the best bang for our spending dollar over there.

But whenever Accreon is involved, due diligence is done with regard to the accusations that the hon. member is asking about.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, the minister of finance promised almost a month ago to bring this information back and it still seems to be sitting on his desk.

Premier Ghiz: How do you know?

Mr. M. Currie: Minister - he just said it was. Minister, are you aware that Accreon was awarded a contract with the Workers Compensation Board for around 500,000? Were you aware of that contract also?

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

Premier Ghiz: They're a separate entity.

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

If Accreon was awarded a contract with the Workers Compensation Board, all the more power to them. As I said, it's very important here on Prince Edward Island to make sure that anyone that's contracting and tendering - that's part of the Atlantic Procurement Agreement. We want to make sure that it's an open, transparent process. Workers Compensation Board, as the hon. member would know, is very much an arm's-length corporation away from government. We have no say in their business model. I have no impact whatsoever with who would do their IT work.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Member from

Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: Minister, could you please tell me if Mr. Allan MacDonald has severed all his ties with Accreon in Fredericton, New Brunswick?

An Hon. Member: You don't like this guy.

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

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

Premier Ghiz: I don't even know who he is.

Mr. Sheridan: Allan MacDonald severed his ties with Accreon last August. Everything from every aspect of his business with Accreon.

As I've said a number of times here in this House, and always to this hon. member of the Legislature, Allan MacDonald is one of three people that could have ever administered these changes that we needed to take place inside of ITSS.

Very similar to what the Premier was saying to this member just moments ago, these are the kinds of things that needed to take place 11 years ago. When they did bring ITSS - this is the IT Shared Services - inside of government, and decide to consolidate them all in the central agency of provincial treasury, it was a great idea, but you cannot cut it to the quick. You have to leave the resources there that allow this group to go forward and do what is needed in the IT side, with all of the major clients.

When I talk about that, we're talking about education, now the community services, and health and wellness. We need to be able to answer their needs in the IT field, and because of the cuts that the previous administration made to this division there was no way they could go forward. We needed to revamp the whole system.

Under the guidance of a very capable Allan MacDonald, we are making strides that have never been seen on Prince Edward Island.

Premier Ghiz: You like the guy and he doesn't.

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

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

Minister, will you confirm to me that he's not a shareholder, he's not a director, and he's not a consultant for Accreon? That's what I want to hear from you.

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

Mr. Sheridan: Yes, yes, yes, and yes. We will bring all of that information as well, Madam Speaker.

I want to ensure myself, and everyone that was involved in government, that Allan MacDonald had severed all ties with Accreon. This is the kind of thing that happens inside of business all the time. When you're looking for these types of individuals - and as I said, maybe three people in the Maritime provinces were

capable of doing this - you have to come from somewhere. They have to come from a background that has all the intelligence that's needed for ITSS renovation.

I make no bones about it. We went out looking for the very best individual to do this, and yes, he has to have a very strong background in this. What I was able to get from his lawyer was the fact of when he finished with Accreon, when the last minute of the business statement, when he last attended a meeting as a shareholder, when he gave up all of his shares, when he gave up his title, and when he left the board of directors.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. M. Currie: I'm just wondering why, about a month ago, you indicated that if Mr. MacDonald was evaluating any IT work for government that he would remove himself from the process if Accreon was bidding.

So, if there's not a conflict, I'm just wondering why he had to remove himself from that business.

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

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

Of course, as we all know, it's all about optics in this business. We have to take one extra step to make sure that you're over and above this. We're not ever going to concede

to taking the second best person possible out there in the marketplace to allow us to move this movement forward. We took the very best person that was out there in the market. We brought him forward. I'm thrilled with the work that he's been able to do.

Just as the hon. member has spoken about, we had AI step aside whenever these important decisions were being made on evaluations inside of tender work. That's not his bailiwick anyway. All of the directorship that's in place would oversee all of these kinds of tender evaluations, ensuring that it would be an open and transparent process that we could happily show to anyone inside the Legislature.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, that's the reason why I'm asking the questions.

