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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2014

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

FEMA minister's London trip

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Question to the minister of finance. In January 2012 you travelled to London, England. Can you tell the House the purpose of this trip?

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

Mr. Sheridan: Yes, Madam Speaker.

I was on a mission as we were looking at gaming for the Province of Prince Edward Island in concert with the Mi'kmaq Confederacy, and saw a large conference on gaming over there. It's called ICE.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Question again to the minister. The minister was in London attending this international gaming conference. It's probably a safe bet to assume that this was a business trip.

Question to the minister: Can you explain why you failed to reveal this as part of your ministerial disclosures?

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

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

I'll have to take a look at how that was written up in the format that we travel. Many of those travels for business purposes such as that – in this case travelling with the Mi'kmaq Confederacy and working on this project – may have been covered. I'd have to check that and I'll bring it back to the House.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Is it common practice for you to take business trips as minister and not report them under your ministerial disclosures?

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

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

It is cases that such as where I went up about three months ago and spoke to the Canadian Labour Congress. They cover my travel to have me go and speak like this. Again, I went up and spoke on CPP expansion with CARP, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, and they covered my costs like that. Same type of incident like this. Every once in a while when it's business that they would like me to be a part of, then they'll cover the cost, yes.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Can you tell the House how much your trip to London cost?

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

Mr. Sheridan: Madam Speaker, I'd have to look that up and bring that back to the House.

Again as I say, I'm not sure if that travel was covered under that business case or not. I'll bring that back.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Let's call a spade a spade here. We know you didn't go to London, England, and not

know who paid for the trip. So can you tell the House who paid for your trip to London?

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

Mr. Sheridan: As I said, Madam Speaker, I'm very happy to bring that back to the House.

Two years ago – I'm not sure how that was reported or recorded and I'll be more than happy to bring it back to the House.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

FEMA minister and Simplex

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Question, again, to the minister: Will you admit to the House the reason you didn't disclose the trip to London was because you went as a guest of Simplex, one of the companies involved in your global gaming project?

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

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

That is incorrect.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Question, again, to the minister. Minister, you have previously told this House and the media that the government had no involvement at all with Simplex. Do you consider getting a comped trip to London on a gaming junket by Simplex being involved with Simplex or not?

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

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

The trip had nothing to do with Simplex whatsoever, I'm sorry to inform the hon.

member. This trip had nothing to do with Simplex and it was not covered by them whatsoever.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

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

Question, again, to the minister: Do you still deny that you had dealings with Simplex or would you like to change your story again?

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

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

As the member is trying to put words in my mouth, this is not the story that we were speaking of. Simplex International played a different role than what the member is trying to put forward here in the House.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Will you table for this House all of your records for your gaming trip to London?

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

Mr. Sheridan: Absolutely, Madam Speaker.

As I said, I will look into how that was recorded and bring it to the House. Very happy to.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

FEMA minister and private investigation firm

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Question to the minister: Are you familiar with RB Mac Investigations, a very reputable private investigation firm?

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

Mr. Sheridan: Madam Speaker, I'm not aware of the firm that he's speaking of, no.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

FEMA and FOIPP request denial

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

You are familiar. They were hired by one of your partners in your global gaming project to review your actions on this file. Your department denied a freedom of information request looking for records for your London gaming junket.

Can you tell the House: Why did they deny that request?

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

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

My office receives many FOIPP requests over the run of a year, and to my knowledge we comply with every one of these FOIPP requests, so I don't know what the hon. member is referring to but we respond to all FOIPP requests.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The reason given for not releasing these records of your London gaming junket was trade secrets.

Question to the minister: What trade secrets would be exposed if you released the records for your London gaming junket?

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

Mr. Sheridan: As I said, Madam Speaker, I'm not sure of what the member is speaking of with regard to this FOIPP request.

As you would know, not all FOIPP requests come to me as the minister of the department and so I'm not aware of which FOIPP request he's referring to. Now, if there was something to do with trade secrets, trade secrets is a word having to do with something to do with a company that may have information that would not want to be passed on to other companies that would be in this space, so that could be what the member is referring to.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm not sure how this minister would have access to any trade secrets if he wasn't involved with any of these companies. You've denied any government involvement, but your department actually has contradicted you here.

Question again to the minister: Who's bluffing here, you or your department?

Speaker: Watching the parliamentary word around bluffing, hon. members.

The hon. Minister of Finance, Energy and Municipal Affairs.

