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

FOR

THURSDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 2014

Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

Questions by Members

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

FEMA minister and tabling of London trip documents

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Question to the finance minister: Why do you still refuse to table the details of your 2012 secret London gaming junket after a week of public calls by us, by the media and by Islanders?

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

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

As I said in the House here yesterday, I did not go to London in 2012.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

What you said in the House yesterday was you had the information. You refused to table it to us. Why are you still hiding that information after publicly committing to the House that you would table those documents?

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

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

As I said yesterday, I made a trip to London in 2011, January 2011, and said that I had the documents from McInnes Cooper showing that my full bill was \$4,623.17.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's easy for him to say that, and we all know how great his credibility is with Islanders, and we'd like to see him table those documents. It doesn't sound like he's going to.

FEMA and FOIPP request denial (further)

Question to the minister: Can you explain to this House why you say you didn't attend the conference in 2012 if your department refused our freedom of information request for the records to that trip in 2012 citing trade secrets?

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

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

Very clear that the department said there were no records associated with the trip in 2012. Whether it was a code that the hon. member is speaking about that he would regard as trade secrets, I don't know. But what the office turned in, and I asked the person that was in charge of going through the records, was that there were no records associated with a trip in 2012.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

That's not at all what the letter said, and I tabled the letter earlier. I'm surprised that the minister hasn't gotten himself up to speed. The media all has it. Islanders have it. They've seen it. What was actually said was that they couldn't release the details of your 2012 trip – and they said the 2012 trip – because of trade secrets.

Your refusal on that freedom of information request, it looks like the minister got a gift from somebody, and you've been to London twice now, according to you, because you've been there in 2012, according to your

department, and you said you were there in 2011.

Question to the minister: Who in the Premier's office ordered you to stonewall the public on this file?

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

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

Very important that the member and everyone that's listening understand whenever you're trying to work on a file like this there are confidentiality pieces to it.

We were attempting to be first mover into this sphere. Very important that we were trying to make movement before three other provinces in Canada and as many as 12 – we knew three active files that were taking places in the United States of America. There is an awful lot of confidentiality around the actual movement into this sphere.

But, however, we're very open to Islanders that this was something that would have been very advantageous both for the coverage of those that play in this game and for the dollars that would come forward for health, social services and education in this province.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

FEMA minister and legality of online gaming

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We all know that this minister's good at taking orders from the Premier's office, and there were lots of orders given from the fifth floor on this file. His actions on this file speak very clearly.

Today in the *Guardian* there was a story that said the treasurer pulled the plug on this failed gaming scheme in February 2012 after he got back from his London gaming junket.

Question to the minister: Did it really take you at least two free trips to London to figure out that your online gaming scheme wasn't even legal?

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

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

If the hon. member would please refer to it as the trip in 2011, as we know very clearly that I did not make a trip to London in 2012. Very important. His information is incorrect. He's following a report that has many errors in it. It'd be very open to the public to know that that is incorrect information.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As a matter of fact, what I'm following is a freedom of information request that we put in, where his own department said: We can't give you the details of the 2012 trip because of trade secrets.

So we know he was there in 2012. He told the House he was there in 2011. So he's been to London free twice for something that wasn't even legal in Canada.

Gaming re: HST

The timeline of this story is particularly interesting.

Question to the minister: Is it a coincidence that you begin planning to bring in HST the very same month that you pulled the plug on your online gaming scheme?

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

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

I think it's about time that the hon. Leader of the Opposition start to focus on what's happening on Prince Edward Island in reality instead of speculation.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We're all speculating what might have happened in London. As you recall, your little gala dinner there that you were at. There's a lot of speculation going around about you and your motives. Those aren't all my speculations, they're widely speculated.

We all know what's happening here. Thanks to years of failed leadership, this government, they were desperate, they were desperate to get a get rich quick scheme and try to balance the books. The huge bet on online gaming didn't come at the last minute. I mean, he's out there trying to bet this money so he can save himself because he can't balance the books. Then he shoved HST down Islanders' throats.

Question to the treasurer: Is this what really happened?