Because we are getting calls from the IT community in this province. They are concerned that you are using somebody else outside of this province. Are you indicating to the IT community in this province that they're not qualified to do any of this work that you're giving to Accreon?

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

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

We know this IT business on Prince Edward Island very well. This hon. member knows it

as well as I do, and we know who is available inside this province. Are they willing to step down from their firm, that's a multi-million dollar firm, to take a job inside of government for piddly amounts of money that would every be paid by the provincial treasury to oversee a transformation?

The dollars that we're paying to Allan MacDonald would never entice the owners of DeltaWare to ever step aside and come work for government.

Is there anyone else on Prince Edward Island that could have done the transformation that Allan MacDonald has overseen? I haven't seen it. They'd have to come forward and show us.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

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

Minister, you also hired another IT expert from Montreal, a Mr. Jean Poirier. Is he still retained with your department at \$1,200 a day?

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

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Imagine. Almost as bad as a lawyer.

Mr. Sheridan: Jean Yves Poirier has been brought forward from Montreal. As I said,

we went out looking for the very best people possible for this transformation. We found this individual working on the infrastructure portion of our business. We needed it overhauled as well, and Jean Yves Poirier has been invaluable. He, as a matter of fact, saved us countless dollars with regard to our service here on Prince Edward Island.

We are doing great things for the clients here, with ITSS and for the taxpayers of Prince Edward Island. These people are well worth the money that we're paying them to allow us to go forward, to make these savings for Islanders.

Thank you very much.

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

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

Is Mr. Poirier still retained with your department?

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

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

That's a great question by the hon. member, asking whether Jean Yves Poirier is still with us on contract. He is, as a matter of fact, still with us. The problem with it is that we have advertised now across Canada twice for this position, and everyone comes back to tell us that we're not paying enough. We can't seem to find anyone. This started out internally, then it went to the Maritime

provinces, then we've gone across Canada twice with the advertisements for this position, trying to find a director of infrastructure, and it's difficult with IT for Prince Edward Island.

Our classifications don't quite allow us to get the person that we need for this position at that rate. Jean Yves Poirier has continued to give us excellent advice in this area, and it's great that we've been able to retain him during this period where we haven't been able to find a replacement.

Thank you.

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

Mr. M. Currie: You also indicated, minister, that there were some positions that were still not filled at the IT side. Have all the positions been filled at the IT section?

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

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

As I just spoke about, we cannot find anyone yet for the infrastructure directorship. It's been an incredible search process. We now have four of the five filled for this transformation, and we're ready to go out and advertise for the COO's position, which is the seat filled by Allan MacDonald at this time, and we have a few candidates that have been in asking about what we are going to do with this position. Two of them are from away right now and know that we need someone to continue this

transformation once Al MacDonald's contract expires.

We are ready to go to market on that one, and there's one directorship still outstanding. As well, we're having problems attracting someone inside of security. IT security, again, a very difficult position to fill. Everyone in the global community is looking for someone with regard to security.

Thank you very much.

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

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

So, minister of finance, you are, as you promised, for the second time, that you are going to bring this information back, a complete accounting of Mr. Al MacDonald's contract, total amount, any work Accreon got, and a complete accounting of Mr. Poirier's work that he's doing here and the total cost. You'll bring that all back? Tomorrow.

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

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

The hon. member should remember I brought him the information on Al MacDonald. He has that contract inside his -

Mr. M. Currie: (Indistinct).

Mr. Sheridan: That's what you have is all

the contract information on Al MacDonald, Madam Speaker.

Again, we make no bones about the amount that's paid. Is it a lot of money for us as Islanders? A lot of money as for myself? No question, it's rich. But when you try to find these individuals on the open market to do the types of work that we needed, it is difficult to find.

More than happy to bring forward the information on Jean Yves Poirier. The hon. member has never asked for contracts with regard to Accreon before. We've talked about contracts for people that are working for us. That stuff is all inside of a file. They told me that that would be available tomorrow for me to bring forward to the House, and we will bring that, Madam Speaker, at that time.

