



Session:	2/65
Date:	17 November 2016
No:	26

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF  
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

THURSDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2016



Responses to Questions Taken as Notice

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Travel claim approval (further)**

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday I was asked about the authorization of the travel claims of deputies and the chief of staff.

I can inform the House that the travel for deputy ministers is approved by the chief of staff based on a clear business justification, and that travel for the chief of staff is approved by the Clerk of Executive Council.

**Train travel/Meal claims/UK Deals (further)**

Yesterday there were a couple of points that I said I would look into regarding the travel while I was in France and the United Kingdom in December of last year.

To just set the context, that was a 10-day trip, seven of which were spent mainly at the Paris climate change conference. Then, as I often do, when there's an opportunity to do so, I'll take advantage to do some business promotion or to promote the Island in conjunction while I'm on the road.

There were two points. One had to do with the amount of the food I consumed during that trip. There was a miscoding of when the answer was given to the member opposite which combined my accommodation and food during that time.

You'll be glad to know that there was \$1,243.57 that did not enter my body –

**An Hon. Member:** Consume.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** – and indeed my total, the total expenses for food over that 10-day period, was \$680, Mr. Speaker.

I said I would look into the question of train travel from Cardiff to London. The only class that was available was first-class. British Rail has long since ceased, I guess, if they ever did, offer fine dining. There was an apple and a cup of coffee from a trolley on a (Indistinct) –

**An Hon. Member:** Fifteen hundred dollar trolley, \$1,500 apple.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Probably better for you than \$1,500 worth of meals.

Let me expand just briefly because it's in response to the question of results.

For example, over in Paris I met with the executive vice-president and the international group head of Airbus International, which owns the largest aerospace company in the province. We explored business opportunities with them. It's a good way of giving colleagues a sense of, I'll say, what the Premier can add (Indistinct) Paris, go to see those folks, thank them for the opportunity to support PEI business.

At one point in that conversation I said to them – these folks run about a, I don't know, how many billion dollar business – I said: It's my understanding that you've got seven sites where Vector Aerospace operates around the world and that Prince Edward Island is your most productive. They said: That's exactly right, we have the most loyal and productive workforce in our Prince Edward Island operation. That's worth a lot to have that conversation.

We met in Paris with an aerospace firm that's considering locating in North America and Prince Edward Island and they came back to see us in January. There were then meetings, as explained yesterday, in Wales and in London and with the embassies in both Paris and London.

Finally, I will be tabling later today an account of the annual operating expenses for the Premier's office for 2015-2016, as well as for five other years that will enable the members to gain a comparative sense of how we're approaching things.

If you take the average for travel and training for those five other years it was \$55,500. That was under two different premiers. In the first year that I served as Premier the amount for travel and training was under \$20,000.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

**Write-off date for IIDI egaming loan (further)**

**Mr. MacDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday the Member from Kensington-Malpeque asked me a question regarding a loan related to the egaming initiative.

The board of IIDI did not approve the loan when first presented. It subsequently approved the loan on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

**Mr. Myers:** Did you say secretly?

**Mr. MacDonald:** Subsequently – following a guarantee from the Department of Finance.

The Auditor General clearly stated that the letter was signed by the former minister of finance. Our government has acted swiftly to respond to the recommendations of the Auditor General, and government departments will no longer provide guarantees to other departments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Questions by Members

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** I don't know where to start, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Future of Kinkora schools**

Government's school change plan has parents, teachers, and students and committees across this Island asking questions about what this government has planned for the future of our schools.

This is in the case of Kinkora family of schools, so I'm hoping not to get a lecture or a story here today.

Question to the minister of education: Can you assure residents that the outcome for the Kinkora family of schools has not been decided?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

The Public School Branch has presented and has activated school change policy which, I must add, has never been really truly implemented in this province for decades.

I will assure the Leader of the Opposition that the process is currently underway. We've completed step one which presents the data about the process. Step two is the public meetings. Not only the public meetings that are being held across the province, but also accepting the written submissions, and also having meetings with individuals or groups that want to have an opportunity to share their thoughts.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**School numbers**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The accuracy of school capacity figures used for the schools like Somerset are in question. At Somerset the actual enrollment is only 20 students of the school's original capacity when it was built. People feel that the government's numbers are being used to paint an inaccurate picture.

