



Session:	4/62
Year:	2006
Date:	23.11.06
No:	4

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

**TRANSCRIPT OF
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS
AND THE
ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
FOR**

Thursday 23 November 2006

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD 23 NOVEMBER 2006 PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

INDUCTEE TO ATLANTIC AGRICULTURE HALL OF FAME

Speaker: The hon. Member from Borden-Kinkora.

Mr. McCardle: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to offer congratulations on behalf of the agricultural community of Prince Edward Island to the family of the late Colbourne Clow on his recent induction into the Atlantic Agricultural Hall of Fame.

A most deserving gentleman, Mr. Clow began his career on the 5th generation family farm in Freetown. It was there that he established Cassialane Farms, an award winning, nationally known dairy farm now run by his son, Derwin.

Mr. Speaker, Colbourne Clow was dedicated to farm life and worked tirelessly on behalf of the farming community. Over the years, he was awarded numerous championships and breeder awards provincially, regionally, and nationally, not only for his Holstein cattle but also for his purebred poultry.

Mr. Clow was recognized as a leader in our provincial agriculture community and was the founding president of the Central PEI Holstein Club, President and Director of the PEI Holstein Association, and served on the Natural Products Appeals Tribunal for Agriculture and Forestry.

Always interested in community, Colbourne received the Hedge Row Award from the Bedeque Bay Environmental Management Association and the Farm Section Award from

the Rural Beautification Society in 2003.

Nominated by the PEI Federation of Agriculture for outstanding achievement in the agricultural industry, there is no doubt the late Colbourne Clow was a most worthy candidate for induction into the Atlantic Agricultural Hall of Fame.

Once again on behalf of the Island agricultural community and all Islanders, I offer sincere congratulations to the family of the late Colbourne Clow on this most deserving recognition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

SUMMERSIDE CHRISTMAS PARADE

Ms. MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, once again this year, the members of the Downtown Business Association of Summerside are organizing the annual Christmas Parade.

This year's parade will be held Monday, November 27th, starting at 6:30 p.m. and will have bands, floats, and lots of Christmas characters frolicking along the parade route from the old Holland College parking lot and winding its way through the city streets to the Waterfront Shopping Centre.

Special thanks go to the Downtown Business Association and sponsors, the Waterfront Shopping Centre, and the County Fair Mall.

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After the parade, everyone is invited into the mall to have some cookies and hot chocolate and Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus will make themselves available to any of the youngsters who wish to visit with them.

I extend an invitation to my honourable colleagues and to all Islanders to spend some time next Monday evening in Summerside and enjoy the hospitality of the wonderful folks who live there.

My congratulations and thanks to everyone who has assisted to make this parade the great success it always is.

Once again, come and join us for a fun-filled evening in Summerside.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Kings Square.

DRUG & ADDICTION AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. R. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize National Drug and Addiction Awareness Week, November 19th to the 25th. This week began as a grass roots initiative in the early Eighties when it was officially recognized by the federal minister of health in 1987.

Mr. Speaker, our Caucus has taken the view that the issue of drug and alcohol addiction is particularly serious as it relates to our young

population. While addictions and substance abuse at any age is a serious social concern, it is simply heartbreaking to see our young people who should be looking towards a future, a good future, but is looking towards a future struggle with addictions and drugs and alcohol.

To this end, we advocated before the opening of the House, a drug and addiction strategy that would address the unique needs of our youth. Our call for this strategy was based upon consultation with parents' groups, mothers and fathers battling to rescue their children from the grasp of this difficult social challenge. Let me declare: Drug and alcohol are a problem among our youth on Prince Edward Island. We might be a gentle Island but this is not a gentle, social problem. It is here and we must face it head on. As parents, as legislators, as families and friends, we all have a role to play in combatting the problem of drug and alcohol addictions among our youth.

In promoting Drug Awareness Week, the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse offered a detailed overview of various activities. Page after page, they identified various provinces and what they were doing towards this problem. For PEI the offer was one line, one line for Prince Edward Island and I want to read you this line what our province is doing for youth drug addictions. PEI does not have a drug awareness coordinator and activities at the regional level are limited. Mr. Speaker, as legislators this is unacceptable. As parents, it is unacceptable. As a province, we must commit ourselves to do more. We must change the attitude and we must act now.

