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(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

WEDNESDAY, 19 MAY 2010

Responses to Questions Taken As Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Restoration of 24 hour ER at Kings County Memorial Hospital

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is to the minister of health. Minister, I've been asking for a long time in both Question Periods and during budget estimates and still have not gotten a clear answer from you: When will be restoring the 24 hour service to Kings County memorial emergency room?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I do acknowledge that the Mayor of Montague is here with us today. We do have a meeting with the mayor and the council in June. But again, I reiterate to the Member from Montague-Kilmuir that this is due to staffing shortages. We did have the combined lab tech issues back in April of 2009. Those positions have been filled, as of January of this year, but we are experiencing a shortage in nurses at the Kings County Memorial Hospital.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Madam Speaker, she's not following her own model of care because

they changed the model of care and they have the proper amount of nurses in the Montague hospital right now under your new system.

So, minister, Kings County residents are getting very impatient with this government. It seems that there is one excuse after another. The last thing you told me that you were short three and a half nursing positions, but yet you changed the model of care in Montague last week.

Minister, since you are laying off 13 other nurses across the province, are you going to move some of them down there? What is your plan for the - open the Kings County Memorial Hospital?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Just to clarify the hon. member's statements, last week we had an opening at the Wedgewood Manor for the model of care at that particular area. The hon. member from Kings County Memorial Hospital, that hasn't occurred to fully implement the model of care there.

So perhaps, in regards to the model of care that will help the situation at the Kings County Memorial Hospital - but again, I reiterate to the Member from Montague-Kilmuir, this is based on patient safety and the complement levels. It just doesn't take doctors. It takes nurses. It takes all health care professionals when we're operating a 24/7 emergency facility.

So I implore the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir that there are statistics out there and that we are working towards that. Our recruitment office is working hard on that. But if we can assure that, we will re-evaluate the situation, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Madam Speaker, they've been evaluating the situation for the last year.

Today I am tabling a petition of 2,300 names from residents that feel dejected because they can't get answers from the minister and this government. They feel betrayed. They are frightened and anxious about emergency room services in Kings County.

Minister, will you stand up today and announce the reinstatement of a 24-hour emergency service in Kings County Memorial Hospital?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, the Member from Montague-Kilmuir asked these questions during Budget estimates, and like I said to him then, and I say that again today, we will reassess the situation when we can fill those positions to ensure patient safety.

But I want to assure the member and those residents in the area of Montague that we have increased access to Island EMS because of the reduction in hours. So to

ensure patient safety, there is an increase in that area of service.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Minister, the people of Montague and Kings County are very disappointed in you. The nurses, RNs, on PEI are very disappointed in you. Minister, when are you going to take some responsibility and stand up and be accountable? Stop putting the blame on somebody else and everything else all the time. You're the minister. Make a decision. Will you announce the 24-hour emergency room being opened in Montague? Minister, we're waiting.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Madam Speaker, as Minister of Health and Wellness, I want to assure patients, I want to ensure Islanders, that there is safety within our health care system.

When we cannot reach and achieve a full complement to ensure, as this particular member's asking about the Kings County Memorial Hospital, we have to ensure a proper complement. We do have a reduction in hours. But again, I reiterate to the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir, that we will reassess that situation.

But again, I implore the hon. Member from

Montague-Kilmuir, this is where we're moving towards with the model of care. We are utilizing all health professionals in our system to full practice and we want that to happen.

Again, Kings County Memorial Hospital is one of the showcase units in this province. Just like the QEH, just like Wedgewood, which opened last week, Madam Speaker.

This should help the situation that we are seeing at Kings County Memorial Hospital.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Leasing land for windmills

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

My question today is for the minister of energy. Minister, I'm receiving some calls from interested landowners that are interested in leasing their land for windmills. Can you tell me what the going rate is for leasing a windmill today in Prince Edward Island?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, that is a private contractor.

That's a private contract between the wind developer and the landowner. We do not set the rates for that. The landowner and the wind developer will get together and

negotiate a contract and a price for that. That's not set in legislation. It's a private contract between two individuals, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. M. Currie: I understand that, minister, but is the going rate somewhere around \$10,000 for one of these windmills to be located on a property?