Question to the minister: Why is your department playing with the school enrollment and capacity numbers for schools like Somerset to build a case for closures?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

The Leader of the Opposition asks a fair question. I want to reiterate to him as an MLA in his riding that this issue has been raised through discussions with a public meeting. This issue has been addressed and is being addressed with the division of public schools which has the mandate of enrollments.

As minister I'm very supportive of the school change process and I'm very supportive of a very open conversation, a conversation that hopefully will lead to ideas, allow us to take feedback, allow us to listen to the voices of communities across the province.

I, too, am an MLA with six schools that will potentially be impacted pending on the recommendations, and the recommendations are not in a playbook in my desk. The reality of it is we're listening, we're taking notes, and we're respecting the voices of parents and community leaders across the province.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

### **Population and economic data re: schools**

**Leader of the Opposition:** I think I just heard a page out of a storybook. Many presenters at the Kinkora school families meetings pointed out that the economic impact information prepared for your department didn't accurately capture new housing developments in both Kinkora and Cape Traverse, respectively.

Question to the minister: Why are you using the wrong data on the population and economic growth of these areas to try and frame the conversation in school families?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

Part of the presentations by the community – one of the discussions or areas to allow communities to speak to is local knowledge. Local knowledge is development that is in line or currently happening in areas across the province. That will be part of the conversation, will be put into the discussion.

The real issues right now that we're facing with schools across Prince Edward Island is that we've got an overcapacity and an underutilization reality in areas all across the province.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

### **New school zone maps**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, we do have an overcapacity in some schools. It's because it's from problems that your school board and your government has caused in the past.

Parents, teachers, and students from Kinkora family were surprised recently to see your department post on websites maps for the Somerset-Athena school zone that already showed changes made to the zone before these consultations were done.

Question to the minister: Why would your department develop and publicly post new school zone maps before you even finished consulting with the group?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

I, as the Minister responsible for education, early learning and culture for the province, will reassure all Members of the Legislative Assembly that this is a very fair and will be an open conversation.

I will bring back specifics to the question from the Leader of the Opposition in respect to his issue around maps. It's a discussion I did have and I'll bring the specifics back on that.

But I want to reiterate that this is a very open, transparent process, and it's vital and important for parents to come forward with their thoughts and ideas about what the possibilities are in schools across Prince Edward Island.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Leader of the Opposition:** Well, I don't think you are being open and transparent because if you were, then you wouldn't be posting maps of already new zones.

Question to the minister: How can parents and students in the Kinkora school family trust that the school change process is fair when the data collected is wrong, and secret maps for new school zones are being accidentally posted online?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

As the minister responsible for education, I see this conversation as being a very important conversation for the future prosperity of the Province of Prince Edward Island. There's no Member of the Legislative Assembly would disagree about the importance and the value of public education and what it means to our Island youth.

I will continue to pay close attention to the conversations. I've extreme confidence and support in the people that are leading these conversations and gathering the information, not only through the public conversations but through the written submissions and the small group discussions.

I will reiterate that no decisions have been made on any option or any recommendation in this province in respect to the process. We are going to respect the process. We're listening, and I encourage communities and parents to pay attention and to make a voice and make a contribution.

Thank you.

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

### **School consultation process**

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last year the Premier was front and centre when he made the announcement of the whole new way, the new direction of schools, and the student-centered learning. Now he's nowhere at all to be seen on the file which is quite typical, actually, for this Premier. He puts a process in motion, then he runs from the consequences of it.

My questions today are to the minister whose lap he dropped this file in after he got what he thought was good news on the front end of it, to let you deliver the bad news.

Whose idea was it to torpedo the consultation process on school changes? Yours or the Premier's?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

I have had lots of good discussions about public education with the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters, and I have to say that I do admire his vision and his constant reaffirmation of the importance of the changing face and the changing needs of students, but also for us as a system to respond to that.

I would just ask for a little clarification on what he's referring to as "torpedo."

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

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While I do appreciate that you recognize my vision in education – and perhaps if you could get rid of your leader the two of us could actually do something about it.

### **School consultation report**

You did torpedo the process because otherwise, on the very last day of the consultations, you wouldn't have announced that you had been sitting on a \$10,000 consultation report that told you to close schools.