We met with a group from Summerside just a

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few weeks ago. Parents are suffering. They want help for their children. My heart goes out to them. We have to do something in this. I thought the government would announce something in the Throne speech. I was extremely disappointed they didn't but this side of the House will continue to fight for this problem and get something done in this area because it's the youth of Prince Edward Island we should be looking out for.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Questions by Members starting with Responses to Questions Taken as Notice.

The hon. Member from Park Corner-Oyster Bed.

Ms. MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, when do you raise a point of privilege with regards to a newspaper article?

Speaker: You can raise it now, hon. member.

Ms. MacKenzie: Yes, in *The Guardian* this morning, it was referred to my second job and yesterday when I was interviewed by reporters, I explained it was necessary for me to seek employment outside of the Legislature to maintain my professional body license and that was left out, and that's why I do seek employment. And I require x number of hours every year in a five-year span to maintain my nursing license and that was neglected from the story and every summer I seek work. And I'm lucky enough now to have a contract for a year so that will make it much easier because every summer I've had to go out and try and find work, the required number of

hours that I needed so I would just like to add that.

Thank you.

Speaker: Thank you, member.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

My first question today is for the minister of health and as the minister knows, PEI faces an acute shortage of speech language pathologists here in the province. In PEI, it is estimated that there is one speech language pathologist for every 4,050 students. On a per capita basis, PEI has among the poorest access in the country to speech language pathologists. Why, Mr. Minister, is your government failing so badly in recruiting these key health care professionals?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is an area that you may recall from the last sitting of the House that we explored from time to time and there hasn't been a lot of change in that area. We still are at - well, we've actually added one more individual. A person has come back from leave and I think that makes 20. There were 16.6 full time

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equivalents, which makes 20 individuals. We have been actively recruiting in this area and as the Leader of the Opposition has correctly indicated, there is an area there that certainly does need addressing and it is an area that we in the government have been attempting to do more in recruiting. It is not the fact that we do not have the budget available. It's just the opposite is that we cannot get the qualified individuals to fill that.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I understand that a full-time speech language pathologist working in O'Leary recently left, which is truly unfortunate. Representatives from the provincial association have told us that vacancies and positions in the west have been extremely hard to fill. One point five position took as long as two years to fill. Has the minister spoken to this individual who has chosen to leave? Has he spoken to her professional association to assess what could have been done to retain that individual?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, it's very difficult with professionals. They come into the province and, unfortunately, they make decisions sometimes to leave the province based on family and/or professional reasons. While I have not myself personally spoken to this individual, I understood that it was for personal reasons why they did leave that particular area. It's no different than in other professionals, i.e. nurses, doctors. It's difficult recruiting to rural areas. We are

presently taking a look in other areas, particularly that of physicians and nurses to see whether or not we can come up with some different and new interventions that will attract and also to keep these professionals. So it's not the fact that we would insist that people stay forever; you cannot. These are professionals and they, obviously, make up their own minds.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And it's actually kind of nice to hear that after 10 years that the minister is finally starting to believe that they have to look outside the box in terms of attracting health care professionals to our rural communities here on Prince Edward Island but I've got a new question for the minister of health. I understand that HRA was awarded a contract to study whether or not we indeed do have a shortage of speech language pathologists. Could the minister confirm if this is the case?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Yes, Mr. Speaker, they were awarded the contract.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The fact that the minister needed to hire a consulting firm to tell him what educators, parents, learning disability specialists have been telling his government for the last three

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years is really quite remarkable. I'm wondering: Could the minister please table the results of that study in the House?