Thank you very much.

An Hon. Member: Table it.

Some Hon. Members: Table it.

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

The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Build PEI signs

Mr. Bagnall: Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Premier.

Mr. Premier, while driving through our beautiful Island, through our cities, our towns, our countryside, our environmental beauty is being obstructed by large signs

with the words Build PEI on it.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

Mr. Bagnall: Madam Speaker, one might also be confused, one might also be confused that we may be in the middle of an election by all the signs that you're putting up.

To the Premier. Can you give me a price on how much government has spent on these signs?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Priceless, Madam Speaker, would be my answer.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier Ghiz: As the hon. member knows, back about two and a half years ago, our government had the foresight to introduce the largest capital budget ever in the history of this province, at \$510 million over a five-year period.

Basically, what that infrastructure, that capital budget, has done is it has allowed Prince Edward Island to be the only province in Canada not to fall into recession last year. What we're doing is we're trying to rebuild our province where we've seen 11 years of neglect. Whether or not we're talking about the roads in our province, the hospitals, the manors in this province, the schools in his riding. That's what our government's doing, is we're making sure that Prince Edward Island is going to be built for the future, Madam Speaker, so that all Islanders can enjoy our beautiful Island

province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Construction of West Royalty school

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Minister, recently the government has undertaken two major projects in the district of West Royalty-Springvale. These are the upgrades to the West Royalty Elementary School and the Sleepy Hollow correctional facility. Can the minister provide this House and update on the construction of the West Royalty school?

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

Mr. MacKinley: What we're doing there, we're putting an addition on the West Royalty school to provide space for five kindergarten classes, and some support space for those. I believe (Indistinct), Murphy and Macleod - Williams, Murphy & Macleod - got the contract. We're expecting it to be done by August of this year.

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

Sleepy Hollow correctional facility

Mr. Dumville: Supplementary, Madam Speaker.

Could he also give us an update on the correctional facility? I noticed on television it was quite an impressive looking -

An Hon. Member: It's in your riding.

Mr. Dumville: Yes.

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

Mr. MacKinley: I don't know if that's where all the convicts are in his riding or not, but that's where the correctional centre is.

There's 10,000 square feet, roughly, there. It's to add extra space for 48 individuals. It's going to be done sometime in August also, or maybe a little later. It's on schedule, I know that, and there are people working at it. It should be done sometime in August or maybe even June this year.

Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Kindergarten children assessments

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and Attorney General.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Mr. Gallant: Mr. Minister, you reported last week that assessments were underway across the province for children entering kindergarten this September. Are these assessments still taking place, Mr. Minister?

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

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

Part of our government's commitment is early intervention in the public school system. Over the last number of months, obviously we're bringing forward a plan to renew and revitalize the early childhood sector. Most importantly, we're transitioning 1,400 five-year-olds into the public school system. Part of that transition, for the first time in the history of the province, we'll be bringing in a university screening tool which was designed by Dr. Doug Willms from the University of New Brunswick.

Over the last number of weeks that screening tool has been introduced in schools all across the province. We had approximately 1,200 students, which is approximately 88% of the total five-year-old population, coming in. The feedback has been very positive. Those screening tools will be provided to parents, to schools, to the department and to the boards across the province as we look at strategies and interventions to provide ample opportunities to provide the appropriate interventions for our five-year-olds coming into the school system, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Supplementary question to the same

minister.

Is there an opportunity for children who missed out on this evaluation to be assessed before September?

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

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

A great part of the success is that it provided an opportunity for the parents of the five-year-olds coming in to engage with the school administrators and teachers in the public school system. A positive first step as we welcome our new parents into schools all across the province.

There's approximately about 195 students that were identified that weren't able to participate in the assessments. We're working with schools all across the province to make sure that every child has an opportunity to have their assessments done so we can have the information ready and prepared for their new kindergarten teachers as we transition in September. So we'll look forward to hopefully providing a number of days in June, and we'll be working closely with the parents who haven't been able to participate, and the school administrators, to finalize that assessment.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Build PEI signs (further)

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you. A question to the Premier, Madam Speaker.