I guess my question is: Why would you go through this whole charade of having consultations and making people believe that you were actually listening to them when all the whole time you were sitting on a report that you paid someone in Toronto \$10,000 to write for you that said exactly what you wanted it to say?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

The consultant that the Member from Georgetown-St. Peters is referring to is a gentleman by the name of Dr. Michael Fullan. Michael Fullan is a global leader in supporting policymakers on transforming education systems. He was a special adviser for the Premier of Ontario, which after the 2002 PESA results, Ontario showed dismal results. Michael Fullan was brought in with his experience, the former dean of education from OISE at the University of Toronto, and worked very closely with policy leaders in Ontario, not only to improve learning in the Province of Ontario but to transform them into a global leader, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess I'll take exception for all Islanders, for all young, educated people who come out of the system, who come out of UPEI, who come out of great universities right across Canada, who are from Prince Edward Island, who live in Prince Edward Island, that you overlooked them, that you didn't think highly enough of them, that you didn't think that they could write any decision or that they could give you advice, that Islanders – I think Islanders are getting sick of Islanders like you who think they have to go to Toronto to get an answer.

I'm quite sick of it. There's lots of smart Islanders here. If you guys would quit overlooking them you might actually get some good advice from them.

One of the other people who authored that report was Mary Jean Gallagher. As you remember, Mary Jean Gallagher was the assistant deputy minister who was brought in to close schools the first time you closed schools, so you know her really well. You knew the answer in this report. You knew what she would write for you because you knew what she did.

Having a secret study telling you to close schools was bad enough, but because you didn't even hire somebody from Prince Edward Island to do it, you had to go to

somebody who is known to hatchet schools. It's shameful.

### **School consultant expertise**

What expertise did your high-priced Toronto consultant have in closing small schools that you couldn't find here in Prince Edward Island?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

Last November the minister of the day, with the Premier, presented the new vision for the model of education in the Province of Prince Edward Island. It's a model that is principled on engagement with the Learning Partners Advisory Council looking at learning from zero to labour force. We have implemented the Principals Council which is a focus of schools and administrative leaderships for their voice. The other council is the district advisory council which is the voice of students and parents.

Those conversations have led us to some really innovative, positive suggestions in respect to the needs to continue to improve the quality of learning here in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know that I speak on behalf of the PC caucus when I say we believe in Islanders. We believe that Islanders have the capability to write reports for government. Believe it or not, we believe that Islanders have the capability to write a \$10,000 consultant report to government. But when Islanders write reports you ignore them. When Islanders give you advice you ignore them. When Islanders come out to consult you ignore them because you have high-priced Toronto consultants to do it for you.

Question to the minister. When you were the minister of health and you were trying to shut down community schools, you ran to

Ontario at the same time to get advice, the exact same thing. Why, when you want to bring the butcher's knife to rural Prince Edward Island, do you always run to Ontario for advice?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

I take full responsibility as the minister for engaging Dr. Michael Fullan. I see Michael Fullan as someone who could advise, and an individual who is very directly linked to high-performing school systems in the country.

In early 2000, after the first round of PESA results that the province participated in, there was a clear message by the government of the day, which was the Binns administration, which created the task force as a result of the concern of how Prince Edward Island was performing and how they did up against provinces and territories in this country.

I am very comfortable, I'm very confident in the support and advice that Dr. Michael Fullan provided to the province, and I look forward to continuing to implement – and some of his recommendations have been implemented in respect to improving school achievement here in the province.

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

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I even feel bad for Susan Willis. The Premier brings Susan Willis in, she's got a great background, she's been in the school system forever, tons of experience, should be able to bring a steady hand to education in Prince Edward Island. All kind of the realm of the things that the Premier had said about her, and then yet you have to pay somebody in Toronto to give advice because, what?, her advice is no good or you don't trust her? It's pretty bad when you already don't trust your deputy minister to give you advice.

I'll tell you, it's pretty clear that the plan all along was to torpedo the process, and it

follows right along with the Premier's playbook on consultations: consult, torpedo, consult, torpedo. We have seen this from him a lot.