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

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

I think that the record for this government stands on its own. Very clearly we're the only jurisdiction in North America that did not fall into recessionary pressures in 2008-2009. We're the only province in Canada that did not have negative growth from 2007 to the present time and that is because of some very advantageous priorities that were brought forward by our Premier and in fact this entire government. The way that we have handled our immigration files and have seen growth each and every year inside our province – an incredible feat during the greatest downturn since 1929.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Common knowledge here, and it was proven here yesterday when he tabled his state of the province here, and we're in terrible shape. Seven and a half years, eight budgets that he couldn't balance. The books are in terrible shape and he was desperate, so he gambled. He went on a gambling junket. When that failed he came back and he shoved HST down Islanders' throats.

Question to the minister: Why did Islanders have to pay because of your failed leadership?

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

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

On this side of the floor, we're very proud of the harmonization of our sales tax and bringing a level playing field into the Province of Prince Edward Island. For many years we were trying desperately to play on this level playing field for industries in every corner of this province from two-man operations on a welding shop right to the largest manufacturing shop here on this Island.

Now we've levelled the playing field and what has happened? Twelve hundred full time jobs in one year. That's incredible. This tiny little province producing that type of job opportunity. A lot of it can be –

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct).

Mr. Sheridan: – attributed to harmonized sales tax, and we were third only in this country behind Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct)

Mr. Sheridan: Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Gaming re: pensions

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Question again to the treasurer: When did you decide to break the collective agreements and roll back the pensions of

civil servants here in the province? Was it before or after your secret online gaming scheme crashed and burned?

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

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

Very proud to say that we sat on the floor of this House last night to finalize the deal with our unions to make this the best pension system in the country. Very proud that over two and a half, almost three full years it took to find this solution, and this solution will work in most jurisdictions and it is groundbreaking. We have found a way that we hyper fund this portfolio to allow a very great possibly of indexation for years and years to come without encumbering this province with a liability that we cannot afford to keep up.

On behalf of the government I'd like to thank all the unions for their work, for saving the taxpayers the dollars that are necessary, and making sure that everyone has a good retirement in the years ahead.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The minister put all his eggs in one basket, and when that failed he had to bring in HST, make Islanders pay for it, he had to cut and slash collective bargaining agreements with unions to help save himself from this big flop that he had.

Question to the minister: Isn't that how it went down?

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

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

Again, to remind the Leader of the Opposition and anyone that's listening here today, this province has done extraordinarily well from 2008 in the greatest downturn this

globe has seen since 1929. This was an incredible feat.

Bringing forward the immigration files that we did brought new spending into this province, and by seeing the growth in the housing starts, which we led the nation per capita for three years, new car sales that we led three out of four years – an incredible act by this Premier and by a couple of ministers that handled this file extraordinarily well.

We have been prosperous on this Island. We hardly have realized what the downturn has meant. Are there tough times still fiscally across this nation? There are definitely tough fiscal times. When we look at the deficit that is here with this province and put it in perspective with regard to our number versus the deficits that are being run across this country, yes indeed, we're in great shape. We stimulated the economy and we kept this province (Indistinct).

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Gaming file (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

They ruined any chance for there to be a future on Prince Edward Island unless we can get some real leadership in this province.

Every day we hear from Islanders in need who are told by government that money's just too tight, they simply can't be helped, there's no help for you, the money's too tight. Yet when it came to a project where millions of dollars of taxpayers' money were needed to gamble with, there was all kinds of money.

Question to the treasurer: What made your online gaming scheme so good that it was that much more important than dealing with the needs of Islanders?

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

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

As everyone in this House should know and everyone listening today, there's not a single solitary cent of taxpayers' money that went in to this initiative.

We were trying to bring dollars back to the province. This is from activity that takes place on offshore gaming. This unregulated market needs to be policed and regulated and taxed. Those dollars that are leaving the shores of Prince Edward Island and all of Canada must come back here to our coffers to ensure that we have all of those dollars for health care, education, social services, all the great values that a Liberal government stand for.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

So to the Island taxpayers, if you're following at home, which many of you are, what the treasurer is basically saying is the money that you make he wants –

Speaker: Please direct your question to through the Speaker, hon. member.

Leader of the Opposition: He'd like to have more of the taxpayers' dollars in his pocket. He doesn't want to see any taxpayer do well. If they have money at all he wants it. It's because he needs it because he can't balance the books because he refuses to make good decisions for Islanders.