Mr. R. Brown: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, on one hand the Leader of the Opposition says: Well, finally, you're going to be able to do something. You're going to start to think outside the box. When he hears of a group that we had asked to give us the type of thoughts that what can we do differently, what are these individuals looking for, then he drops all over the top of us and says: You're going the wrong direction. You should have been able to identify that for some other reasons. Mr. Speaker, again, you can't flip-flop. You can't have it both ways. These are, as I have indicated many times in many cases, young professionals. They come into the province, obviously, many of them fresh from school. They want to get their CV built up over time and then they're in many times anxious to move to other centres for other reasons.

We contracted with HR to see whether there were some other things that we can possibly do. I will investigate to see whether or not we can in fact share that study. As far as I know, it is a public study.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And I'd ask the minister to please pay more attention to my questions as I was asking

questions directly before on whether or not HRA was doing a report into seeing whether or not we have a shortage of speech language pathologists here in the province, to which he indicated yes but that's okay. I hope he can get back to this House as soon as possible with that information so that we can see exactly what the government is paying for when we already knew what the problem was.

But I've got a new question now for the minister and nowhere is this government's abject failure in recruiting and retaining speech language pathologists more evident than in our school system. Is the minister aware that shortages of speech language pathologists are so bad that parents are being told that if they can afford to pay for private service that they should do so?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have been examining the issue. It is a known fact that there is increasing need for these professionals. There is a two-pronged approach. The Department of Health work with the pre-school age children in conducting assessments and evaluations and then it is up to the Department of Education through that ministry to be able to apply programs. They have added in this past year a number of specialists in that area but it is true that the private sector also has, I think it is, six individuals that are available for private consultation and as with any other opportunity, the private sector in this instance did see fit that there would be an opportunity to offer services to the public here. And if parents wish to avail themselves of those professionals, the service is there.

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Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I have a fundamental problem with that answer. That leads to two-tier education. It leads to two-tier children really where if a parent can afford to go out and pay for a child to get the help that they need with their speech problems, then that parent is able to do it. But for a family that's not able to do it, they're still stuck in waiting to get the necessary care that they need so that they can continue on with the education system, the same as any other child can and I really find that quite unfortunate. I'm wondering: does the minister support the move that schools are having parents, that parents are going out now and paying privately to have speech language pathologists take care of their children? Does he support that?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, again it is with any enterprise that is in the private sector, parents, consumers have every right and they will make the decision as to whether or not they want to access the service. I have certainly agreed that there is an ever growing need within the school population, within the population pre-schoolers. We do not have sufficient numbers to satisfy this and I'm sure that you are aware that only in the recent past - and I'm referring to the last five to seven years - that science has been able to because of the advantages and advances in technology been able to identify at an earlier age these children which do need the services of these specialists. So it is a relatively new science,

relatively new behaviours and evaluations have to be offered. And I'm sure that it is an area of need and concern and it's going to be addressed.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And I find it quite unfortunate that there is this somewhat of a two-tier system taking place now and I really wish that the minister would put more resources -

Mr. R. Brown: Private clinics.

Leader of the Opposition: - and ensure that we can have more speech language pathologists. But I believe if anyone is qualified to comment on the extent of the shortage of speech language pathologists on PEI, it would be the parents who have had to turn to privately paid services. I'm wondering: were any of the parents who were told that they should pay for speech language pathologist's services interviewed or consulted as part of your government's study?

Mr. R. Brown: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, I can only assume that they were. I do not have firsthand knowledge. I was not given an opportunity to have a briefing and/or at any time to be part of that study. I am sure that all areas and avenues would be thoroughly investigated as a very reputable company and they certainly are very exhaustive in their pursuit of information and

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details and that's why they make good recommendations to government and to anybody else who makes use of them. So I would certainly go out on a limb and indicate that I'm sure that contact would have been made. We have in the past had contact to the Learning Disabilities Association. There is a group there that represents the public and we have met with them on a number of occasions and that is the reason why we are kept abreast of the needs.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And I'm wondering: could the minister inform this House how many parents have had to secure privately paid services for their children because of this government's failure to attract the number of speech language pathologists that we have. Is it 10 parents, 50 parents, 100 parents? Could the minister please give us that information and if he doesn't have it, I'd ask him to bring it back hopefully when he tables the documents here in the House with regard to the HRA (indistinct)?