### **School consultation report leak**

Question to the education minister: Why else would you leak details of your secret school closure study on the last day of the school consultation process? Why else would you do that if you weren't purposely torpedoing the process?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

As I shared earlier, the importance of continuing to improve the quality of public education and how our government responds to the changing needs of classrooms in the Province of Prince Edward Island, and also the changing realities of the world. I've got a daughter right now that's in grade 12 and my priority as a father is to hope that the public school system is giving her all the skills to allow her not only to compete with students from Colonel Grey and Westisle and Souris high and Montague. The system allows her to be able to have the skills to compete with children that are graduating in June from high schools in Calgary, Toronto, Halifax, Vancouver.

We are very passionate as a government about public education. We also know the importance that as a small province we can punch above our weight and we will be better and we'll continue to make gains on achievement and continue to work towards the front to the pack as opposed to the back of the pack in this country, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

### **School change process and learning excellence**

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the minister of education. Minister, our MLAs have been at these

public meetings on the school changes. We've been at the Home and School meetings to help prepare for these public meetings. We're engaged. We're getting strong feedback about this process. We are hearing about the underlying issues that is impacting learning excellence: programming in the classroom; mental health; teacher allotments; support for our newcomer and special needs learners.

Minister, how will the school change process address these underlying issues that Islanders are saying are impacting learning excellence?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

**Mr. Currie:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and that's a great question from the Member from Morell-Mermaid.

One of our top priorities in the department of education is around student achievement. The second priority is around social-emotional, and that's the well-being of schools and cultures in the buildings that we have the responsibility to oversee. The third is public confidence, and that is the ability to engage Islanders, but also to show Islanders that we value – and the importance of public education is key.

To the point that the Member from Morell-Mermaid is making, the issue that we're facing right now is no different than any issue school board across this country. It's about overcapacity and underutilization. It's about the inequitable distribution of students and the impact that's having on the quality of learning all across schools in the Province of Prince Edward Island.

We've got schools in parts of the province that, in grade 12, have lists of class sizes of 44-45, where we go into other schools at the same course in different parts of the province with six students.

All we're trying to do is try is to find better balance, better parity, with an extensive consultation, and to continue to support schools and communities and the province to prosper and be a key success in education.

Thank you

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, you know our caucus is fully engaged in this. Actually, I think if you look at the eight of us over here, we have more than double the number of schoolchildren in the system than the other 19 MLAs combined. That means that we're invested personally in this.

Minister, I'd like you to answer a question that keeps coming up over and over from the parents that we're talking to. It's: How can we improve learning excellence by focusing on school buildings instead of what happens inside the classrooms?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

When I was asked on questions about Dr. Michael Fullan, Dr. Michael Fullan's recommendations were very clear. He was very clear on the approach that we continue to – if we're looking at making gains in student achievement, there needs to be a better alignment in respect to how we're working with instruction, classroom teachers, curriculum, and outcomes via achievement.

As we speak right now, when I talk about the term leading from the middle, we've got high levels of engagement and accountability with the school principals and schools across the Province of Prince Edward Island focused on school goals that target school achievement and social-emotional well-being.

To the point the Member from Morell-Mermaid is making, I, as the minister, am very supportive of the school change policy. I'm not aware or have any idea what the outcomes or recommendations will be, but my hope will be that we'll be able find a better way to use the resources, to distribute them across the province to enhance learning in Island classrooms, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Morell-Mermaid.

**Mr. MacEwen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, the message is out there that each of these families of schools have to figure out what to cut. They have to figure out what school is in bad shape, who's got the most capacity.

Minister, is there a real possibility that we will see your department and your government listen to parents, listen to these groups, take their suggestions for improvement, show leadership, and actually invest back into the schools?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

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

The whole mandate of the school change policy is to continue to find ways to move markers on achievement.

As the minister, I recognize that student achievement is important, but it's also very important as a province that we continue to raise the bar on how we're performing against other provinces across this country.

To the question from the Member from Morell-Mermaid, I'm extremely committed to looking at ways we can support, unaware of the recommendations – we are going to be paying very close attention through the process – how we can continue to reinvest and make firm statements around any potential recommendations that come, and how we're going to support those recommendations for better learning and better outcomes in Island schools, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party.

### **Demographic trends and health care infrastructure**

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thanks so much, Mr. Speaker.