Is that what you hear of in your department?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, as I understand it, at some point in time, if there's wind production, if they can put a windmill on a piece of property that produces 40% wind, there's a higher rate.

If they put a windmill on a section of property that can only produce 30% power, that's a lower rate. So I can't tell him where it is in that range.

Again, I reiterate, this is a private contract between a private landowner and a company. If he wants us or if he wants Maritime Electric or the developers to release all of this information to the public about residents and what they're getting for rental properties, then so be it. He can request the developers to do that.

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

MLAs leasing land for windmills

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

A question for the minister. Minister, are there any of your colleagues that are presently leasing land for windmills in Prince Edward Island?

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

Mr. Brown: Again, Madam Speaker, this is a private contract between a private company - a developer - and the landowner.

This has nothing to do with government. There's no government money involved here. If windmills are put on people's property, that production will be exported off the Island. This is a private company and a private investment.

I don't know where he's getting his information from. The government of PEI is not leasing any land. The government of PEI is not involved in the process at that point in time. We have an independent fairness auditor in place to ensure that proper due diligence is done and that it is a fair process for all Islanders, Madam Speaker.

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

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

Minister, you didn't answer the question. My question is: Do you have a member of Cabinet that has a vested interest in leasing their land for this RFP project that's being placed?

Mr. Bagnall: Yes, he does.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I would have no idea. Neither would the ministers, because everything that they would own would be in blind trust.

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

Wind energy RFP (further)

Mr. M. Currie: Last week in the House, Madam Speaker, the minister of energy indicated he was in charge of this file.

Are you in charge of it, or Maritime Electric?

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

Mr. Brown: Madam Speaker, the plan is quite clear, envelope A and envelope B in this tender process.

Maritime Electric will be the company that's purchasing the power. Any export power will be purchased and will be a deal between the landowner and the company. There is no money involved here that belongs to the government of PEI. This is a private transaction between a private individual and a private company.

I don't know. Is the member insinuating that if I go out and do something with the government today or go out and get a

driver's license, I'm in a conflict of interest? Is this what it's getting down to? We can't do anything because we sit in government?

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

Minister and leasing land for windmills

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

Question for the Minister of Agriculture and Deputy Premier. Minister, do you have a vested interest in the RFP that's taking place and do you have leases signed for windmills to go on your property?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Deputy Premier.

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, I've said before in this House on several occasions, everything I do have is in blind trust.

Our family does own land. I'm out of the business now. I basically have a full-time position here. So no, I don't know.

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

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

Question for the Minister of Agriculture and Deputy Premier. So, minister, you're indicating that you're not aware of any windmills or any leases that signed for your property and your farm in Kinkora?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Obviously the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters would know that he was in Cabinet. He held assets. Any assets when you go into Cabinet are placed into a blind trust. None of my members - who knows?, it could be myself. I don't know, it could be any one of us - may have land that is leased out. We would have no idea whatsoever, Madam Speaker, because it would all be in blind trust.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Question for the Premier. Premier, you indicated last week that you're going to have the final say on the RFP process, then. So are you going to sit there and evaluate a process that one of your Cabinet ministers has land leased for this project? Is he going to be in there lobbying for his project versus everybody else?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Obviously not, Madam Speaker, no.

First of all, the minister would not know. Usually, if those things come up, the lawyers would be notified and ministers would dismiss themselves from any conversations. We do that all the time within Cabinet. If there's anything to do with - for example, there are contract negotiations going on. If it has anything to do with doctor negotiations, I dismiss myself from the discussion. When we're here in the Legislature, if something comes up with

regards to teachers' pensions, all the teachers in the Legislature dismiss themselves.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters knows what the protocols are, and it's unfortunate that he tries to slander individuals in this Legislature.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, each windmill is three megawatts and it's 130, so there are 40-some windmills at 10,000 lease a year.

That's \$400,000 on a 20 year lease. It's 8 or \$10 million. It's a nice gift to have.

Premier, there seems to be a pattern here. There seems to be that you promised Islanders you were going to look after Islanders first, and your MLAs were supposed to be good servants and caretakers of the taxpayers' money. But what we have is involvement in FoodTrust, involvement in land for bypasses, PNP, and now we have windmills. Do you not see the pattern that's developing in your government? Are you not concerned about this?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

It's unfortunate that the hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters chooses to follow his leader on this issue. But as you know, all members have their assets in blind trust. There is nothing untoward here whatsoever.