Will you find the exact cost of these signs and table it in the House?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: I'm sure I can get one of our departments to figure that out.

It's important that we make sure that Islanders know that we are, as a government, investing in our infrastructure in this province, the same that the federal does. I think you see lot of the signs around the province are both the provincial and the federal government, and we're very happy to work collaboratively with the federal government on a lot of these projects to make sure that our One Island Community, that their infrastructure needs are met.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Mr. Premier, during a recession, do you think this is the best way to be spending your money, putting up signs all over the province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Madam Speaker, I guess we could not be doing these infrastructure programs across the province.

We could not be doing what we're doing

now out at the QEH. Perhaps it was a bad idea, I'm not sure, to put the Department of Fisheries and Oceans down in the beautiful community of Montague. Perhaps it was a bad idea to build a brand new Montague high school. If the hon. member is against those ideas, perhaps he should just stand up and tell the House.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Government at Work website

Mr. Bagnall: Madam Speaker, the Premier and the Liberal government, they didn't stop here.

It seems like awhile ago they purchased the web site entitled Government at Work, which outlines in a very partisan way the government's so-called accomplishments.

I know the site didn't take a lot of space because the government doesn't have many accomplishments to put on it. But it cost to design and operate this Liberal propaganda tool.

Premier, how much has your government spent on this Government at Work website?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I'll get one of my ministers to get that information for you when they come back with estimates. But when it comes to announcing government's accomplishments, we think it's very important that Islanders

know that before we were in power we promised a Family Residency Program, and guess what? We have one now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier Ghiz: We promised an Accelerated Nursing Program, and we did it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier Ghiz: We promised to reduce down the gas taxes in this province by 4.4 cents a litre, and we did it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier Ghiz: We promised to freeze residential property assessments for three years. In fact, we didn't do that, we did it for four years, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier Ghiz: We made a lot of commitments to the people of Prince Edward Island, and I think it's very important that we continue on delivering on those commitments and that's what our government will continue to do.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the Premier: Can you tell us what staff member of the Liberal Party of PEI designed your web page?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Again, I'm sure that it was one of our great IT people in the Province of Prince Edward Island that we probably got to do that.

But again, we promised the colorectal cancer screening program, we delivered on that. We promised the Tyne Valley Health Centre, we delivered on that. We promised the Palliative Home Care Drug Care program, we delivered on that. We promised expansions to the ER at the Prince County Hospital, we delivered on that. We promised coverage for blood glucose testing strips for insulin-dependent Islanders, we delivered on that. We promised free emergency ambulance service for seniors, we delivered on that.

Part of the reason why we need the website, Madam Speaker, is because I don't have enough time in this House to list through them all.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Ads in time of recession

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's another waste of taxpayers' dollars putting that on. If you look at the newspaper you'll see his advertisement continuously, One Island Community, One Island Future. They always have a picture of the Premier

or one of the Cabinet ministers on there. Do you feel this is the best way of wasting taxpayers dollars putting these ads in the paper in a time of recession?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

We believe as a government in stimulating the economy. That's why I'm very happy to point out that a lot of independent economists in the country cited our infrastructure announcements in this province for giving us the ability to avoid a recession.

So in fact, everything that the former minister, the Member from Montague-Kilmuir, is talking about has enabled us to be the only province in Canada, in fact, not to fall into recession.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's always good - and this Premier has the same history, saying one thing and then doing another. I have a bill in my hand, Bill No. 101, *Government Advertisement Standards Act*. This was a bill that was introduced to this House by the Premier. It says the Hon. Robert Ghiz on it, the bill. So it was the Premier that brought this in and he was the Leader of the Opposition at that time. He said that he wanted this stuff taken out.

Premier, why have you done a 180% flip on

this issue? You're the one that stood in this House and fought and argued that this is what should be done and now you turn around and you're doing it five times worse than it was ever done before. Explain, Premier.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Obviously, the member thinks that I only went half way. I can let him know I went the full way in making sure that we let Islanders know exactly the great investments that our government's making.