Question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Does the government use demographic trends when planning major new health care infrastructure?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Obviously, Mr. Speaker, anytime we are looking at doing any construction or any renovations to any of our facilities we try to look at how we're going to best utilize the funds and resources and, once again, all factors are taken into account, and demographics would obviously be one of those.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party, your first supplementary.

### **Riverview Manor**

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

According to PEI Statistics Bureau's 2015 population report, Kings County seniors make up 21.1% of the population while the Canadian average is only 16.1%. Senior citizens in Kings County increased from 2,828 in 2006 to 3,706 in 2015, a 24% increase in less than a decade.

Question to the minister: Given the aging population in Kings County, why is the planned replacement for the Riverview Manor, already twice delayed, the same size as the existing facility?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, once again, we have done significant investments into long-term care in this province.

In fact, actually, I think we've increased long-term care beds in this province since 2007 by about 145 new beds.

When it comes to the issue of the Riverview Manor, yes, it's unfortunate that we didn't get construction started this fiscal year, but it is going start next year. All the planning is in place.

**Mr. Trivers:** It's not going to be big enough. Why is it the same size?

**Mr. Henderson:** We are going to be replacing that facility at the same amount of beds that are currently there.

But we're also in the process of working on a long-term care strategy in this province. Things that we're going to be looking at are the potential of more beds that will be distributed across the province, the situation of how we assess long-term care, and we'll try to be developing that as we move forward, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Third Party, second supplementary.

### HW and rural PEI

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It seems to me we have two choices here. We either do what this government has chosen to do, which is to ignore the demographic trends and do nothing to prepare for that, or we look to the future, we take action, and we start to plan for the decline that has been going on in rural communities on Prince Edward Island for decades.

A government official recently stated that the new approach to rural development would include every department.

A question to the minister: How will the department of health contribute to building a vibrant and prosperous rural Prince Edward Island?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Mr. Speaker, it is very important that we look at a holistic approach to this province, whether it's regarding the health care of Islanders or whether it's the long-term care needs of Islanders.

When we talk about long-term care and having our seniors age gracefully and with pride and dignity in this province, there's a number of approaches that you can take. One of the services that are out there, obviously through the private, non-profit sector, are the community care facilities that are out there. I believe in the hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, there's an

expansion going on there in community care.

**Ms. Compton:** Waiting for the (Indistinct).

**Mr. Henderson:** We also look at the issues around home care and supports, Mr. Speaker.

We've increased our home care investment in our department I think about 40-some per cent in the last number of years, and will continue to invest in home care, but also, as we look and as we move forward about a long-term care strategy.

If you are well aware, we have 1,141 long-term beds in this province. Those beds are distributed in the private sector as well as they are in the public sector. We will be reviewing those, and we do that periodically to make sure that our long-term care beds are utilized properly and that they're distributed across the province properly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

### Adult literary organizations

**Mr. Dumville:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A recent study by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development in partnerships with Statistics Canada showed the province had a rate of 45% illiteracy among Islanders aged 16-65 years.

Could the Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning update the House on his department's work with adult literacy organizations on Prince Edward Island?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

**Mr. R. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have to go to the individual that has a problem with reading or writing or math. Their world is closed when it comes to the online world, when it comes to working in societies today. We have to do everything we can as a government to assist people in learning to read and write and numeracy.

Our department is working extremely hard with organizations across the province to outreach to as many people that require upgrading in order for them to gain skills in the reading and writing area.

Last year we had a family in this Legislature from Scotchfort. The father said he went back to school because he could not read to his daughter. He went to school, got a reading skill, and that person has a new life now. He can read to his daughter, he can read himself. We are doing everything we can to increase across Prince Edward Island the skills that people require in order to increase reading and writing, Mr. Speaker, and we'll continue to do that.

Thank you.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, your first supplementary question.

### **Federal literacy funding cutbacks**

**Mr. Dumville:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to compliment the government on their generosity with the *Guardian's* Raise a Reader Program, contributing money to that.

There have been federal cutbacks in literacy funding in recent years. Has the minister reviewed this matter with federal MPs, or the federal minister that's responsible?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

**Mr. R. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, want to congratulate all the donors of Raise a Reader, it was a great event across Prince Edward Island. I'd say all the MLAs in this Legislature took part in it, raising money to help our fellow Islanders learn how to read and write, a great cause.