That's why we have a Conflict of Interest Commissioner. The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters I believe tried not once but twice, and challenged the hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal with regards to conflict of interest. There was none there whatsoever. Actually, the conflict commissioner even came back and went so far as to say that hon. members are making baseless accusations in this House, and it's slandering all MLAs in the Legislature, including himself.

So I urge the member, if he has any issues whatsoever, Madam Speaker, that's why there is the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

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

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

I think I did see the Auditor General say in his last statement that the conflict of interest legislation should be changed.

Genzyme Diagnostics

My next question is to the minister of innovation. Minister, a situation is unfolding today in Prince Edward Island regarding a bioscience company in the West Royalty industrial park, Genzyme Diagnostics. I'm wondering. That company is - there are over a hundred people there. Can you tell us what the situation is? Is it going to be sold and moved off Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation

and Advanced Learning.

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

That's a very good question. Yes, Genzyme corporation has made a decision to sell off its diagnostic division, not a lot unlike what Diagnostic Chemicals did back in 2007. In 2007 we were very fortunate to have Genzyme come to this province. Genzyme is a very well recognized multi-national company. Now, they have made a decision to sell off the diagnostic division. We're watching that process very carefully.

Regardless of the ownership structure, whether it be Genzyme or whether it be a new company, since Genzyme has taken over from Diagnostic Chemicals, they've actually grown in West Royalty. They've grown from about 87 jobs, I think, to now about 103. Average salaries have grown from around 40,000 to \$47,000 a year. We're very hopeful that regardless of the ownership structure that that growth will continue. We're watching it very closely, and if it's not Genzyme, if it's another company, we'll be in close contact with them as well to help them grow and prosper here in Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

BioCommons Park

Mr. M. Currie: Thank you, Madam

Speaker.

A question to the same minister. Minister, it's my understanding that this company also spent a lot of time over the last number of months, with design and doing blueprints for a new \$20 million facility to go in the much talked about BioCommons Park that's been talked about for the last couple years. Has that project also been cancelled for the new BioCommons Parks?

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

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

Absolutely not. We're actually very excited about the progress with respect to the BioCommons. Again, regardless of the situation with Genzyme, the BioCommons, I think, will be a cornerstone and centrepiece of the bioscience industry here on Prince Edward Island, a research park that allows our research and development companies to work towards commercialization of bioscience products here in this province.

Again, we're awaiting the outcome of the discussions with Genzyme with respect to selling off the diagnostic division. When that process is complete - if there is a new ownership structure - we'll be engaging that company as well to tell them about the BioCommons and the prospects of growing their business here on Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

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

Mr. M. Currie: A question for the same minister. Minister, the BioCommons Park has been announced over two years now and there's nothing there, just a sign. So if this company is not coming, are you in discussions with any other bioscience companies to come to this park in West Royalty?

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

Mr. M. Currie: This year.

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

Yes, we are in discussions with a number of companies. Some companies that were very excited about the prospects of having, and companies that are also very excited about the prospects of coming to our new bioscience park.

Again, we're in negotiations with those companies, and with respect to those negotiations we won't be disclosing those companies at present. But we think we'll have some exciting announcements in the very near future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Pavement on bypass road

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

A question for the minister of transportation

and public works. A week or two ago it was found out, I guess, that the bypass road, the pavement has failed, or whatever. Can you give us an update if a final decision has been made on the road that was paved last fall?

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

Mr. MacKinley: We might know next week. We're looking for the independent consultant's report to come back. It hasn't come back yet, that I know of.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Registered nurse positions (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question is to the health minister. Madam Minister, the PEI Nurses' Union is baffled by your government's decision to implement the model of care at the QEH -

Mr. Bagnall: They feel betrayed.

Leader of the Opposition: - with no consultation whatsoever. My question to you is: Why would you eliminate 12 full-time positions, and six part-time positions at the end of National Nursing Week, last Friday? Why would you do that?