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

Very clearly, as you speak questioning the bureaucracy of the –

Leader of the Opposition: Questioning you. Questioning you.

Mr. Sheridan: – administrative finance, Madam Speaker, would not be the thing to do in this House –

Leader of the Opposition: You know where this is going.

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Sheridan: With that, of course, we honour all FOIPP requests, and there a number of issues that we deal with each and every day that sometimes are not privy to a FOIPP request.

In this case, I would imagine that's what's taken place as to what the hon. member's asking about.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

FEMA minister's London trip (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This, of course, is not about the bureaucrats. This is about the minister. The minister knows what this is about. Everybody in the House knows what it's about. Can you hear the hush in here? Everybody knows what's going on here.

Time to put your cards on the table here, minister: Do you think Islanders deserve the straight goods on your London trip or not?

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

Mr. Sheridan: Madam Speaker, the straight goods on the London trip, as the member puts it, is very straightforward.

We were working on an online gaming project for a number of years. We've talked about that in this House, and we're trying to do what's right for Islanders. There is online gaming taking place all around this globe where Canadians, Islanders, are playing. We're trying to find a way where we can police, protect them, regulate that game, and tax it. That's what we're doing.

There's nothing to be hidden here whatsoever. That's what we're doing at the ICE conference. There's nothing to hide.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It must be awful taxing trying to keep all his stories straight at once here because he said numerous things through the media and through this House, and I think he's going to get himself caught up here.

Investigative report

There's an investigation report into your government's actions on the project here, and it was shared with a number of people that were involved last week. Have you had the time to read this report yet?

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

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

I am aware of this report, and it has been sent on to the justice department to give out a proper response to this.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Do you know, minister, if any other members of your Cabinet have read this report?

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

Mr. Sheridan: I wouldn't see any reason why any other members of the Cabinet would be involved in this, Madam Speaker.

This is a report put forward with supposition, and I wouldn't expect anyone else to have any knowledge of it.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'll table it here in a bit, then, so everybody can read it. The report raises many troubling

questions about how this government does business.

Investigative report and historic announcement

Question to the treasurer: Do you think it's a coincidence that last week's historic announcement happened not even 24 hours before this investigative report was circulated?

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

Mr. Sheridan: Madam Speaker, I have no idea what the hon. member is talking about.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Aylward: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Do you think it's a coincidence that 24 hours before this report was circulated there was a huge announcement that changed the political landscape here in this Legislature?

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

Mr. Sheridan: Madam Speaker, I would hope that the hon. member is not referring to what I think he is in this House of Assembly.

This is an honourable place. We do the business of Prince Edward Island. We take care of all matters that are very important to Islanders. I would hope he would be above such accusations.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Tabling of impact analysis

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

Yesterday during the Question Period the minister of health stated that he would bring back the impact analysis on rheumatology that the PRPC had conducted. I'm wondering today can the minister respond if he's prepared to table that document today?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Currie: No, Madam Speaker, I have not yet – I've asked my department to request the analysis from Health PEI.

As I shared yesterday, that physician resource planning committee is a committee that evaluates all internal requests for additional medical services. I have great confidence in the impact analysis that was done, the conversations with subspecialists and specialists in our health care system, to look at what the priorities are moving forward as we continue to provide health care services.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Wait times for children

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The minister of health announced in September that \$750,000 per year for the next five years will be going towards children with complex health needs. Currently wait lists for many conditions are as follows: two years for pre-school autism assessment, 12 months for audiology testing, four to five months for speech language pathology, over three months for orthotics service, up to four months for occupational therapy, three months for child physiotherapy.

Minister, this is simply an appalling list of wait times for Island children. Do you honestly feel that \$750,000 a year is adequate to address these wait times?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

As government we take the needs of children with unique needs very seriously. Government made a \$3.7 million commitment and, yes, the Member for Stratford-Kinlock is correct. That's why the investment was made. We as a government, in partnership with Health PEI, which is part of their strategic plan, have identified that more investment and more targeted investment needed to be focused on children with unique needs.

My expectation is that I will be getting updates on the reduction of those wait times which is tied into the investment we made so children with unique needs and their families get the support they need.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

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

Minister, it's painfully obvious that \$750,000 a year – and that's what we're talking about here, \$750,000 a year, not \$3.7 million, we're talking about \$750,000 a year – is not nearly enough to fix the gaps in services for children with complex needs.