I was proud to announce also that the Province of Prince Edward Island made an equal contribution to the number that was contributed by the people of Prince Edward Island. That money goes a long way on helping a lot of people on Prince Edward Island.

The federal government recognizes that there is an issue with this, not only in Prince Edward Island but right across this country. We are working with the federal government to come up with new programs in order to outreach more and more, mostly to people that require the services. We will be working with the federal government in order to ensure that these programs are given equally across the board.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale, your second supplementary question.

### **Adult literacy and Rotary program**

**Mr. Dumville:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Charlottetown Rotary Club has a literacy initiative, and I just wondered: Would the minister work with this organization, or his department contact Rotary, to advance their program?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

**Mr. R. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do want to thank the Rotary Club of Prince Edward Island for their efforts in assisting in this matter. It is great that organizations come forward to assist this. All Islanders recognize this as being a concern, and all Islanders are willing to assist in helping fellow Islanders gain skills that are required.

I will work with any organization that comes along that is wanting to help other Islanders advance themselves. Because if all Islanders don't have an opportunity to advance, that's not the kind of Prince Edward Island, I don't think, any Islander wants. We will do whatever we can to assist anyone requiring skill level upgrades to have those skill level upgrades.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

### **Western Hospital activity director**

**Mr. Murphy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a little odd not looking directly at him when he's right beside me to ask the question. Anyway, my question is for the minister of health and wellness.

There are currently a number of patients in the Western Hospital in Alberton that have been medically discharged and they're waiting to get into a manor bed or a long-term care facility. I've been hearing from the families of these parents, and they're telling me that their loved ones' mobility is declining from lack of an activity director.

My question today to the minister here is: Will you look at finding some funding somewhere to hire an activity director for these folks that are spending up to several months in the hospital?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

It is good to have the hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville next to me here. We're kind of partners for the west.

Anyway, it is an important issue here and I would say that the well-being of Island seniors is extremely important to our government, and myself as the minister, and we have and will invest in the care and comfort and independence of our Island seniors.

Just to clarify a little bit about the hon. member's question in regard there, there are currently about 12 Islanders that have been medically discharged at Western Hospital in Alberton and they are awaiting long-term care. There is about four at the Community Hospital in O'Leary and about nine at Prince County Hospital. Together it's very important that we work on trying to improve the transition of those individuals from hospital beds eventually into long-term care.

We are doing that currently. We have offered that our long-term care facilities work and invite those in acute care to go to those long-term care day programs, and we have a number of other programs to help transition those Islanders into long-term care, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville, your first supplementary.

### **Transportation and mobility activity**

**Mr. Murphy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Is there transportation available for these folks to get to these programs? I think most of them would be in a bed and would have very limited mobility. (Indistinct).

Is there transportation provided for these folks to get this or will you look at maybe, even if it was on a part-time basis, hiring somebody to go into the facilities on a part-time basis and provide different types of activities that they may require to keep the mobility and enhance their quality of life?

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

**Mr. Henderson:** Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, when we do look at the situation there are opportunities to transition people from acute care. The families, we can coordinate things around that. We also have services through Transportation West.

But I think I would want to comment that the hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville has made a good point and he has continued to lobby on behalf of his constituents.

He may be also aware that if he read the Public Service Commission website that on October 26<sup>th</sup> there was a position advertised for the western region as a project coordinator to look at the holistic approach to integrating some of our services around recreation. As well, we also hired recently an occupational therapist in the west and those individuals are going to look at trying to integrate those people into all the services that (Indistinct) enjoy their stay at those hospitals.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

### **Ferry service**

**Ms. Compton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This summer our province suffered an entirely avoidable crisis with the Wood

Islands ferry service. A number of people here in the gallery, and overflow at the J. Angus MacLean Building, are here today. It concerned them and I'm here to ask some questions on that.

The problem came to light in May and the Premier failed to say a single thing on this issue until the end of July.