Mr. Bagnall: They feel betrayed.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Last year, approximately May of last year, we announced the new model of care, and the process, and we announced a design team of approximately 80 individuals, including RNs that sat on that, to look at the whole system in terms of the design. This is following out of the Corpus Sanchez report of 2008.

These changes are because we are trying to ensure patient safety in our system. We are trying to ensure a sustainable health care system here on Prince Edward Island. We are just following in the direction of every other jurisdiction in Canada, recognizing the full scope of practice of every health professional in our system.

This is not about any job loss. Obviously, we feel for the RNs that do work at - and I know we're using the example of the QEH. Last week we did open the Wedgewood showcase unit, fully. We do recognize that there obviously, with any profession, when there are changes there are issues around that. I have empathy for those individuals that are effected, but I guess the message to send today, that each one of those nurses that are affected, that are being displaced, they will be guaranteed a position within the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and if they so choose - some of them may live in other parts of the province - may choose to work somewhere else within our health care system, but they will all have a job. We are creating a sustainable health care system here for the future of Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The PEI Nurses' Union were not consulted. They were not allowed to be part of that process. As one person put it, a registered nurse from the QEH, and I quote: A nurse shuffled from one area in nursing to the other is not so simple. Many nurses who work on unit 3, which is a medical unit, have been there for decades. To shuffle a surgical, orthopaedic, or other unit nurse, will feel more like a complete upheaval, and it's based on a lot of assumptions, that the particular nurse has the skill sets for that specialized unit.

My question to you is: Why would you on Friday of last week have your staff go in and eliminate 12 full-time positions and six part-time positions at the QEH unit 3 in Charlottetown?

Mr. Bagnall: No heart - betrayal.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Madam Speaker, I just want to reiterate, and make it fully aware that unions were part of this.

They weren't part of the design team, but what's important to note is that RNs were part of the design team. Now, the PEINU was asked to be part of presentations and things like that and they refused to go to those meetings. That was up to them to do that if they wanted to. But again, we made sure that RNs were part of the design team.

But again, I reiterate that this is not about job losses, this is about patient safety. The best possible health care for Islanders and fully using the scope of practice and the training of our registered nurses in this province, the training of our licensed practical nurses, the training of our registered care workers in this province.

Again, I reiterate to the Leader of the Opposition that our staff did meet with the affected individuals on Friday, obviously because of shift issues. But I know there has been concerns over vacation and we certainly feel for those individuals because a lot of them have very young families. They will have their vacation time and full implementation will not occur until September because of the vacation time.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, to the minister of health.

Let's hear directly then from an RN who is working on unit 3 just about what it's like for her. She's lost her 50% position on Friday of last week:

As of Friday, May 14th, I suddenly was informed that 16 part-time positions on unit 3, only six would remain on the rotation as of June. Only one of those is 50%. So now, because I'm not looking for a full-time permanent position - because the woman has to work she's got five children - and increase of hours I will not be needed any longer in unit 3.

She'll not be able to stay there.

Mr. Bagnall: Shame, shame!

Leader of the Opposition: My question to you. This nurse can only work 50%. Explain how cutting these RN positions are going to help with the nurse retention problem in the province?

Mr. Bagnall: Shame on you, minister.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I would like to speak to the Leader of the Opposition in terms of the shortages that - we have a chronic shortage in RN positions in this province. If we use the Queen Elizabeth Hospital as one example, we have about 25 full-time positions that we have a shortage of and we have 51 permanent part-time positions.

I would like to reiterate and ensure the Leader of the Opposition that all the affected individuals on unit 3 will be given a job at the QEH, and they will be, obviously, sitting down individually - and I think this is the most important - that they will be individually discussing the options that are available to them to look at their experiences, where they would like to be within the hospital.

I want to reiterate to the Leader of the Opposition: we are ensuring patient safety by moving in this direction and we want to create a sustainable health care system in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tyne

Valley-Linkletter.

Psychologists in Western School Board

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and Attorney General. Mr. Minister, I know you and I share the same philosophy that early intervention is crucial for children with learning disabilities. There's been a lot in the media about school psychologists and the assessment wait times. I've had some frustrated parents waiting for their child to be assessed.

Can you please tell me what the ratio is that the department is using for child assessment psychologists in the school boards and how many are in the Western School Board?

