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STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

Tuesday 16 October 2007

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Madam Speaker: We're going to start with the Government House Leader.

TRIBUTE TO CANADIAN SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN

Mr. Vessey: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise in my place today to congratulate and to welcome back those brave, young men and women of our Canadian forces who have recently arrived home to the safe and welcoming soil of Prince Edward Island. These young, Canadian heroes are all part of illustrious Island units representing some of the oldest reserve units whose personnel have fought and died in conflicts new and old.

My colleagues and I recognize and appreciate the sacrifices made by these service men and women, all individuals who serve, and those who are still serving. It is the selfless dedication of the brave men and women of the Canadian forces who protect the rights, the freedoms, and the security of Canada that we have all come to rely on.

Madam Speaker, Remembrance Day is just around the corner, the day we all pause to remember those who paid the supreme sacrifice and the day we honour those who returned home from peacekeeping, peacemaking, and armed conflicts in countries remote from the safe and secure shores of our island.

As we go about our everyday busy and self-centered lives, we must stop and remember that we owe it all to our courageous soldiers, sailors, airmen and women, our brave military

personnel to ensure that every day, not just November 11th, is Remembrance Day here on Prince Edward Island.

Madam Speaker, if I may, I would request that all members of this legislature rise and offer a moment of silence of honour of those we recognize today and those who will never return home.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member from Summerside-Wilmot.

MAYOR'S MEDAL OF HONOUR

Ms. Sherry: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It is indeed a pleasure for me to stand today to represent all my colleagues in this Legislature as we honour and pay tribute to a very special Islander, the recipient of this year's 2007 Mayor's Medal of Honour from the city of Summerside. Madam Speaker, of course, I refer to Paul H. Schurman, a man who epitomizes the true meaning of just what this award stands for. Established in 2003, the Mayor's Medal of Honour recognizes those who have displayed special accomplishments or achievements, including the demonstration of outstanding contribution to the social, economic, or cultural life of Summerside.

I wish I had the time today to list all of the accomplishments of this gentleman's career but, sadly, I do not. However, I must say that Paul Schurman continues to be involved with numerous community, provincial, and national groups and organizations as he has over the past four and a half decades. Notable in the

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contributions of this fine gentleman is the fact that he has been a director with the PEI Special Olympics, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Foundation and the PEI division of the Canadian Paraplegic Association.

Madam Speaker, only a handful of our neighbours can boast the fact that they have been inducted in to the Canadian Association of Broadcasters Hall of Fame, the PEI Sports Hall of Fame, and have been named to both the Order of Prince Edward Island and the Order of Canada. Paul Schurman has done all of that and more. He has also received an honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of Prince Edward Island. Madam Speaker, Paul H. Schurman gives life to the expression that giants walk among us.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

TRIBUTE TO PEI REGIMENT MEMBERS

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It is with respect and admiration that I rise in the House today to pay special tribute to the men and women who proudly are members of the Prince Edward Island Regiment. The history of these citizens who made great contributions in the province has gone back to the 1780s when the Island's first militia act was passed by the General Assembly of the Island of St. Jean. The forerunner of Prince Edward Island's regiment was in 1875 under

the name of the 82nd Queens County Provisional Battalion of Infantry. This regiment sent a contingent of volunteers to the Boer War in 1899 earning the regiment's first battle of honour.

Today, the regiment is composed of a headquarters and two squadrons. They train in two armories; one located in Charlottetown, one located in Summerside with a total unit strength of about 140 personnel.

Over the years, members have volunteered for peacekeeping operations in the Middle East, Cyprus, and Bosnia, as well as participating in NATO training exercises in Germany. This year 15 members of the regiment completed a six month tour in Afghanistan during which one person, Corporal Tyler Coady was actually wounded in action. Other members of the regiment who served in Afghanistan includes: Captains Shawn Arbing, Kent MacRae, Andrew Petrie; Sgt. Randy McCourt; Master Corporals Mary Jean Murphy and Duane Keizer, and Corporals Calvin Arsenault, Matthew Duffy, Roy Good, Aaron Judson, Jerry Landry, Bailey Lidstone, Ben Miller, and Anthony MacLean.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of all members of the Assembly, may I say that we're not only grateful for their safe return but proud and thankful for their dedicated services to Canada in this very dangerous mission to improve the lives of Afghanistan people.

Thank you.

Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: Questions by Members. The hon. Leader of the Opposition, whenever

you're ready.

PHYSICIANS IN TYNE VALLEY

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

Madam Speaker, it is my distinct privilege to be able to lead off the first Question Period of this new session of the Prince Edward Island Legislature. We look forward to many lively and informative changes across the floor of this chamber in the days to come. Madam Speaker, my colleagues and I take very seriously our responsibility to hold government accountable to this Assembly and to all Islanders. My sincere congratulations and thanks to all the candidates and their supporters who staged a wonderful exercise in democracy in the bi-election in Belfast-Murray River and congratulations to the gentleman across the room. We're not allowed to say your name.

Madam Speaker, in May of 2007, this government won the endorsement of the people. You won government in the spring election, five months ago, on a number of factors not of which was a very long and expensive list of promises. Islanders are expectant of good things occurring in this mandate of this administration and we want Islanders to know that their loyal opposition will consistently demand an accounting of these commitments from the long list of promises from the spring election. Actually, the list was very, very long. I think I gave up counting at 100.

Madam Speaker, health care continues to be the number one priority of Islanders. This government's promise for a doctor for every citizen is one that you will be evaluated on

month to month, year to year until the next election but already government is failing in the area. Health care in the area of family physicians has deteriorated. Would the Premier tell this House how many full-time family physicians are practising today in Tyne Valley?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And that's a very good question and I'd like to thank the hon. member for that question because she's absolutely right. Health care is this new government's number one priority. That's why we have committed to introducing a residency program in this province. That's why we have committed to increasing our doctor recruitment budget by doubling it because we believe that every Islander does deserve access to a family physician. For too long now we've seen arbitrary numbers tossed into the air without any concrete plan in place. Well, we want to make sure that we deliver the best possible health care and we believe that that begins with primary care and every Islander having access to a family physician.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, my question is simple. How many doctors are practising medicine in the area of family practice in Tyne Valley today?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And we are working extremely hard right now to deliver on our promises of making sure that every Islander does have access to a family physician. For too long now we talked about how many doctors we are going to recruit, what we're going to do. Well, if we want to follow the *Canada Health Act*, if we want to make sure that we're living up to our obligations of delivering a public health care system, we have to make sure. So, Madam Speaker, we're working on attracting more doctors now. Unfortunately, there was a difficult situation in the Tyne Valley area. I believe that we have one doctor who is currently on the move to O'Leary. There were two doctors there working full time and now we're down to one physician.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

PHYSICIANS IN SOURIS

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you for the answer to that question.

How many doctors are practising in Souris?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Again in the Souris area, there were four doctors practising there for awhile. We've had difficulty over the last number of six months or so of retaining them. We've lost a couple. We're a couple of doctors short in the Souris area as well.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

From your website, I notice that you have several openings in many communities for family physicians. I'm curious. In the area of Souris, I know you're working really hard to get some of those doctors back. When do we expect you to be able to announce that you actually have secured the second and third doctors who have left since May of 2007?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I know that there have been many visits by different doctors coming here to Prince Edward Island. Of course, one of the issues that we have now is the Souris Hospital does not have an emergency room so it's difficult to offer the extra incentive pay that the former government introduced to help attract doctors to our rural areas. We're working diligently right now to make sure that we fill those vacancies. There have been many site tours taking place and we're going to have many announcements to make in the upcoming days. Right now I can report that we have more doctors working in Prince Edward Island than in any other time in the history of this province.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

PHYSICIANS IN O'LEARY

Leader of the Opposition: A question for the

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Premier.

How many doctors are in O'Leary?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Again, Madam Speaker, O'Leary is in a unique situation where their complement used to be four family physicians. We were able to lobby the former government to increase that to five physicians. We have a new doctor coming into the area now who is leaving, of course, the Tyne Valley area. We have another doctor who leaves there so we're fluctuating right now between three and five family physicians.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

RECRUITMENT OF DOCTORS AND NURSE PRACTITIONERS

Leader of the Opposition: Madam Speaker, this question is for the Premier.

How many doctors are you recruiting for Tyne Valley, Montague, Souris, O'Leary, and the list goes on?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much.

And that's a very important question and that's what happens, Madam Speaker, why we have to come in with our doubling of the doctor recruitment budget, why we have to introduce a residency program in this province. For far too long now over the last 11 years, we've seen a government that has failed to attempt to fill in these gaps. We've been in power now

for four months. We're doing our best to fill them in. In fact, we're even considering increasing the complement in certain areas of the province, especially in the Montague area so that we can make sure that all Islanders have access to a family physician.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: My next question is for the Premier.