Mr. R. Brown: Good question.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, I do not have an exact number so I'm certainly not going to guess at it. I do know that the number is higher in Queens County than it is in Kings and in Prince County. Obviously - and I shouldn't necessarily say 'obviously' - I believe part of that is a reflection of the higher

population base that would be available in Queens County but I do not have the number of individuals or parents. There is no reason why I would necessarily know that number. I mean it would not be necessary for parents to check with us before as to whether they should or should not go and also as a followup if there is no need so there would be no direct contact with my department.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And I'll move on to a new line of questioning for the minister but I really hope that he gets back to this House with the information that we're looking for as soon as possible.

RECRUITMENT OF RADIOLOGISTS

Mr. Minister, the delays experienced by Island women requiring mammograms is nothing short of negligence on the part of the provincial government. The fact that our radiologists on PEI have had to go out and plead with their colleagues from other provinces to come and temporarily help, I believe, is a sad story. Clearly, this is an indication of the Conservatives complete failure in recruiting these health care professionals. Mr. Minister, why has your government been so unsuccessful in filling the two vacancies that exist in radiology? What happened to your dramatically expanded doctor recruitment budget and that list of prospects you kept waving about?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

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Mr. Gillan: Well, Mr. Speaker, as in the previous line of questioning regarding SLPs or the speech language pathologists, in all areas of professionals - and I've indicated this many times before - we are very fortunate in this province to be securing many of these young professionals right out of their training schools. We've also been able to reach out and bring in individuals with a number of years' experience. Not all of those for any number of reasons both personal and professional choose to remain with us forever. That has been the case with the radiologists. It was only last year, 2005, that we lost two radiologists, a husband and a wife team. This has happened to us before and I think that the Leader of the Opposition probably knows of a number of husband and wife teams that have left the province. They did so for professional reasons and you cannot stop that. So in the interim between the time that they have left and, yes, our recruiting efforts were certainly on, the radiologists that were left were able to keep going for awhile but, again, there were a number of events which unfortunately occurred which created a backlog but it was not for a reason that we were not actively recruiting; we have been.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And I know the minister likes to talk all the time about all the great recruiting that they're doing but, unfortunately, there still seems to be vacancies left all the time and this government has now been in power for the last 10 years and have had an opportunity to come up with new strategies and it failed every step of the way. And you know now

with the mammograms, in some instances Island women with a history of breast cancer in their families are being forced to wait months for an exam. I'm wondering: will the minister please tell the House as to how specifically he and his officials have gone out to try and fill the two radiology positions on a full-time basis?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated on our website, we actively recruit and make known to specialists and family physicians of the openings and the possibilities of working here in the province. We also, not only with the website, attend job fairs but also it is the contact that professionals, i.e. the doctors, radiologists, in this case an influence that they could have on their colleagues, their classmates, their former classmates that we have found over the last number of years that is very rewarding and, indeed, those are where good contacts have been made.

So we make abundant use of all methods of advertising to get the word out. And in this case, it did come to fruition that at a recent conference when we did have a couple of radiologists from the Island in Montreal. It was a national conference and they put out the word that, indeed, they could use the assistance of some and a number of locums have appeared from that. So we have made use of all of the normal advertising channels as well as word of mouth.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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That was a very interesting answer because the Canadian Medical Association offers a national advertising service for hospitals and provinces trying to recruit doctors. We've done some research into what other jurisdictions are doing to recruit radiologists. The CMA advertises openings for radiologists. This is an organization that over 80% of all Canadian doctors belong to and on that site we find radiologists. Vancouver Island is advertising for radiologists, Vancouver, Sudbury, Winnipeg, Vancouver Island again, Alberta but nothing from Prince Edward Island, not one advertisement, not one nickel of that so-called new doctor recruitment spent on actually telling radiologists that we want them to work here. Why, Mr. Minister? Why the lack of action on recruiting new full-time radiologists on Prince Edward Island?