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

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

I am very well aware of the wait times for psycho-educational assessments here in the province. Just to give you some numbers, we've been successful - board psychologists are hired by the school boards across the province and boards have been successful in adding two positions over the last year and a half, but the funding does come from, obviously, the department.

We basically realize that right now we're working on a learning disabilities action plan. There is a component of that which

deals with interventions. But I certainly want to clarify for all Members of the Legislative Assembly that interventions are well underway before a child does receive their psycho-educational assessment. The only people in the system that can apply a Wechsler-III are trained psychologists here in the province. But we have school counsellors. We have approximately over 50 school counsellors, we have over 150 resource special ed teachers, and we've been fortunate to sustain and add positions in the system to help support children who are requiring interventions.

So those interventions are in place and while the psycho-educational assessments are in the queue, interventions are taking place and school psychologists do have the ability to do the Woodcocks, the Peabodys, informal reading and math assessments to provide supports to classroom teachers.

I want to reiterate that. There seems to be a message going out to the public that supports are limited, but I will remind the Member from Tyne Valley-Linkletter that there are strong supports in the system and we make sure that intervention is our number one priority in the system for children who need that support.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Monitoring of wait list

Ms. Biggar: Supplementary, Madam

Speaker, to the same minister.

Mr. Minister, what monitoring process do you have in place with the department to ensure that the children that are on that wait list through the school board are actually getting moved through the system? How do you monitor that?

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

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

As I alluded to, we as a department am committed to - and I've sent a very strong message to the boards - that as the minister I want to do everything in our power from a department to look at ways that we can reduce wait times on the psycho-educational assessments. That's a very formal assessment. You need specific trained psychologists to do that. We have been fortunate that we have added over two positions in the last year and a half.

One of the pressures that is on school psychologists in the system are the risk assessments. The risk assessments in the province, if there is a threat on a student to another student, psychologists are brought in, and those risk assessments take anywhere from three to five days of full-time focus on the students that are in crisis. So there are realities of the pressures on the psychologists. But we are working with the boards and the senior leaderships to make sure that we do everything we possibly can to address the wait times, and committed to that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms. Biggar: To the same minister, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Minister, will you ensure that the resources are followed through for those children that are waiting to be assessed?

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

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

As the minister, I've been very fortunate to be part of the support from the Premier and Cabinet in respect to the investments that we're making in classrooms. Not only are we making investments in the classroom, as I alluded to, we made investments with over 25 reading recovery teachers. We have implemented and supported literacy coaches. Have seen some direct results in grades 1, 2 and 3 in literacy across the province since 2005. So, very focused. We have increased the educational assistant allotment to over 300 positions, which do provide daily interventions and support, particularly the children who are struggling with their reading in the early grades.

This particular fiscal year there is an expectation as minister that we key in on literacy interventions and numeracy interventions for children in grades 4, 5 and 6.

So, very committed to raising the bar on

educational professionals in the system to make sure that children deserve every opportunity. Keeping in mind that we are bringing in kindergarten, we are adding over 112 kindergarten teachers. We have implemented -

Speaker: Minister, I would ask you to wrap up your answer.

Mr. D. Currie: - the early year education - thank you very much - but they are our priority, Madam Speaker, and we'll continue to do so.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Festival of Small Halls

Ms. Docherty: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is for the hon. Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development. As many of us know, the Festival of Small Halls was a fantastic event in the province, and one that not only did many Islanders and visitors enjoy, but are looking forward to what's forthcoming.

I would like the minister to indicate to the Legislature the process that is currently being followed in regards to the applications that were received from interested communities, communities that are wishing to host the event, and as well, how soon they will know whether or not they were successful in their application.

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

Mr. LeClair: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

A proposal has been received from the Festival of Small Halls regarding the balance of funding for their events and programs. As you know, earlier on the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Learning announced \$90,000 in funding for support staff for the event through our Community Internship Program.

Before that took place we also announced funding and support for development of a three-year plan for development and expansion of the Festival of Small Halls. We expect that we will be announcing our commitments when that plan comes forward. Definitely, in cooperation with the department of tourism and other departments in government, we'll be implementing that plan and moving forward with that.