The secret failed online gaming scheme was a huge priority for the government. It was being directed right out of the Premier's office by the Premier's top staff.

Question to the minister: Who in the Premier's office told you that this scheme was more important than the needs of Islanders?

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

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

We look back at the time when we talked about harmonizing the sales tax here. It was very important that we level this playing field. Now today, if the hon. Leader of the Opposition does any driving around in his district, he would go out to the far reaches and look at a dairy farm, take a look at a potato farm, go to the welding shops that may be existing in his district, and talk to any one of these individuals. They will quickly tell you that now the input tax credits that they're receiving are creating jobs right across our Island.

It is creating all kinds of opportunity so that we can keep Islanders here, keep them in full-time jobs, just like the 1,200 jobs we created last year.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I do spend quite a bit of time in my district driving around talking to people. What they tell me is they can't wait till this government's gone.

You know what? Islanders really know what's going on here and this government puts greed before need and personal interest before public interest. When this minister lost on this gambling Islanders paid the price in HST, in higher fees, taxes, cuts to pensions, cuts to school, cuts to health care.

Question to the treasurer: Why did Islanders have to pay the price for your failed bet?

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

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

One more time, very clearly to all that are listening, there isn't a single solitary penny of taxpayers' money that has gone into this initiative. It was just the opposite. What we were looking at was to see what opportunity is out there. If you're going to be like the

previous administration, like this group that are across the floor, yes, you are going to sit on your hands, do nothing, make no change, do not move forward, do not bring in new tax systems that make it more advantageous to have a level playing field for our manufacturing. Sure, sit still and perish.

This government is not like that. We're looking for ways to make Prince Edward Island the greatest place in the world to live, and that's exactly what we're doing with this initiative. Not one single solitary cent of taxpayers' money went into it. But what it did do was look at an opportunity that would maybe, possibly, enrich the lives of Islanders by putting more money in the coffers of education, health care and social services.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

This government does have money into this failed gaming scheme. It was a loan, and the minister knows full well that's true.

FEMA minister and budget

After all the scheming by this government and all the pain by Islanders, this treasurer is still at least \$50 million over budget.

Question to the treasurer: Do you think that Islanders consider that to be good management?

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

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

As a percentage of our entire budget it is a very small number. No one wants to be in deficit. Not any of the provinces across Canada. We look at New Brunswick, at Nova Scotia, at Newfoundland and Labrador, at Quebec, at Ontario, at Manitoba and British Columbia – every single one of these provinces are in deficit, and why are we in deficit? That is because

in 2008-2009 we suffered the biggest setback globally since 1929.

What we did as a group of finance ministers, including the late Mr. Flaherty, we decided that we would stimulate the economy. For five years we put extra cash into the system, into policies that would create jobs, create opportunities, make sure that cash would continue to roll across our provinces, and yes, Prince Edward Island led the pack. We were the very first province to go into the stimulus project, and because of our small jurisdiction, that very first year we escaped going into recession. We were the only province, the only state of the union, that did not go into recessionary pressures that year, 2008-2009. Because we moved quickly and because we had a very aggressive immigration policy, we avoided it.

It was great management and we take full credit for that. What we need now, as you've been watching, four years in a row we've brought the deficit down, and next year we will present a balanced budget.

Thank you very much.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Gaming file (further)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

An online poll today suggested that 75% of Islanders don't believe that he's capable of balancing the budget. I agree.

Islanders can see through his spin too. This was a get-rich quick scheme that was cooked up by some of his Liberal back room there, and when the deal went back Islanders got stuck with the bill. When the Premier's inner circle tried to get greased, Islanders got fleeced.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Leader of the Opposition: Question to the treasurer: Don't you think Islanders deserve better than that?

Speaker: Hon. member, please use parliamentary – watch your parliamentary language (Indistinct).

Leader of the Opposition: Okay. Sorry, Madam Speaker.

Don't you think that Islanders deserve better than that, treasurer?

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

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

To be very clear, this was an initiative that was brought about to bring prosperity to Prince Edward Island. This is not anything dreamed up in a Liberal back bench or a back room. We're talking about a commission that was put together with some of the most talented people on Prince Edward Island. They included a previous deputy finance minister, Mike O'Brien, that led a very good government. We had a couple of other lawyers that have great corporate knowledge and legislative regulatory advice that they could bring forward.