Now minister, your government found \$29 million to have a party this summer. Why did you not ensure that some of those funds or all of those funds were put towards the area that it needs to be, and that's health?

Mr. Henderson: Some of that money went to the (Indistinct) in the gallery.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Currie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) wasted.

Mr. Currie: I am aware that –

Leader of the Opposition: (Indistinct).

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: We would have (Indistinct).

Mr. Currie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Government did announce \$3.7 million and we also announced –

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Currie: – this week an additional \$1.1 million for additional drugs, particularly one high cost cancer drug. We also announced a month ago approximately \$9 million over the next five years for mental health and additions, and I think we added and recruited a dermatologist.

But the point that I'm trying to make to the Member for Stratford-Kinlock, there are constant competing demands for services, and we as government in a time when we have to be very respectful of our budget envelopes to meet our fiscal targets are working very hard. I give full credit to Health PEI for the PBMA exercise to look at efficiencies and re-investments back in.

The example that I'm trying to use here today is that we've got a range of competing demands and we are continuing to improve access and use the resources and get the best value for every dollar we have in our health care system.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

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

It's interesting that the minister keeps coming back to Health PEI and he is the minister and Health PEI and what they're trying to do to rectify these serious shortcomings within health delivery on Prince Edward Island.

But the CEO of Health PEI told our legislative committee on health that not only were there wait times, these wait times were unacceptable, but the children who need those services to see a physiotherapist, for example, actually should be seeing a physiotherapist up to six or seven times a year, but the simple fact is that they're only

getting to see the physiotherapist one or two times a year.

Again to the minister: Can you state here today that you believe that \$750,000 a year is adequate funding to address these complex needs?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Currie: Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

A year ago Health PEI, as part of their annual general meeting, was very clear in sharing one of their strategic priorities. One of their strategic priorities was new investments and resources for children with special needs. Government, who sets policy and direction and priorities, made a commitment of \$3.7 million to address the very question that the Member for Stratford-Kinlock is addressing.

I fully agree, and as the minister, and along with my caucus and Cabinet colleagues, fully endorse the investment that we're making for individual and special needs. I know that the hiring has started through the hiring processes and we're watching very closely. My expectation has been very clear to Health PEI that we're targeting – I want to see wait times come down and we're going to continue to pay attention to the wait times because I fully believe – I've got a background in special education, a master's in educational psychology, I worked with children unique needs, and know the importance of early intervention and appropriate programming.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

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

Some of these children are dealing with very chronic health issues and diseases, and unfortunately some of these individuals are unable to walk because they're not receiving the proper interventions and assessments that they require.

As one parent in the *Guardian* story earlier this year stated: Adults with sprained wrists have better access to therapy and rehabilitation.

Again to the minister: Minister, why won't you once and for all ensure that the proper funding, the proper staff, are recruited to provide the necessary services for our children here on Prince Edward Island?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I'm going to continue to reiterate the message. Government announced six weeks ago an additional \$3.7 million. We currently have vacancies and positions available to fill to hire more OTs, to hire more physios. I full agree, and government fully supports the investment, that the wait-times are unacceptable. That's why we made the investment, that's why we tied the money to the strategic plan from Health PEI. This is what we're trying to accomplish. We're trying to make sure that we're making the investment in an environment where there's all kind of competing demands.

I used the example within the last month: \$1.1 million in additional drugs, \$9 million for addictions and mental health; we'll be opening up 55 new long-term care beds.

I shared the discussion yesterday in physician recruiting planning. We've got constant demands for additional resource physicians. That is why we made the \$3.7 million investment, that's why positions have been advertised, is to address these needs. I give full credit to Health PEI and the support by my Cabinet and caucus colleagues to make this a priority by our government.

Thank you.

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

CPI and personal tax exemption

Mr. Dumville: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question is to the minister of finance. Minister, the government uses the Consumer Price Index as a method of determining price increases for revenue capture to fund essential government services. That seems fair, even necessary.

My question: Why wouldn't the government use the same method to raise the personal tax exemption for those earning less than \$20,000 a year?

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

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

That is a very good question. We've had that debate in the House here a number of different times with regard to taxation being tied to CPI increases, and whether it's for those that earn less than \$20,000 or those right across the entire system.

What the answer has been is that at this point, when we're in a non-balanced budget position, very much due to the downturn in 2008, as are all provinces across Canada with the exception of one, we have heard from Islanders that they want us to get back to balance. Until we can get back to balance there's really not a way in which to pin all taxation to CPI increases.