I just wanted to say I remember seeing the Premier on CBC after the election where I think the comments were something to the effect that with the number of people on a wait list for doctors, there are probably only 6,000 or 7,000 people. Just do the math. Most people's practices are around 2,000. Divide and we'll only need two or three doctors. In relation to that, how many doctors have you actually hired since taking on the mandate May 28, 2007?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

There's been actually quite a bit of activity recently with regards to hiring new doctors here in the Province of Prince Edward Island. I know that out at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital alone, we're hiring another two additional hospitalists to make sure that our patient care is being taken care of. The Leader of the Opposition is absolutely correct right now. I believe there's approximately 6400 people on our patient waiting list to receive a

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family doctor in this province and that's why we're making this a priority to make sure that we can get as many people off that list and make sure that we're going to have every Islander have a family physician.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

My question is to the Premier in terms of: would you mind naming the doctors that you've actually hired since 2007 May 28th that are practising family medicine full time in rural communities in Prince Edward Island?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And we have numerous doctors that are currently visiting Prince Edward Island coming in. They're touring through Tyne Valley where the hon. member from that area is making sure they're being taken care of. Our hon. member from Souris has the opportunity to make sure that they're able to get hospital or good service when they come to the Souris area. Our member from Alberton is doing his part for our Alberton Hospital and our member for O'Leary is doing their part and we realize that this has to be a priority. The Leader of the Opposition was absolutely correct. Currently, right now, doctors take on patient loads between 1500 and 2000. Some of our new doctors who come in don't quite have that much of a patient load that are salary and that are new. Some of them are around the 800 mark. We're trying to get them raised up so that they're going to be around the 1500 mark

to the 2000 mark and we believe that if we fill in our complement of doctors here in the province, have our doctors attracting in between 1500 and 2000 patients each, we're going to be in a good situation to make sure that every Islander has access to a family physician.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

My question is for the Premier. With all the emphasis on recruitment for doctors, have you forgot about the crisis in health in the area of nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, et cetera?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And not at all and I'm glad that the hon. member was able to ask those questions. And currently right now, we're working on attracting in new nurse practitioners to this province. We're also working on attracting speech language pathologists to this province. As the hon. Leader of the Opposition would know, when it comes to a lot of our emergency room services or out-patient services that are delivered in our rural communities, a lot of the time and especially in the summertime when we see shortages where there has to be a closure for a period of time, it has more to do with having a shortage of the nurses in the area than it does with the doctors in that area. That's why we've re-implemented a position

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that was cut only two years ago in this province of Prince Edward Island and that is the position of the health recruitment officer in this province so we can make up for all the mistakes that were made over the last 11 years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

LOCATION OF NEW MONTAGUE SCHOOL

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

I was just thinking back to the promise of actually re-opening the emergency room in Souris. We look forward to when you're going to be able to do that.

My next question is actually for the minister of education. When can we expect the final recommendations from the Eastern School District on the location of the new Montague school?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And the hon. member raised an interesting point with regard to the ER service in Souris. What our promise was during the election that if we reach our complement of doctors in Souris and they wish to open up the emergency room, we're going to facilitate that. You cannot go in and force doctors to work in an emergency room. I know an instance for sure where there were doctors who visited Prince Edward Island. They went to the Souris

area. They went to the O'Leary area. Where did they choose to work? They chose to work in the O'Leary area because they wanted to work in the emergency room. If there are doctors that we can recruit into Souris who don't want to work in emergency room, we're not going to force it. If there are doctors who want to come there, see the emergency room open up, then we'll explore that option.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: I believe I addressed that question to the minister of education. When do we expect the final recommendation from the Eastern School District on the location of the new Montague school?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Attorney General.

Mr. Greenan: Madam Speaker, I want to acknowledge the question by the member of the Opposition.

The department is awaiting the final report from the Eastern School District as their preferred location and we expect that within by mid-November.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

SCHOOL BOARD AUTHORITY

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you for that.

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My next question is actually for the minister of education again. Do you agree with your Premier that the board of the Eastern School District elected by the community has the authority to make decisions affecting the service delivery of education on Prince Edward Island?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Attorney General.