Premier, why have you failed to show leadership on the ferry issue?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, within 24 hours of the announcement of the withdrawal of the ferry I was in touch, my office was in touch, with the office of Minister Lawrence MacAulay, and through him with the federal government, to suggest a very precise solution, which was to point out that the *Captain Earl Windsor* ferry that has operated on the Fogo Island run and the Change Islands run in Newfoundland and has now been replaced by a vessel named the *MV Veteran* – the *Captain Earl Windsor* formerly operated on the Nova Scotia-PEI run – and to make the precise suggestion and to urge the federal government to seek out the availability of the *Captain Earl Windsor* to serve on the PEI-Nova Scotia run.

Our approach was to get to work on it and we did.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

**Ms. Compton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to hear that you do have that pull and that you will continue to move this issue. But it would have been good for Islanders, especially Islanders in eastern PEI, to realize that you were working on their behalf. The only thing we heard was blame, and after three months you came forward after I basically said you didn't.

We would like to know, Premier, why you didn't share with us what you were doing on behalf of Islanders.

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I think is very important for all of us, community advocates, members on all sides of this House, and our government to bear in mind, is that the Nova Scotia-PEI ferry service is an interprovincial undertaking under the full responsibility of the federal government, a constitutional responsibility of the federal government that has been funded by the federal government from its inception, the ferries and the docks and the landing facilities.

Our approach to this was to advocate from day one, to reach out, to take steps, and to let it be known that we were looking for solutions, but not to step into the space where the federal government could get away from its responsibility.

Our view is that it's the Department of Transport, Northumberland Ferries as the company, and ultimately the federal government as the order of government with the constitutional responsibility to provide that service. We have been very direct in every sense in letting it be known that we favour a two-ferry effective, continuous, and modern service on that run because we understand what it means to this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River.

**Ms. Compton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Favouring two ferries is not enough, Premier. We need you to operate and offer some solutions to this province, to Eastern PEI, on the ferry problem that we had all summer long. To say that you made a phone call is not enough. This is affecting ferry workers, truckers, small businesses, and many constituents, Premier. They face challenges in Wood Islands, the workers face challenges with the tourists that were there, how upset they were. This is a vital transportation link of the province.

Premier, why is the Wood Islands ferry not a major infrastructure priority for your government? It affects the province.

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct).

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy.

**An Hon. Member:** Minister soapbox here.

**Speaker:** Order, please!

**Ms. Biggar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I first of all want to welcome all of the workers that are here in the gallery and those that are watching .

I want to assure those people that are here and the people of Kings County that my department has been working very diligently in communicating with the minister of transportation, the federal minister, on behalf of our concerns as to why this ferry – and we also want answers from Newfoundland ferries as to why that was let to get to the stage that it got to that it was taken out of service.

Our responsibility is not for infrastructure –

**Mr. LaVie:** Newfoundland ferries?

**Ms. Biggar:** – for the ferries and I want to make that very clear.

In regard to the Northumberland Ferries, the federal government is responsible not only for the ferries, but also for maintaining the infrastructure that goes with that ferry.

Now, we do not have a mandate or criteria from infrastructure dollars that was delegated to Prince Edward Island to put towards the ferries, and we are adamant that the federal government should honour their commitment constitutionally to this province.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Belfast-Murray River, final question.

**Ms. Compton:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's great. We understand it's constitutionally a federal issue. Twenty-seven million dollars in the economy of this province comes from that ferry service. This is a provincial issue.

Premier, I am calling on you to set up a ferry task force to be established with local voices, the federal government, our partners

in Nova Scotia – including the premier and the transportation minister – and your government.

Will you show leadership and sign on a ferry task force for a development of a long-term plan for our ferry?

**Speaker:** The hon. Premier.

**Premier MacLauchlan:** Mr. Speaker, I know this matter is to be debated shortly in a motion, at least that's my understanding, and I'd be happy to speak on that at the time.

But let me say I think we should all recognize, and I think all Prince Edward Islanders do, and certainly people in Eastern Prince Edward Island, that this province and the eastern part of this province are very fortunate to have one of the most capable representatives in an MP and in a regional minister in the hon. Lawrence MacAulay who's represented that district for almost 30 years and is totally committed to this.

We're working very closely with the hon. Lawrence MacAulay and respect the part that he plays, and are totally behind his efforts, and in partnership with the efforts of the federal government, to solve the problem and provide an effective two-ferry service at Wood Islands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[End of Question Period]