These individuals worked very diligently to finding a solution for this province so that we could stop this outflow of cash leaving Prince Edward Island and all of Canada. This needs to be policed, regulated and taxed. We've said it for a number of years and we'll continue to work at that as we move forward into the next year or two.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Deep-well irrigation

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I was shocked to read in the *Guardian* that the agriculture minister plans to expand the current level of irrigation. Minister, the legislative committee on agriculture just held a series of public meetings to get input on the irrigation issue.

Minister of agriculture: Why did you allow the committee to waste its time, waste the taxpayers' money, when you have already made up your mind?

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, the standing committee on agriculture reviewed the whole irrigation file and they came back and recommended that the moratorium stay in place until all Islanders are consulted and the rest of the science is gathered.

I believe that we need to gather that information and that science and make a decision based on all the information, not on incomplete information.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the minister of agriculture, you were quoted as stating that the customers' needs must be met.

Minister of agriculture, what customers are you talking about?

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, there's a whole network of customers out there that buy food from Prince Edward Island that's important for them and their lives and their business.

As a minister of agriculture, how could I stand up anywhere in front of any producers or any of society and say: I don't want to develop agriculture?

Mr. LaVie: You did it in the *Guardian*.

Mr. Webster: That's not what I do. I promote a solid, well thought-out agriculture plan.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and Deputy Premier. Your government

promised that no decision would be made on lifting the moratorium on deep-water wells until a new water act was passed. Do you still stand by that statement?

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, absolutely, I do stand exactly on that sentence the hon. member made.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors.

Atlanticade

Mr. Greenan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

A question for the Minister of Tourism and Culture. This week we learned that the organizers of Atlanticade are pondering moving the annual motorcycle event festival away from my community, Summerside. The organizers are in talks with Tourism Summerside about this. I was wondering if the minister could elaborate on his department's involvement on this file.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

There's no question that Atlanticade has been one of those tourism products that has brought visitation to Prince Edward Island. In fact, in 2014 there was about 2,100 motorcycles attended that particular rally with a direct spend of approximately \$682,000.

Our department has been supportive of Atlanticade through Tourism Summerside where in fact we had a three-year contract that's going to end in March of 2015. Obviously, Tourism Summerside is the sponsor, so we are awaiting a decision from them whether they want to proceed or not.

Speaker: A supplementary question, the hon. Member from Summerside-St. Eleanors.

Mr. Greenan: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the same minister: When can we expect this decision? Any idea?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Mr. Henderson: Madam Speaker, Tourism Summerside is the sponsoring organization, and they had numerous partners involved with Atlanticade in the past.

Our department was one of those, I believe ACOA, and the city of Summerside is also a partner in that. To my understanding they are having some consultations to determine the return on investment on that event. Hopefully they'll be back to us in early December with an answer, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Bar clam season

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question today is to the Minister of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development.

Minister, a fish buyer from my district contacted me with concerns regarding the fact that the bar clam season is quickly ending at the end of this month, in particular for the area of Nine Mile Creek.

To the minister: Is there any way that this could be extended for another two weeks since we've had some inclement weather in the last month or so?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. MacKinley: Yeah, it's a good question. When I first became minister in this portfolio there was a group of fishers in Nine Mile Creek area that had a market to a buyer in the Summerside area. They were only allowed to fish until October 15th.

We got together. We went and worked with DFO and we extended that season till

November 30th. That was a great help for that particular time. But what we have done is open new markets, and there's a big demand for these bar clams.

Those people, fishers, have got an application into DFO now. I have great success working with DFO, but we'll have to look, though, at the science. The time before, if I stand to be corrected, they had to stand up to give up a month and a half. They wanted fish so you could go I think it was August or something. We extended their time till the end of the season when the clams are better.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

Substitute bus driver shortage

Ms. Crane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

There's a real shortage of substitute bus drivers for school buses in the province. My question is to the minister of education: What is he doing to alleviate this problem?

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

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

It is an issue that's brought to my attention on a regular basis. Example, just last week I had talked to a bus driver from down in Montague area who had said they had five spare bus drivers at the time down there but since then they've all become full-time.