Mr. Greenan: Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the question by the Leader of the Opposition.

I do support what our Premier has indicated and the *School Act* gives the elected officials in school boards that right to take that direction in the education of our students.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

CITIZENS' HOSPITAL COMMITTEE

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

So the minister of education supports the decision that the Eastern School District has the authority to make decisions affecting service delivery of education in their geographic area.

My next question is actually for the minister of health. Madam Speaker, to the minister of health, in that same vein of support, community based decision-making and regarding the crisis in health care service delivery in West Prince, do you, Mr. Minister, support the decision of the citizens' committee

that had recommended the establishment of the new hospital for West Prince?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Just to acknowledge the question, it's not under the act. Just to speak to the situation in West Prince. It was the previous administration who hired a consulting firm that we're waiting on a report in respect to the direction of health care in the western part of the province. So my understanding of it is the report is basically finished. I haven't seen the report and we'll look forward to seeing that report when the report is presented to me.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

AUTHORITY OF COMMUNITY BOARDS

Leader of the Opposition: My question is for the minister of health. Do you support the policy by your government that community boards have the authority to make decisions when they are given the parameters, the scope, the criteria to take policy questions on such as the Eastern School District? Are you supportive of the same policy in health?

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

Mr. D. Currie: To address the question, Madam Speaker, in relation to community boards, I believe this is the same community boards that have been stalled for the last two

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years by the previous administration and we see the value in the input from communities across this province. And we will make sure that when any decisions are made in this province, we will engage with communities and consult appropriately.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I just want to clarify. So in the area of education, the policy is to support what the community has brought together and make recommendations for a new school in Montague. In the area of health, although the community process was similar and it was actually a process put in place for at least three years or more, it seems to be different.

So my question to you, Premier, is when it comes to the recognition and support of community based decision-making, do you have one policy in practice for education in Kings County and one policy in practice for health in West Prince?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

By the sound of the question, the hon. member doesn't like the recommendations that the Eastern School District made with regards to Montague High School. Perhaps she should have attended the meeting, listened to the people in the community and heard that they

wanted a new high school for that area. Of course, she would know that what happens is the Eastern School District makes a recommendation to Cabinet on how to proceed. Well, our Cabinet, Madam Speaker, listened loud and clear to what the Eastern School District said. We listened loud and clear to what the people said and they said that they wanted the best possible education for future generations in this province and that's exactly what this new government wants. We want to make sure that instead of going out and spending \$14 million after we get elected to build a new golf course, we go out and we spend \$20 million to make sure that every Islander and every child in this province can get the best possible education they can and that's why we made the decision to build a new high school for those children in eastern Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. R. Brown: More books, less golf clubs.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

HOSPITAL BED CLOSURES IN WEST PRINCE

Leader of the Opposition: My next question is just for the Premier.

Based on the last few comments, I'm curious in terms of this summer in West Prince, were there any crises in health care and how many beds actually had to close all summer?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam

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Speaker.

Well, of course, after the last 11 years of neglect, there's going to be some problems in the health care system. Every summer - I discussed this earlier - with regard to our emergency rooms or outpatient rooms in our rural hospitals there are staffing shortages because some of our people deserve to have holidays and I believe they do. So we do the best we can to fill in those gaps so if one community hospital is closed, the other one can be opened up. Are we going to solve the problem overnight? Absolutely not. Is a \$30 million new facility the answer to solving all our problems? The hon. Leader of the Opposition knows there's shortages of emergency room doctors at the Prince County Hospital where there's a brand new facility, knows that we have trouble even recruiting doctors at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. So a \$30 million facility may be the answer. It may not be the answer but we're going to make sure that we go out and if we spend money in health care, we're going to spend it where it should be spent and that's on the front line with doctors, nurses, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists and all the other health care service deliveries that should be offered to Islanders.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

MLAs ON EXECUTIVE COUNCIL COMMITTEES

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Premier and it's

funny because when people were clapping, it reminded me of this question. Mr. Premier, you were quoted on enhancing the role of the Legislature. You made many statements about your opinion of removing MLAs from Executive Council Committees and ending the practice of paying an additional \$5,800 to members who serve on these committees. In fact, you seconded the motion. Right now, Mr. Premier, do you presently have any backbench MLAs sitting on Executive Council Committees?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And I'd like to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for that question. After the election of May of this year before we had the chance to swear in, I had the opportunity to consult many people who were perhaps former government employees at high levels, former politicians, to provide advice to myself on how best to set up a government. And I had a great meeting where someone made a recommendation to me that perhaps we should look at going back to the old system where not all government members are on Executive Council Committees where there's only a few. Madam Speaker, I believe it was a very good suggestion that was made to me and that's why I chose to return to the way it was and not the way that the previous government had done it for the last 11 years.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