That has totally different comparisons that he's making. We're making announcements in this province to make sure that we move our province forward.

I want to quote from the Conference Board of Canada, from the provincial outlook, executive summary, winter 2010: Perhaps the greatest boon to the Prince Edward Island economy last year was the steady stream of government funds directed to the refurbishment and construction of public infrastructure.

Why do we have to make those announcements? Because there was 11 years of neglect in this province. The reason why the hon. member sees so much construction going on in the province, sees so many signs in the province, is because we want to make sure that Prince Edward Island, that the public infrastructure, is up to speed in this province, unlike the neglect of the former government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Premier, will you ensure that future government advertising does not include the name, the voice or image of a member of the Executive Council as member of the Legislative Assembly on your ads and on your posters? Will you assure that that doesn't happen?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I've seen a lot of the signs across the province. If my picture's on one I wish the hon. member would let me know where that is, and if it's paid for by the government we'll take it down. But I'm pretty sure there is none.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Madam Speaker, every ad in the paper seems to have that picture there.

Premier, will you put a notice on each ad that states that the advertising is paid by the taxpayers of Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Obviously, Madam Speaker, the hon. member knows full well here.

He's trying to compare apples and oranges. If there are government announcements, the same as I see from the hon. members from Montague-Kilmuir or Georgetown-St. Peters, sometimes they put advertisements in the paper, whether or not it's congratulating a local service club or congratulating a sports team that's done well. We follow the same guidelines that they do. In fact, the only time we put out an ad that went out in all the *Guardians* last year was paid for by the Liberal Party of Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: (Indistinct) to the Premier. Premier, would you make that a notice that at least be 20% size of the ad who is being paid for, like you suggested in your bill?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Again, if we're doing anything that is untowards, we will look at that. That's why when we put out a pamphlet last year we made sure that on that beautiful pamphlet that listed a lot of great things - I wish I had it on me now. If anybody has it, dig it up for me because it was a great ad, and we made sure that it was identified that it was paid for by the Liberal Party of Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

On your radio advertisements and t.v. ads, Premier, will you ensure that it clearly states, right at the first of the ad, that these ads are being paid for by the taxpayers of Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I'm pretty sure the only television ads that I really see on there have to do with transportation and public works and the hon. minister is not on those ads.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Premier, it seems to me that you made a lot of noise when you introduced this bill and these are all items that are in your bill to make sure you do it, and you're doing none of them, Premier.

You're the Premier of this province. You wanted this bill put in, obviously, or you wouldn't have brought it to the House. You can bring this in. Will we be seeing you table this bill in the Legislature this year?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I'll have to take a look at the bill. But we're too busy in this province rebuilding the public infrastructure that was neglected for an 11-year period.

But I can assure the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir that our government is very conscientious when it comes to advertising in the province. We know that the local media likes it when we advertise because obviously it's revenue for themselves. But we also make sure that our advertisements - that I believe there are provisions when they go on CBC television to make sure that the minister or Premier is not identified unless it's a government initiative. Certain things that do apply. But when it comes to public service announcements, I know that I see when it comes to winter tires all the time, you don't see the minister of transportation on there, you see a public service announcement, and we do follow all the guidelines.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, final question.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We notice that in the website there is all this propaganda advertising. You'd think that we're in an election campaign at the present time. Premier, is the Liberal Party so strapped for cash that you have to use the taxpayers' dollars to advertise your government and what you're doing rather than putting it through the proper channels? Why are you using this form of advertising as propaganda for an election and using taxpayers' dollars when it should be paid for by the Liberal government?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I can assure the hon. member that we started the election campaign on May 28th, 2007 to make sure that we'd be ready for the next general election. Any time that we do do partisan advertising we make sure that it is paid for by the Liberal Party of Prince Edward Island, and that's exactly what we did last year with our beautiful brochures.

I don't have one on me now because they were in such hot demand across Prince Edward Island that people wanted them to be able to look at all the great things that the government's doing. But that was paid for by the Liberal Party of Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]