It's one of those things that when we do get back to balance it would be a very significant piece of work to take a look at how best to incorporate a CPI increase in our indexing. Those under \$20,000 is a very interesting concept that the member puts forward.

Thank you.

Speaker: A supplementary question, the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale.

Mr. Dumville: Minister, would the government source revenue from other groups that are more fortunate and lessen the burden on those requiring more assistance?

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

Mr. Sheridan: That's a very good question. That is what a progressive tax system does, Madam Speaker, and that's what we have here on Prince Edward Island.

As I speak to it, every dollar that would go towards CPI enhancement of indexing on Prince Edward Island would have to be taken away from health or education or our transportation needs. They all have to be measured off. In order to balance a budget we have to have a very nominal growth in revenues that we've been experiencing since the downturn, and then restrain spending on health, education and transportation across Prince Edward Island.

Until we get that, as every province is grappling with, we really can't harness the CPI indexing. But the progressive nature of which the member is talking about with regard to taxation here in the province, it will continue and only be enhanced under a Liberal government.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Tracadie-Hillsborough Park.

Highway 2 intersection

Mr. Watts: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

For the last number of years the residents of Hillsborough Park, and in particular the residents from the north side of Hillsborough Park, have been voicing their concern and their frustration over the inability to be able to turn onto Highway 2, to go west on Highway 2, to go into Charlottetown, especially during the rush hour traffic in morning and evening. It's very frustrating for those residents. They try to go to their workplace. They can't get out, it's gridlocked for them, so I can understand their frustration.

So my question, Mr. Minister, is: What improvements does your department have planned in the future for this intersection to fix this problem?

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

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, the member raises a good question.

There has been growth in that area. There is a lot of traffic in that area, as we all know. I come in that way to work a lot of times. The department has put two turning lanes onto the bypass highway just to clear out the intersection to give them more opportunity to come on to the Route 2 from the Hillsborough development, and it's something that we've been looking at.

I remind the hon. member that there is another entrance they can use at a signalized intersection on the other side of the development to access the highway as well, but that's something that we've been looking at over the last couple of years.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Safer access to Merry Pop-Ins Childcare Centre (further)

Ms. Crane: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The parents of Mary Poppins Child Care Centre in Tryon are having some issues around road safety and having access for their children.

My question is to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development: Has this minister met with the parents advisory group to understand their issues?

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

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, I know the area that the hon. member is mentioning.

It's an area on the Trans-Canada in Tryon that we straightened out a curve in the road to bring it in within the standards. All the department has done in that area is improve the highway.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Ms. Crane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

One of the parents that met with me yesterday, Krista, was driving her three-year

old and one-year old to the facility. A transport truck passed her on the right-hand side with a transport truck coming towards her. As a parent, they are very worried about this road, and I know all of the parents have said the road access – or the road itself is improved so much, but they're really worried now because of the speed.

I was hoping, perhaps the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, because he is responsible for the child care facility, would meet with you, the transportation minister. I'm just curious: Have you met? Because somebody is going to get hurt.

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

Mr. Vessey: Again, Madam Speaker, I don't want anyone in the House to say that the highway's not safe out there. It is a safe section of roadway that's built. The only thing that's changed in the area is the road has become safer.

I know there's some concerns from the parents. I've been in contact. Staff has gone out to meet with them. They've talked over options. I've offered them to come meet with me, so we're well aware of the area and the issues that are out there.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: A second supplementary, the hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Ms. Crane: Minister, I didn't realize they were meeting with this minister, but one question I'll pose on behalf of the parents: Is there any way that transportation can put a flashing light there until there's some kind of an issue resolved?

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

Mr. Vessey: Yes, Madam Speaker, I believe the chief engineer was out to meet with the people at the daycare and they did talk over some, maybe, possibilities that we could do for them.

My door has been open for them to come in to meet with me to discuss it and we wait to hear back from them.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Wait times for children (further)

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

Health PEI has hired one part-time physiotherapist and one casual rehabilitation assistant. This means that, currently, we have 1.5 physiotherapists for the entire province. This minister knows it, we all know it, that this is just not adequate.

Minister, why won't you provide the necessary resources to provide adequate health care for our Island children?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Our investment and the hiring of new positions to provide more consistent front-line service for children with unique needs is well underway. If you look at government's commitment to health care services in the Province of Prince Edward Island, as I shared numerous times on the floor of this Legislative Assembly, we've increased health care spending in this province from, in 2008, \$360 million to over \$610 million.