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My question is actually to the Premier and I think I'd better refer to the motion where it was quoted: And whereas the current practice of paying government MLAs an additional over \$5,000 per year to serve on Executive Council Committees offers no additional input into the decision-making process that could not otherwise be achieved in government caucus meetings and Legislature. And it goes on to almost talk like they're actually in a conflict of interest and have no value being there.

And my question is: Who are the people that you have on which committees? Which committees are they? How much are they actually getting paid? And the last question in that is for the record, for actually what it might be worth, do you intend on appointing any of these other backbencher MLAs to such committees?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And like I indicated in my last answer was that after we had the opportunity to win the election but weren't sworn into power yet, I went out and I consulted and found out the best ways that you can deliver government services to the people of Prince Edward Island, found out what the best approaches were. This person I sat down with, I said to this person, I said: Look, I said all along that I didn't believe all government members should serve on Executive Council Committees. And this person made the suggestion to me that perhaps I should go back to the way it was before the Conservatives formed government and decided to put all backbenchers on the committees and

I thought it was a very good suggestion and I'd like to thank the honourable Ambassador for Ireland, the former premier of Prince Edward Island, Pat Binns, for making the suggestion to me to return the old way things were done instead of going with the way where all government backbenchers were sitting on Executive Council Committees.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

HARMONIZED SALES TAX

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. I hope you pay attention to all the advice that the former premier gave you.

In terms of the next question is actually for the premier once again. I want to raise an issue that's becoming very worrisome to Islanders. I'm sure the person who ran in District 4, Belfast-Murray Harbour heard this quite often in the last couple of weeks; that is, the government's dalliance with the harmonized sales tax. Nowhere in the Liberal Party campaign literature could we find it. It's a very punitive tax, as people know. HST could hurt the ordinary Islander: 8% on fuel oil, 8% on electricity, no more sales tax break on clothing and footwear. Mr. Premier, where in your platform did you tell Islanders you were thinking of making such a fundamental change in the Island tax system?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Nowhere.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Leader of the

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Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: So my question then, Premier, in terms of - is this an area that you're going to be moving ahead with taking a look at the HST in a serious way?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Well, Madam Speaker, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition is probably aware, our record on tax fairness speaks for itself. The former government when they came into power in 1996, the gas tax was at 12 cents a litre. After they were defeated, it was over 20 cents a litre. We were able to come in and deliver a gas tax cut of 4.4 cents a litre which returned approximately \$8 million to the pockets of Islanders. After that, we were able to deliver on our tax fairness issue with regards to freezing property assessments in the Province of Prince Edward Island. The only thing we're looking to do is to make sure we offer Islanders tax fairness by cutting taxes in this province, not by increasing them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

USED TIRE PROBLEM

Mr. Dumville: Madam Speaker, a question for the minister of the environment.

As the minister knows, there's a terrible problem with bales of tires that have built up in two significant areas of the province and one of them is in my district of Sleepy Hollow. Although I know this comes under the auspices of Island Waste Management, which

is TPW or transportation and public works, there also is an environmental component to this problem. Will the minister please tell the House exactly what the government's plans are to deal with these piles of tires?

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

Mr. George Webster: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question.

Island Waste Management Corporation currently manages and collects and stores used tires on Prince Edward Island. There are approximately one million tires on these two different sites; one in Sleepy Hollow and the other one in Wellington. Those are of significant issue to us and of significant importance and we will be addressing that in the near future.

Mr. Dumville: An additional question, will the minister please explain to the House when the problem began and, clearly, these huge stockpiles did not develop overnight. When did the stockpiles begin and why was nothing done to address this question?

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

Mr. George Webster: Madam Speaker, the stockpiling of these tires began about approximately 1999. It's been going on for a number of years. The Island Waste Management Corporation has request for proposals out in August, 2007 for removal and final disposal of these tires. The lowest bidder apparently to buy these tires was a company from Quebec. We also received a second

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proposal for the transportation of the tires to Quebec. There is a fee on tires at the moment of \$4 per tire on new tires that go into service. Part of that fee is used to move those tires to a recycle position. That process should be started in the next number of months. It will take approximately three years. We have approximately \$750,000 in our budget over three years to address the disposal of these tires which are very, very important to the Province of Prince Edward Island. They pose a major hazard out there at the moment and we want them out of the system and we are going to carry that activity out.