Regarding the schedule of events, the festival requested applications and received an overwhelming response. I understand they have been evaluating these proposals and they will be making an announcement on which ones were successful and where they will be having their events in the very near future, I believe probably as soon as Friday.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Registered nurses positions (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the health minister. We were talking about the expertise that the nurses have, especially the RNs, and the process of you setting up this model of care. You made comments that you were answering me. You're actually answering today to the people, the RNs and the bachelor of nurses. We both received this letter from an RN and I'll repeat this and quote directly:

I'm an RN with 18 years experience and currently working on unit 3, the showcase unit, for the model of care at the QEH hospital. Though I had had many concerns throughout the process, nothing could surpass the shock and (Indistinct) of the catastrophic news that was passed on to the RN staff in the unit on Friday, May 14th.

But she goes on to say that:

We were told and believed the number of practising RNs is going to decrease significantly over the next ten years.

In light of this, it seems that it's very disappointing that you're actually cutting out RNs, causing such an upheaval, and now we're going to start having nurses, instead of choosing to work on PEI, move elsewhere.

What are you going to do to ratify this situation you've put them in?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Madam Speaker, we are

valuing our RNs.

We have a chronic shortage of RNs in our system. It's important to know that over 95% of the registered nurses graduating from UPEI this year have been sponsored in our health care system on Prince Edward Island this year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bertram: That's over - about 53 students that have graduated, Madam Speaker.

Not only that, we have a Health Care Futures Program encouraging our - whether they be graduates from high school to enter the health care profession. This is about sustaining our health care system. It's about valuing every health professional in our system, and it's about jobs. We value jobs in our system, Madam Speaker, and every individual is valued in our health care system.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. To the health minister. Not only have you failed to receive input on the new model of care from those who know best how it would operate, but you've also violated their collective agreement by making major changes to the scheduling and also eliminating positions.

My question to you: Will you stop the process until you actually meet with the PEI Nurses' Union, meet with the staff at unit 3, and make sure that you clear up these issues

before you push this change further and then impact on patient care?

Mr. Bagnall: And most of all, know what you're doing.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, I bring it back to a year ago when this process was initiated. We had design team members, whether they be RNs, whether they be ERRNs, ERNs, LPNs, RCWs, PTs, OTs, SWs, RTs, nutritionists, dietitians, and the list goes on. So a whole 80-plus individuals came together for this design team, a fully integrated health care system.

Again, I implore the Leader of the Opposition: do go around and visit our health facilities, Madam Leader of the Opposition. We have a shortage of RNs. Many of our RNs are working in excess of overtime hours. So we want to ensure patient safety. We value our RNs, we value our LPNs, our RCWs, and we are fully implementing the model of care and moving forward with this. The members on and the RNS on the unit 3 of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital will have jobs at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital if they so desire, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, to the health minister.

One time you're saying that we have a critical shortage, then you're saying that the RNs can stay if they want to? You cannot just take an RN that works in a medical unit, has 15, 18 years experience, and plump them over in the psychiatry unit. Do you not understand that these RNs will require further training and support? You also have a whole group of new RNs coming in the system which require the support from the experienced RNs.

Madam Minister, you created a mess. What are you going to do to fix it up?

Mr. Bagnall: A big mess, a big mess.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I would reiterate. About a week ago I talked about the pink slips that were given back in 2005 by this former administration which left our system in a chronic shortage.

About a week ago I also announced the redevelopment of the emergency department at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. We are implementing more RN positions at the ER at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. But we do have a chronic shortage. It's interesting that the Member from Montague-Kilmuir talked about his hospital at the Kings County Memorial Hospital, and that is dealing with a shortage of Rns.

We do have a shortage. We're addressing this. We're moving, like every other jurisdiction in Canada, towards a model of care, and we are valuing RNs, LPNs, RCWs,

every health professional in this one Island health care system.

We appreciate every job in this province, and we value our students that are coming out of our RN programs, whether it be the accelerated program - and by the way, the accelerated program, 11 of them are going to be sponsored in December of this year.

So it's great news, Madam Speaker, and it's great to see our students and our RNs that are graduating having jobs in Prince Edward Island.

An Hon. Member: Great!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the health minister. I must remind people that your government, your Premier, is the Premier that thinks Islanders are spoiled with access to health care.