Mr. R. Brown: They don't want them.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've indicated in the previous answer that we make use of any and all advertising opportunities. We do use the Internet. We do use the journals. We do use word of mouth and I have been told that not every month is it good advice to keep putting the same advertisement in the same area. We have, for instance in the past, skipped a month in some of the journals about putting in our advertisement for Prince Edward Island. Apparently, that is a bit of marketing opportunity that if you skip a period of time and then go back, they look at it as a fresh opportunity. I'm sure that the Opposition may not have heard of that or would certainly not agree with it. I'm not sure

whether in the case of the CMA that that indeed is the possibility but we have made use, extensive use of all of the advertising forms.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Another interesting answer from this minister so let me try and direct my next question to the Premier. Mr. Premier, you, sir, have spent thousands upon thousands of taxpayers' dollars advertising your own government for your own vanity ads. We see ads all the time of you and the minister of development out showing how you're spending taxpayers' dollars. You advertise in the newspapers. You put on nice blue print just like the Conservative Party in Prince Edward Island. July 26th, September 13th, September 14th, October 8th, September 22nd - all this for advertising the Premier's own vanity ads.

Mr. R. Brown: Shame, shame!

Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Premier, don't you think that Island women requiring life-saving mammograms would be better served by a government that put money into advertising for new radiologists rather than half-page self-promotion ads that do nothing but pad your own ego?

Mr. R. Brown: Shame!

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Binns: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that government advertises in a number of areas. We certainly promote job

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creation on PEI. We want to promote the fact that good things are happening across Prince Edward Island. It's important for young people to know that there are opportunities today in bio-science, that there are opportunities in IT and communications, that there are opportunities in aerospace, that there are opportunities in alternative energy, those sorts of things. And really, it's because of the initiatives we've taken in letting people know that those opportunities are here that we're getting a tremendous enrollment in programs at Holland College, in the university in these fields that employment continues to grow in Prince Edward Island and we're not doing that at the neglect of funding for health care or advertising for health care. In fact, we advertise heavily in the health care field as well. We're spending a lot of money on recruitment on an ongoing basis. That recruitment has been successful. Do we have areas that need continued attention? Absolutely. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we have more doctors on Prince Edward Island today than we ever had in the history of Prince Edward Island. We have more nurses working in Prince Edward Island today than we ever had in the history of Prince Edward Island and that's because we have had strong recruitment efforts, including advertising where necessary.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, but I think the Premier should really get in touch with the people waiting at the emergency rooms at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (indistinct) in touch with the people who can't go to an emergency

room in Souris. He should really get in touch with the thousands of Islanders that still don't have a family doctor but, unfortunately, this Premier still believes that he should be putting out ads telling Islanders how he's spending their own taxpayers' dollars when that's in fact his job anyway. There's no reason to go out and promote yourself like that when we have shortages in our health care fields. I'm wondering: does the minister of health, would he rather have those dollars that this Premier is wasting on these ads and rather spend them in recruiting doctors or does he agree with this Premier?

Mr. R. Brown: Yes, he agrees with the Premier (indistinct)

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier has indicated in replying to the question, a big part of our budget is advertising. We do have a very viable recruitment effort we've had for many, many years now. Since the beginning of 2000, we have attracted over 90 physicians through our recruitment efforts here on Prince Edward Island. Obviously, not all of the 90 have remained but over half of them certainly have. Since 1996, over 100 people have been recruited so the word is getting out; however, it is filling specific specialties that it is often very difficult. I know that we have worked with the Ontario radiologists in advertising in their newsletter for this and *The Medical Post* I've indicated a number of these different magazines and we will continue to recruit through those areas.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

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OPEN HOUSE AT WIND FARM

Mr. Mooney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, you know in our district not unlike the fixed link, there's just a real marvel of technology taking place with the wind farm. And I've had a few calls from constituents that because of security reasons they're not allowed in to actually see the cranes work and do some of the heavy lifting and they're wondering for the possibility of having somewhat of an open house. So my question is to the minister of energy and environment if that's a possibility.

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

Mr. R. Brown: Cake and cookies and everything.