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

SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS

Ms. Biggar: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

A question for the minister of health. As many Islanders know, there's been a serious shortage of speech language pathology services in this province for quite some time. It has been unfair to many Islanders and their families. Although I know we are still waiting to hear today's budget, will the minister provide some assurance that this long neglected area will be addressed?

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

Mr. D. Currie: Madam Speaker, that's a great question from the member from Tyne Valley. It's just my pleasure here today to announce that the Department of Health, Social Services and Seniors and education have worked together in collaborating to address the limited resources and will be announcing four

positions to the Department of Education and 1.3 positions to the department of health to address the shortage of speech language pathologists across this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Biggar: Could the minister tell the House when the shortage of speech language pathologists was first identified? I understand the minister may not have that information right at his fingertips. I'm willing to wait until tomorrow if that's necessary to get the information but I do want to know when government was first informed about the shortage in this area and what steps were taken to address this shortage.

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

Mr. D. Currie: Madam Speaker, in my former life, I was an educator, administrator, and teacher and dealt consistently with frustrations of families, fellow teachers in the lack of resources in the area of speech language pathology and certainly got a firsthand view of the importance of the need for appropriate services for young children across this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT
AND TECHNOLOGY**

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

I think it's only appropriate that I direct my first question to the member now that has the privilege to sit in the chair that I did, the Minister of Development and Technology. First of all, congratulations to being elevated to a senior post in Cabinet.

But I do feel somewhat disturbed by the fact that the department has been stripped or gutted of a lot of responsibilities; that being of bioscience, aerospace and innovation and I'm just wondering when the minister found out that he was going to become a mini minister of development.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Minister of Development and Technology.

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

First of all, I want to thank the member for that question. Secondly, we have to realize that the biosciences and technology is a major emerging business on Prince Edward Island. These are the jobs of the future. These are well-paying jobs in the future and many, many Islanders want to fill those jobs. The Premier and I have discussed this over the years while we sat over there and how can we make PEI a better place? How can we elevate the people of Prince Edward Island from \$7 an hour jobs that that government gave Islanders to well-paying jobs that this government wants to give. The Premier and I have discussed these issues time and time again and we've decided that it needs its own office to look into these

areas to come up with plans and studies and that office was created by this Premier to look at these issues in order to see where we can be in the future. And I think it's a great opportunity for Prince Edward Island. It's an opportunity that Islanders will see themselves in jobs of the future in well-paying jobs and that's what this Premier wants and that's what this government wants and that's what this government is going to deliver to Prince Edward Island.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Well, Madam Speaker, it's quite obvious that he's in favour of this dissection of his department and the loss of responsibilities and, certainly, I'm disappointed because I believe there's a lot of very talented people who work in BDI and the staff and a lot of expertise and experience and, certainly, I think they should have been looked upon. But I am a little disappointed that he is allowing that to be gutted.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

Anyway, I guess I'll ask the minister now. Could he tell me what the unemployment rate in PEI was in the month of May?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Minister of Development and Technology.

Mr. R. Brown: The figures that I have it was about 10.5.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I'm sorry. Well, I guess he's starting off on the wrong foot again. The unemployment rate for the month of May in PEI was 9.4, the lowest it ever was in this province and, certainly, I think that you made a mistake there but I'll give you another question then. What is the unemployment rate for the month of September after six months of being in government?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Minister of Development and Technology.

Mr. R. Brown: That's about 10.5. I just want to mention back in April why it was 9.5. And you can see by the numbers that will be presented later on today over \$700,000 was spent in one month in order to generate jobs. You know what month that was, Madam Speaker? Election month. No wonder the rate went down to 9.4.

An Hon. Member: Shame, shame!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Well, I guess it's barely five, six months into government and, certainly, the private sector in this province is losing confidence in this government. They've stalled a lot of projects right across PEI and I'll list a few of them. They cancelled the Artifactory, which is a \$5 million project.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. M. Currie: They put 75 people out of work. They cancelled the high school in Montague - \$15 million. That's probably 150 skilled workers that are not working. They cancelled a gymnasium in Tracadie. That's another million and a half dollars. That's probably 35 or 40 people working. I don't see anything on the bio-gas expansion. I don't see Trimark started. I don't see Ceridian started. I don't see the medical clinic in Tyne Valley. All of these are important projects that drive the economy of our province.