The crux of the matter is, right now, it takes about \$4,000 to take the bus driving course. If you're going in as a sub driver, a lot of people do not see that – they see that as a little extensive. They need to take a lot of time just to pay back for the course.

What we're looking at is looking at an alternative route of training these teachers. Also, the idea of perhaps the drivers putting some money up front. Possibly paying them back, the rest of it back, from their wages. But we're looking at whatever way is possible to make sure that we do fill that gap because there is presently a serious shortage.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: A supplementary question, the hon. Member for Morell-Mermaid.

Ms. Crane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The throne speech had mentioned new dollars for people, especially if there's an opportunity for employment.

My question to the education minister: Could the English school board, or the French school board actually apply for some of those training dollars and use that to train the substitute bus drivers?

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

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

Again, a very excellent question. Not out of the *Guardian*, too, that must have come off the top of her head. It's terrific.

It is a good question and there is a definite need there. We will be looking at what dollars are available – whether we have to go to some other department to look at – for training dollars or whatever that may be. But we certainly will look into that because we do have a serious problem in that area. It is not just in the Montague area, it's across the province, so we will look at every avenue possible.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms. Crane: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

On today's job line, actually, Summerside and O'Leary are looking for substitute bus drivers as well.

My final question to the minister: Would you make sure the CUPE union is involved in that as well?

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

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

I did speak with the CUPE representative on this several times to look at what avenues we might look at at solving this problem. There is the dollar issue, the \$4,000 training issue. We have to tackle that piece. We also have to make an incentive that we can draw people in to fill those positions. We're going to look at all avenues to make sure we can fill some of those because there is a shortage, not just like I said in Montague, but up west as well, and even in the Charlottetown area.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member for Souris-Elmira.

Deep-well irrigation (further)

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To the minister of agriculture again. Your government has obviously already decided to lift the moratorium on deep-water wells for farmers who need it.

Minister of agriculture, why bother with more public discussion when you have already made up your minds?

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, that certainly is not a decision of mine.

It's a decision of all of Prince Edward Island. The folks that are going to host the white paper on the new water act for Prince Edward Island. We're the only province in Canada, I believe, without a water act, so we need a water act so we understand –

Mr. LaVie: The piece in the *Guardian's* wrong?

Mr. Webster: – where the water is used –

Speaker: Allow the minister to respond, please.

Mr. Webster: Where the water is being used currently, Madam Speaker, and we need to understand our complete system.

It's a decision that will come from dialogue and discussion with all Islanders.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member for Souris-Elmira.

AFDP minister and conflict of interest

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again to the minister of agriculture. Minister, you were a farmer, your companies are big farmers. Will you admit today that you're in a conflict of interest of interest and should not even be talking about the irrigation issue?

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

Mr. MacKinley: You're talking fishing all the time.

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, I can clearly say that I'm not in the farming business now.

Everything I did own is in filed under the conflict of commission – with the conflict commissioner and it's in a blind trust. I do have a lot of experience farming, and my goal would be to make the right decisions that are best for all of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member for Souris-Elmira.

AFDP minister and deep-water wells

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again to the agriculture minister. Minister, you already told the potato board you will allow careful expansion of deep-water wells. Minister, tell the House today that you support lifting of the moratorium on deep-water wells.

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

Mr. Webster: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Souris-Elmira is correct, I said careful expansion if the science says it's okay to do it.

That's the key behind this. Let's collect the information, let's collect the science behind it, and make sure the right decision is made, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Member for Souris-Elmira.

Souris dialysis

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My question is to the health minister. Minister of health, you've shut down the dialysis in Souris, and he allowed these patients to travel over these rough roads of PEI for the last six months. You told the patients that there was a deadline of opening dialysis in Souris – January 1st. Is that still the case?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

As government we're committed to hemodialysis across the Province of Prince Edward Island. We recognize the incidence and rise in chronic disease, so we're very pleased to be investing, approximately, an additional \$400,000 in the dialysis unit in Souris.

The unit was closed because the water quality and water filtration system was of low quality and wasn't meeting national standards. We're pleased, and we currently are paying approximately \$1,000 a week to transport the seven patients from Souris to Charlottetown for their dialysis treatment.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. LaVie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I understand what you're spending. I understand it's costing you to transport these patients. But I get these calls. These calls are coming to me. I don't wake up in the morning and think of a question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. LaVie: These guys are coming to me with the questions, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Order, please!