Mr. Ballem: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There'll be no cake and cookies but the member raises a good question and a good point. Because of the heavy equipment, it's a construction site and it's not possible for the public to have access to it on a regular basis. But that's a good suggestion and I think we'll be able to accommodate the residents from Eastern Kings and the public in general to allow that to happen.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Souris-Elmira.

Mr. Mooney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying, this is one of the largest cranes that's ever worked on Prince Edward Island. A lot of the seniors in my area would

really love to see this up close before it's taken apart so I guess I'd like to pinpoint this Sunday afternoon.

Speaker: All right, hon. members.

Mr. Mooney: The reason, Mr. Speaker, is because I believe this is a tremendous project. It's going to be finishing fairly soon and I'd kind of like to have constituents able to see this work in progress before the completion. Thank you.

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

Mr. Ballem: It's hard to say no now. Yes, Mr. Speaker, on Sunday afternoon, we will make buses available for people to come to the site. We do need to have people stay away from the site though with their cars and at the Eastern Kings Community Centre, we'd ask them to go there.

As the member did point out, the crane operating there is the largest ever to operate in Prince Edward Island and I know some people in this Assembly have operated cranes in the past and they're more than welcome to come and look at the big machines too.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

INITIATIVES FOR ORGANIC FARMING

Mr. Arsenault: Merci, monsieur président.

I have a question for the Minister of

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture. In the spring 2006 Budget, our government announced an additional \$500,000 to be devoted to organic market development, training, risk management and business planning. I understood that this additional funding would be the first year in a five-year development program and government will be allocating \$1 million in each of the successive years. And my question is this: Could the minister inform the House as to where the dollars have been spent?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, our department has put a program together. It's an organic industry development program to work with the organic people. It was finished. The program was put together and it was open to applications beginning the first of July and to date, we have approved a number of projects and we've approved four really large projects; one being a dairy project, another one is potato packaging facility, another has been a greenhouse operation, and another one has been for grains and oil seeds. So these are four major projects that will help for the development of the organic industry in the province of the Island.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Evangeline-Miscouche.

Mr. Arsenault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just a supplementary question. Could the minister perhaps give us more detail on how the industry has benefitted from this, from these initiatives?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture.

Mr. Bagnall: Well, the province recognized that the organic industry was an industry that we had to promote here on Prince Edward Island. It's been increasing approximately 20% a year for the last years and into the forseeing future that we see organic products moving ahead and forward. And I guess one of the real success stories of our promotion would be the organic, natural and organic group and PEI Pork Plus that have come together and took over the Garden Province Meat facility. And they say that part of the reason that they are here is because of our heavy commitment to organic on Prince Edward Island and they wanted to be in the ground floor and move forward in this industry. So we've seen the new owners of the Garden Province Meat based on our organic commitment and I'm sure we'll see many developments in the future based on our commitment to organic.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Crapaud-Hazel Grove.

CLEANING SUPPLY PURCHASES FOR NURSING HOMES

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question today for the minister of health, a question in regards to the cleaning and chemical supplies that are being purchased for the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Prince County, Colville Manor, Beach Grove - from whom are these being purchased from, Mr. Minister?

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Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, I do know. I don't have the name of the companies. I do know that I spoke to an individual here a short while ago and he was concerned. He was the Maritime distributor and we have made a collective decision and we are now going to be looking at buying our supplies for the hospitals from an area, a much wider area, and I believe it is now going to the Atlantic area through Merx or the procurement services which means that the company and the individual that is presently providing many of those supplies and services will not be doing so in the future.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Crapaud-Hazel Grove.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

From what I'm told and I've been contacted by small business owners who have participated in the contract for these supplies in the past - am I under the understanding, Mr. Minister, from your comment that this is now part of the Maritime agreement? It wasn't before; it now is part of this new three-year contract, yes or no.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: I understand that that is correct that this call for supplies has gone out. It was an open tendering process and prior to this time it was, as I said, a decision that we were making on Prince Edward Island but now it is open for bids on an Atlantic wide basis.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Crapaud-Hazel Grove.