But the questions to you, Madam Minister, are from some of the RNs. One question is this: Why is government recruiting UPEI students to the workforce when we new grads will continually be at the bottom of the totem pole and not able to get a full-time job?

As you eliminate positions and you cut the positions out of the system, you're actually defeating the purpose of trying to invest in the young nurse that's coming in to take the

job.

Mr. Bagnall: She doesn't understand.

Leader of the Opposition: My question to you is: What are you going to do to fix the problem that you've just created?

Mr. Bagnall: She doesn't understand.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I'm glad that the Leader of the Opposition referenced myself. She's taking that out of context, of course, because she knows I was relaying a story about a test that I was supposed to have at the QEH, but perhaps I was going to have to go to Summerside, and I said to myself: Isn't it amazing how lucky we are here in Prince Edward Island that perhaps we just have to travel 45 minutes to Summerside to have a test? That's what I was indicating.

Now what we're trying to do with our health care system in this province is make sure that it's sustainable. We know that things have to change. I apologize that things are difficult whenever there's change, but with change can come positive things. I implore everyone to give us a chance to allow us to make the system a little bit better.

I think everybody will agree that the system is not functioning as well as it could be. What we're trying to do is implement new models of care where we're able to use all the talents of all our health care professionals, starting with our doctors, our

nurse practitioners, our RNs, our BNs, our LPNs, our RCWs, everyone working together.

It's not going to be an easy road, but it's going to be something that we hope that's going to make health care in this province sustainable for a long time to come. Because one of the great things about being a Canadian is the fact that we have a public health care system, and as a government we have to make some decisions on how we can sustain it for the long term, Madam Speaker, and that's what our government is trying to do.

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

Expectations of model of care

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Back to the Premier, then. We spent the whole session when your health minister was on the floor to find out what are your principles around health care that you expect your government to deliver when you turn this all over to the health agency.

My question directly with you is: What are your expectations on the delivery, the type of model of care at the QEH and other hospitals, directly related to RNs and bachelor of nurses, and will you actually, today, give the message out that you'll meet with the PEI Nurses' Union, the RNs, and also the bachelor of nurses?

Mr. Bagnall: She's ducking and hiding.

Leader of the Opposition: Both the Premier and your minister, will you commit to that today?

Mr. Bagnall: She's on the hot seat. She can't handle it. Look at that.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I've had the opportunity to meet with Barb Brookins before in the past. I've had the opportunity, where I think the former minister of health and myself were the only premier and minister of health combo that ever went out to UPEI. We met with our nursing students out there, we heard their issues. We were the government that introduced the accelerated nursing program.

But the Leader of the Opposition talks about our long-term vision for health care. Having a safe and sustainable health care system is what we're looking for. I realize what worked 40 years ago in health care does not work today, the same as what works today is not going to work in 10 or 15 years' time. Health care is going to continue to evolve.

The hon. member talks about the emergency room. Just to look at the irony of the situation, he's up talking about the emergency room in Montague, which is currently open. It's not open during the nighttime hours. He says the new model of care should make it easier for us to implement that.

So there we have the hon. House Leader for the opposition fighting for the new model of

care, then we have the Leader of the Opposition that is fighting against the new model of care. That is the debate we're currently having.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Premier Ghiz: It's a debate that will continue on, Madam Speaker.

We currently have shortages in the province
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Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) you did.

Speaker: Order, please!

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I'm pretty sure the only year where there's been job losses in our health care system over the last five years has been decisions made by the previous government with pink slips. But what we're trying to do is make sure that there's a long-term sustainable system. We want to see more money put in preventative measures, more education around health care, we want to see more money put into home care. We want to see less institutionalization in our health care system. We want to see all our health care workers working to their full potential, and that's what we're trying to do there.

Is it going to be easy? Absolutely not. But are we going to be a government that is going to go through those steps to make sure that we can do the best we can? Absolutely, because I know that unless we change the

way things are working today, in 10, 15, 20 years' time, things could all fall apart.

We see what's happening in Greece, we see what's happening in Europe. Health care needs to adapt, and that's what our government is going to do. Because we want to make sure that Islanders have access to the best possible health care system in this province, Madam Speaker, and that's a pledge that I'll continue to make to Islanders.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[End of Question Period]