The member has the floor.

Mr. LaVie: Question to the health minister: Minister, will this be open by January 1st like you told these patients?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Currie: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As part of the new water filtration system there are major renovations to expand and to improve the dialysis unit in Souris. RFPs have gone out, tenders, and the work will be starting immediately. I can't commit to January 1st, but we will be monitoring the start and the opening because I recognize the inconvenience for patients travelling. But it's short-term and we will have a state-of-the-art facility in Souris for the Member from Souris-Elmira's constituents.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Stratford intersection

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

Question to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. You and I, as you're aware, we've had several meetings over in Stratford, actually, to look at safety and traffic concerns that we have over there.

I'm just wondering if you could update me at this time on the potential realignment of the intersection between Sobeys and Home Hardware on the Kinlock Road.

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

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, safety in our department is always in the front of our minds and we've been looking at different areas in Stratford trying to make the traffic flow better.

The intersection the hon. member is speaking of, I believe, is the one between Sobeys and the Home Hardware location. I just want him to confirm if that's the right one.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Aylward: Correct, Madam Speaker, that is the intersection I'm referring to.

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

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, that is something – that intersection has been designed by staff in the department and we'll be realigning that intersection to line the Home Hardware entranceway up to the entrance into the Sobeys to make it right across from each other as opposed to the staggered intersection that was put in when they were both put in back many years ago under the previous government.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

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

I wonder if the minister can advise me when that work will be done.

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

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, that work will be started next summer.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MacKinnon Drive

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

Another question to the minister of transportation. Minister, there's also another concern that we have in Stratford. Currently, our two schools essentially are land-locked by only one road coming in, and that's Glen Stewart Drive. As we had discussed, and I had toured you through and showed you the

area, MacKinnon Drive that comes down behind Sobeys naturally should be connected at some point to Glen Stewart Drive.

My concern is if there was ever, God forbid, an emergency at the school that we see quite often happening in the news around the world, the first responders would only have one road, one entrance, into those schools.

Minister, what I would like to see is MacKinnon Drive connected through to Glen Stewart Drive. Can you tell me if there's any update on that?

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

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, I did look at that area this summer with my chief engineer.

A partnership would have to be developed there between the town, the developer and the province, but there would be increased traffic in that area as well around school zone. So we have to have a look to see if that would offset what the hon. member's asking. But we are looking at it in the department. I'll get an update from the chief engineer and I'll let the hon. member know when I do that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

McEsso Corner

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

This time I'd like to take the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal a little bit closer back to Charlottetown and talk about the –

Mr. Brown: Esso Corner?

Mr. Aylward: Thank you.

Actually, we refer to it as the McEsso Corner because there's a McDonald's there at that Esso. It's a very dangerous intersection, it's a very dangerous parking lot with, unfortunately, cars cutting through

the parking lot because we do not have a dedicated right-hand turning lane there.

I wonder if the minister can tell me if there's any update on that, if there are possibilities of redesigning that intersection.

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

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, we're trying to work where we can with the hon. member, but we must keep in mind we have more than one area in the province to work on.

That intersection in question has a turning lane in it. It empties the intersection well. The problem to have another turning lane off through that area would have two lanes going in front of a commercial business that would almost make traffic impossible to get back out to the main area.

There's a lot of moving pieces to that, but we are looking into that as well.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Aylward: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd just like to remind the minister that it's not only residents of Stratford that utilize the Trans-Canada Highway, it's actually all kinds of Islanders, and a lot of tourists as well travel the Trans-Canada Highway. It's very important that we do keep our road safety.

Again, I stress that that is a very dangerous intersection. We've had many very serious accidents there as well. Currently the design just simply is not working the way it should.

Hillsborough Bridge pedestrian/bicycle lane

Another question to the minister: We've talked lots with regards to the town of Stratford. The minister of health has talked about go!PEI and getting our residents more active. Now, there are many people who would like to be able to bike or walk to Charlottetown from Stratford and areas further out.

Have you looked at, and is there any update on, providing a safe pedestrian/bicycle lane on the Hillsborough Bridge?