Ms. Bertram: I guess the question is why. Here we have - there were various small businesses on Prince Edward Island benefitting from this government contract and it's a sure contract that they have. Why would government - why, Mr. Minister, would your department decide or transportation decide to tender this out under the Maritime agreement where in the past it wasn't?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, the response for that is fairly obvious is that we are expected, as government, to get the very best possible services at the very best possible rates. This is the reason why we have gone on a wider area. This is the reason why we have an Atlantic procurement agreements so while it is advantageous and it is nice and it is comfortable to be able to offer whatever services we can for suppliers at home, we also have to be able to get the very best possible price on this. It is open for everyone including Islanders, obviously, to tender but we are expecting and going to be able to get the very best price.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Crapaud-Hazel Grove.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For the record, what is the value of this contract?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

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Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, I do not have that figure committed to memory. I know that it is substantial.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Crapaud-Hazel Grove.

Ms. Bertram: Mr. Speaker, one of the small business owners that contacted me, I believe it was \$50,000 to \$75,000 that was a benefit to their small business here on Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Minister, are you able or will you table the tender, those that did tender for this and the prices for this and the contract that was signed between this company and your government, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: Mr. Speaker, that is available I'm sure. I imagine it would be on the Internet but if not, I would certainly make it possible. But I understand that we were also able, however, to give out still an existing piece of business to this particular individual and his company and he is a Maritime-wide representative so there is a portion of it that he can be competitive in. There's also another part of that is that if we're speaking about the same individual, he also provides a very good program of repair and I understand that we would still be looking to him for that service.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Crapaud-Hazel Grove.

Ms. Bertram: Mr. Speaker, I'm not speaking of just one company in particular. There's various Island companies and we need to

support Island businesses here on Prince Edward Island. Now if the minister is prepared to say it went to the tendering process. It was fair and it went through the Maritime agreement, many of the provinces have a 10% variance, a 10% variance, the threshold in the tendering process for in-province tenders related to that province. Did your department or did transportation and public works use that 10% variance or do we have that 10% variance where in fact that will support Island businesses and the tendering process for Island businesses here on Prince Edward Island, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors.

Mr. Gillan: No. Mr. Speaker, I indicated at the outset of the line of questioning, I wasn't absolutely sure of the figures. I can only assume that 10% variance principle was followed. Once again, I will be making the figures available to the Opposition and they will be able to take a look at them.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Crapaud-Hazel Grove.

VISITOR TAX REBATE

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll go on to another line of questioning. Questions for the Minister of Tourism.

In September of this year, there were federal announcements made where the federal government was proposing amendments to the federal *Excise Tax Act* and I'm going to ask the minister and this is related to the visitor tax rebate and there's various implications.

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Do you agree, Mr. Minister, that this was a marketing tool that was valuable and with its elimination is going to create challenges to the tourism industry this coming season?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism.

Mr. P. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And when there were changes announced to the visitor rebate program, I did contact the minister of industry and other people within the federal government to make them aware of the challenges that this would present to the tourism industry. Also attended the Tourism Industry Association of Canada annual summit where this was discussed in great detail and this will be an item that we are going to discuss coming on December 3rd and 4th when the ministers from the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers meet.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Crapaud-Hazel Grove.

Ms. Bertram: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Minister, do you believe that the federal government is making the wrong decision by eliminating this visitor tax rebate?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism.

Mr. P. Brown: Mr. Speaker, this is certainly a complex issue and 3% of visitors, international visitors that are coming to the country exercising their option to participate in the visitor rebate program. We do have to see if the energy and effort spent on this particular initiative is where we should be directing our efforts. Certainly, 3%

participation rate would speak to it not being as effective as other measures. We feel that - the tourism industry feels that there is opportunity for the federal government to support the Canada grant through marketing initiatives of the Canadian tourism (indistinct) and this may be an option to take. I did speak, as I mentioned, with Minister Bernier on Tuesday night on this issue and we'll be discussing it in Ottawa when the ministers meet.

Speaker: The hon. Member from Crapaud-Hazel Grove.