We've replaced all our public manors, we've added an additional 215 drugs to our provincial formulary, we introduced a Catastrophic Drug Program. We've made investments.

That's in light of the changes that the federal government have made and the reduction of payments to our health care transfers which is now tied on the backs of seniors in respect to economic growth and GDP, which is a struggle and will continue to be a struggle until there are changes in the capital city, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

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

Each time I get up and ask a question specific to a certain health issue here on Prince Edward Island – and particularly it saddens me that it's Island children that we're talking about today – this minister continually gets up and starts talking off – it's probably a laminated list that he has over there. But he's talking about all these other investments.

I agree those investments are important, I agree those investments are good, I agree those investments are necessary. But minister, again, today, we're talking about Island children. You seem to find money – your government seems to be able to be able to find money – any time you want to do something else that surrounds having fun, having a party, whatever, but when it comes to our Island children, \$750,000 a year –

Leader of the Opposition: Yeah, (Indistinct), he's right (Indistinct).

Mr. Aylward: – you admit it, you know it's not adequate.

Again, there is only orthotics technician in Charlottetown and a 60% pediatric psychologist. Do you honestly believe that those numbers are adequate to address the needs of over 150 children under the age of five?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

As part of the investment, these are targeted investments for children with unique needs. It's been a \$3.7 million investment in an environment for competing demands for services, whether its services for our elderly and long-term care, whether its services in our acute hospitals, whether its investments in primary health care.

Madam Speaker, \$3.7 million. The hiring process has started and I've been very clear with Health PEI that we have expectations on immediate reduction in wait times. I would love to say that we had 10 more

million dollars to invest in children with unique needs. That is a very important area.

We also have other areas of the health care system that we have to pay attention to respect and I think from respect to the money, we are getting good value, we continue to find parity and balance in the investments we're making, whether it's from newborns with unique needs or whether it's our elderly in long-term care facilities. We are continuing to evolve our health care system to make sure that we are providing the best care and the best services, getting the best value for the resources we have in our province, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

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

The minister talks about reducing wait times, and again, I have to agree with the minister. I think that's a very important step to take. I applaud that. But we all know that reducing wait times is not enough. We need to be able to provide necessary follow up care once a child has been assessed, and simply, this is not happening at this time.

So I'm going to give you one more chance, minister. Will you commit here today to ensure that the resources to support these necessary services will be in the spring budget?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

We'll commit that we will continue to provide the best services we can. Obviously there are competing demands on our health care budget. I used the example yesterday when we were discussing the process for PRPC with the discussion to add a rheumatologist. PRPC also had requests from addictions to add an additional addiction physician, we had requests to add an additional palliative physician, we had an addition to add more family physicians. We understand that there's a lot of demand, but

we want to make sure that we make the appropriate investments, that we find balance and parity across the spectrum from birth to long-term care for our seniors.

I'm pleased and proud of the investment that this government has made. We have almost doubled the health care budget in the time that we've been in government. We've moved the system forward, we've built primary health care, we've expanded scope of practice with our nurse practitioners, our paramedics, our pharmacists, our optometrists, and we take great pride that we're moving health care forward. The work that Health PEI is doing is on the cutting edge of some of the best practices in the country, Madam Speaker.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

That was a very elegant speech. He just could have simply stood up and said no, because it was a yes or no question: Would you provide the necessary resources in the spring budget? So with the speech that you went on with I can only assume that the answer was no.

Pediatric services

Another question to the minister. Minister, can you confirm that the announcement that you made back in September with regards to pediatric services, will that announcement extend to children up to the age of 18 or will you simply cut off those services once they reach the age of six?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Our investment, as I indicated numerous times, is \$3.7 million. I would like to be able to say that we had another \$10 million, but \$3.7 million, the process, there's been staff already hired. There's continuous hiring to be happening. We are going to be monitoring our wait times. I've also asked to identify a steering committee. The steering

committee will look at best practice for service delivery, whether it be in audiology, whether it be autism assessments, whether it be in OT, physio, look at best practices across the country, look at ways that we can be efficient and utilize the resources that we have to provide the care.

I'm confident that within the next 12 months we'll see a reduction in wait times. As far as the budgetary process, we have all kinds of demands on that budget and we'll continue to make all expansion of services for all range of the age spectrum in our health care budget, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Let's make this as simple as I can for the minister. I'm not talking about wait times. I'm not talking about competing demands. I'm not talking about PRPC. I'm not talking about mental health and addictions.