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

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, we are currently looking at some options on the bridge, but we have a report done that's not back yet to see if the structure's able to put a bike lane on it.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

CIHI report

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

The Canadian Institute for Health Information, known as CIHI, recently released a report looking at mental health illness hospitalization and numbers of patient days for mental illness. I'm just wondering if the minister of health would like to venture a guess as to where PEI placed in that report.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

As the minister, as all of us are here in the Legislative Assembly, we're very much aware of the issues and concerns about mental health and addictions in our communities across the Province of Prince Edward Island.

That's why our government has stood tall and made the investments. We just recently announced a new 24/7 youth recovery facility in Summerside. We opened a new transition unit. We've increased frontline supports and we continue to do the work.

We have one of only two provinces in Canada right now that has a chief public mental health officer on the ground, every day, looking at our mental health system and advising on policy and change in investment to improve our system.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Funding for mental health

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

PEI, in fact, had the highest rate of mental health hospitalization of any province in all of Canada coming in at 838 individuals per 100,000. Surely you know your own statistics show this as well. Yes, I understand that you're putting \$9 million over a three-year period into mental health and addictions. If we hadn't have pushed you on that, minister, I'm fearful that you wouldn't be doing even that.

But minister, why are you continuing to fail to put the real necessary dollars in mental health here on PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Some Hon. Members: (Indistinct).

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

I want to remind the Member from Stratford-Kinlock that we're not really concerned on this side of the House about who gets credit for the investments –

Speaker: Order, please!!

Mr. Currie: – that are being made in mental health and addictions.

Our government recognizes, just like every other region, every other province, we have huge challenges with mental health and addictions. Government is responding and is making appropriate investments. Actually our investments have been strong, and yes, we've got more work to do.

Mr. LaVie: (Indistinct).

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Currie: Madam Speaker, Dr. Rhonda Matters is meeting regularly, she's advising,

she's now looking at the adult side of mental health.

Our focus over the last 10 months with all our investments have been on the youth mental health and addiction side. Now our focus continues to be looking at how we can be a more efficient, more streamlined, more accessible system for mental health and addictions for adults in this province, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

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

The minister here spends roughly 75% of the entire budget and yet can't seem to take a quick decisive action and has failed to invest solid dollars into mental health.

Now, this minister has been the minister of health on and off for about six years.

Minister, why are you failing to add a significant and necessary number of mental health beds and mental health professionals, clinicians, into our system?

Ms. Sherry: (Indistinct).

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Leader of the Opposition: (Indistinct) from behind you there.

Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Currie: The health budget consumes –

Ms. Sherry: You can't answer the question (Indistinct).

Mr. Currie: – approximately 42% of all provincial –

Leader of the Opposition: He's got some great ideas.

Speaker: Order, members!

Mr. Currie: Just a correction from the statement by the Member for Stratford-Kinlock. Health care is approximately about 42% of all provincial spending. As government we've sent a clear message 10 months ago when we started with the investments that we made by hiring Dr. Rhonda Matters. We opened a transition unit. In 2009 we built the Strength Program. Now we're continuing to expand on that to open up our own 24/7 youth facility here in the province. We are opening up a new youth mental health unit and wing for Island youth and families struggling with mental health.

We are spending money, we're implementing policy, we're looking at our current admissions and protocols. We are looking at improving and making better access. We are doing some positive work but I recognize that more work needs to be done. There's not an Islander or anyone in this Legislative Assembly that doesn't know somebody that is struggling with mental health or a neighbour or a friend or a family member.

We recognize the challenges and as we continue to balance the ongoing demands and pressures in our health budget we'll continue to make sure that mental health and addictions are paid attention to, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Final question, the hon. Opposition House Leader.

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

This CIHI study also reported back for a population of 10,000 people on PEI a patient day's rate of 1,012 – that is 1,012 days of hospitalization for mental illness amongst a sample of 10,000 Islanders.

Minister, this problem goes against your quick photo op template. Will you agree to finally recognize your failing leadership around mental illness and take some decisive action?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

Our government has been very decisive. Our government is being very decisive by backing up with investment, new facilities, more staffing, more resources today. We have more psychiatrists than we have in a number of years in the province.

But I recognize that we have more work to do, and we'll continue to work on improving access to mental health and addictions to make sure that the appropriate resources and supports are in place for Island families, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: End of Question Period.