Ms. Bertram: Mr. Speaker, the minister's tune has changed. Perhaps now it's because he has counterparts in Ottawa that he would like to side in with but in fact the minister, he went back into September and he stated that this was a bad cut for tourism here in Prince Edward Island. Now he's saying that, well, perhaps there's other measures. Mr. Speaker, countries in the OECD have this. We are part of the OECD. It's a reciprocal thing. If we travel to other countries in the world, we receive this rebate as well if we travel. So how can a Canadian government support such a decision? How can a Minister of Tourism here on Prince Edward Island support such a decision federally? My question is this: Did you go to the committee hearings? Did you present your case for the tourism industry here in Prince Edward Island as minister responsible at the parliamentary proceedings in Ottawa and fight for this case and fight for the tourism industry here on PEI?

Leader of the Opposition: Right. Did you do that?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism. All

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right, hon. member.

Mr. P. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And, no, I wasn't part of the presentation. That was an industry presentation of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada. I would like to inform the member that I was the only minister of any Canadian province or the federal government that attended the tourism industry association annual summit. I participated with Randy Williams, President, CEO of the organization on this debate and that was to be an industry presentation. I was well informed of it and that is why I spoke to Minister Bernier and why I'm taking up the issue at the meeting of the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Crapaud-Hazel Grove.

Ms. Bertram: Mr. Speaker, this is an \$80 million worth decision. If the federal Government of Canada makes this decision, it's going to be \$80 million plus affecting the tourism industry here in Canada. This is a significant blow, a very significant blow to such an important industry that needs to be supported in this day and age with all the struggles it's been going through.

Now it's interesting to note that the minister states that he did not present his case in front of the parliamentary committee looking into this because, in fact, we had a union representative. We had other members of the community here on Prince Edward Island go up and make case to the parliamentary

committee. Why, as the minister or someone from your department, did you not represent PEI at these parliamentary proceedings to fight for PEI to fight for the industry here on Prince Edward Island?

Some Hon. Members: Shame, shame!

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism.

Mr. P. Brown: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I was not going to take part in the grandstanding of the MP from Egmont in pretending that he was all of a sudden in favour of this particular program. But as I did indicate, I brought this issue to the attention of the ministers responsible. I'm going to ensure that it's on the agenda but at the federal-provincial-territorial meeting. But I do want to say the hon. Jim Bradley, the Liberal Minister of Tourism for the province of Ontario, which has the most cross-border travel of any province in Canada, said that this was secondary in his concerns at the upcoming ministers' meeting to the western hemisphere travel initiative. So less than 10% of our visitors here are international visitors and so it doesn't affect us to the same level but we think it's a serious issue. That's why I'm bringing it up and we're going to work with the Government of Canada to enhance tourism in our country.

Speaker: Final question. The hon. Member from Crapaud-Hazel Grove.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bertram: Mr. Speaker, the tune is changing. Here is a quote from the minister. It was a marketing tool that was valuable and with its elimination, it's going to create

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challenges to the tourism industry, stated by the minister in a press release to *The Guardian*. And Mr. Speaker, this is an important component. It's important for the convention industry here on Prince Edward Island. There's many components, exhibitors to these conventions. It's very important and I am very disappointed that the minister here is not stating this. He represented us at the parliamentary proceedings.

My question is this: How are you going to lobby your federal counterparts in Ottawa and fight for this for PEI, fight for industry here on Prince Edward Island, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism.

Mr. P. Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And there must be trouble with hearing on the other side of the House. I did tell the hon. member that I lobbied at the Tourism Association of Canada, the highest industry association in the country. I was the only provincial minister there and the closing comments made note of that. I did lobby the minister responsible for tourism in Canada. I did ensure that this will be part of the agenda of the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers' meeting.

Now I do want to say that it is fair to analyse a program that is only accessed by 3% of the people that have availability to that particular program. So it is in fairness if I had a program in my department that was only utilized by 3% of those to which it was available, I would have to question at some point whether or not that was a valuable program. Now we have to do that and I will certainly lobby the federal

government in regards to this program.

Speaker: End of Question Period.