What I'm asking you, again, is the announcement that you made back in September with regard to pediatric services, will those services end when a child reaches the age of six or will it extend to when they're 18? Six or 18. Simple. Answer, please.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

I'll have to – I mean, I'm not privy of every program that's functioning in community hospitals or the QEH. It's a six –

Leader of the Opposition: It's not your policy.

Mr. Currie: It's a \$610 million budget, Madam Speaker.

I think I do have a level of appreciation for the operational side of health care delivery. Our priority has been very clear. The investment of \$3.7 million has been tagged in to children with unique and special needs.

I, as the minister, am well aware of the importance of early intervention and efficient and appropriate programming for young children. We recognize that this is an important area, we're backing up with an investment, and we're going to continue to monitor our wait times because we've been very clear that this is a priority.

If the Member from Stratford-Kinlock had to have time to come to the AGM last night, he would have got a very clear update on the operational of 42% of the provincial budget, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Home repair program

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question will be to the senior minister: Minister –

Speaker: Hon. member, the Minister of Community Services and Seniors?

Mr. LaVie: Minister of Community Services and Seniors, yes.

Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. LaVie: My question.

Minister, there are seniors out there who are living in their homes struggling. Can you update the House on a process they can go through for a home repair program?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Services and Seniors.

Ms. Docherty: Madam Speaker, if it's okay I would like to sort of pose a question back, and if the hon. member can be a little bit more specific as to which program that I have in my department that he's referring to?

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the Minister of Community Services and Seniors: How many programs do you have?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Services and Seniors.

Ms. Docherty: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We have three programs in which a senior could apply to, two that are currently available and the third which we hope to probably launch in January. So if the Speaker will allow me to have a little bit of time I can explain the programs or I can –

Speaker: Normal time, hon. member.

Ms. Docherty: Okay, thank you, Madam Speaker.

As announced in the throne speech, our seniors' home renovation program – a lot of us refer to it as a seniors' emergency home renovation – which is a program available to seniors. Originally had been for a \$1,500 grant cost-shared where the senior would pay 50% of it. We've increased that now to \$2,000. If a senior has never applied, they can apply for up to \$2,000 to do modifications of any type in their home of which they pay the other 50%. So a maximum of \$2,000.

If they have a received funding from that program, which would have been up to \$1,500, they can come back for that balance of \$500.

We also have the home modification program, which is a program that any Islander can apply to within the income levels, so, up to a maximum of \$50,000. So it doesn't matter – age – it's anybody, first come, first serve, when the application process begins. A senior, as well as anybody, could apply to it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Question to the Minister of Community Services and Seniors: The home renovation program, when can the seniors apply?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Services and Seniors.

Ms. Docherty: Madam Speaker, this is a five-year program that we took over from the federal government which was previously known by the feds as the RAP program, as in rap, not rat, sorry.

We are in year two. Applications started to be received on the 16th of June. We made the application process available the week prior, the 9th of June.

That program now is closed and I would expect that we will probably be offering the third-year program for the 2015-2016 fiscal year probably around the same time in May or June of 2015. But it's not specific to seniors. It is open to low-income Islanders on a sliding scale up to \$50,000 depending on the number in their household, and it's on a first come, first serve basis.

Thank you.

Speaker: Final question, the hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Only 72 people received help under this program last year while hundreds who needed it went without.

My question to the same Minister of Community Services and Seniors: When these seniors apply, where does their application go and do they get word back even though it's not accepted?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Community Services and Seniors.

Ms. Docherty: Madam Speaker, one of the changes that we made from our first year to the second year was the fact that we made the applications available a week in advance before we started receiving them.

That way, we wanted to make sure all Islanders had an equal opportunity. Not everybody has a computer. Not everybody has transportation. We recognize that. So we felt that by providing the applications in advance it gave them enough time to prepare the necessary information and to be able to get the application in.

But the applications from all Islanders who fit the criteria were received at either the Access centres across the province or at our housing offices. Again, as I said, first come, first service basis.

We have completed going through all of them. We received something like 561 applications on the first day and at this point in time, everybody has been notified as to whether or not they have been approved in the program, and if for some reason maybe the hon. member has a constituent that hasn't heard, I encourage that constituent to contact our housing offices.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: End of Question Period.