Madam Speaker, I'm just wondering what the hon. member and minister is going to do to restore the confidence back in this province that's gone.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Minister of Development and Technology.

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

First of all, I want to inform the minister and the Leader of the Opposition confidence in this government is increasing. As I travel the province, businesses are telling me: You're not here with the camera man, Mr. Minister. Why aren't you here? The previous minister, every time he showed up had a camera man with him to take pictures. I'm not there to take pictures. I'm there to create jobs and this government here to create jobs.

Mr. Minister, do you know where Euston Street is? If you take a drive home, oh, sorry, I think I'm still in Opposition.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. R. Brown: Madam Speaker, to the hon. member- if he knows where Euston Street is

and he should take a drive down around there. You'll see major construction happening on Euston Street. That is the new Trimark building. That is close to an \$8 million project that's being done. This government put that project together. We negotiated a better deal for taxpayers and now if we just swing around the corner to Queen Street and come on down Queen Street, hon. member, you'll see another big project happening just right next to City Hall. That's the new Ceridian building. That's another deal that we went back to the table on and renegotiated and got a better deal for taxpayers. Take a drive around. You'll see all kinds of work happening.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

TUGBOATS BUILT AT GEORGETOWN

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

Mr. M. Currie: And I appreciate the confidence that the hon. member had in our government because it was actually our government that brought those projects to the province.

And he mentioned photo opportunities. I traveled across PEI and met with the private sector and the businesses and I enjoyed that quite immensely and I do see that's in your first announcement of which I think there's only one announcement you made in six months. You had to go to Quebec and fly a private plane and bring your executive assistant with you for tugs that are built on PEI. When are you going to cross the bridge in Hillsborough and go east and talk to the workers who built these tugs and meet with them?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Minister of Development and Technology.

Mr. R. Brown: Madam Speaker, first of all, I want to thank the workers at Georgetown, the workers in that plant. I saw the tugs that they built, a tremendous job that our workers on Prince Edward Island have done and all members in this House from both sides should thank those people who work down there. Excellent work done. When I was asked to speak at that conference, I said that I really - I promoted our industries on PEI. I've talked to the people who have purchased these boats. I was up there trying to get more tugs for that area. If the minister doesn't want me to travel and try to get work for Islanders, just say so but we want to get out there. We want to get work for Islanders and we want to get good paying jobs for Islanders.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, I guess the question I have for the minister, seeing as he's avoiding most of them, is would he table all the announcements he's made since he's been in power for the last six months and what announcements he's done.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Minister of Development and Technology.

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

I've been so busy over the last few months trying to fix the things that they screwed up in the last 11 years. We've been spending so

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much time trying to re-negotiate some of the deals that they did that it is - I apologize to the Islanders at this point but we are cleaning up the mess. There was a big mess when we entered the government buildings. It's going to take a little time to clean it up. We're going to clean a lot of it up today with today's budget and once that cleanup is done, we will be on to getting more jobs for Islanders but that didn't stop us. All he has to do - and you know what? I'll take him for a drive around after Question Period and show him all the developments that are happening.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

POTATO WART

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My first question will be for the Minister of Agriculture. Last night on CBC the news reported the presence of potato wart on Prince Edward Island again on a field in Prince County. We all know the devastation of this disease and what it did to our potato industry back in 2000. But with the provincial government and federal government working together, we were able to keep the borders open and keep the potatoes moving into the States, which we drastically need. My question for the minister is and to give the reassurance to farmers and all Islanders, would the Minister of Agriculture please tell this House what is the protocol.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Minister of

Agriculture.

Mr. LeClair: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Yes, I will tell the House. We've been working on that over the weekend and we, as it stands today, the US border - nothing will be affected to our knowledge.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: I think he misunderstood my question. I already know that. What is the protocol for handling this issue?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. LeClair: Well, unless, I'm not sure, Madam Speaker, what the question, what the actual question is. We've talked to CFIA, the federal agriculture has been informed. CFIA is doing the inspections. We're doing the disinfecting and we've looked into all the procedures. We've informed the United States. We've done everything that we've been asked to do and that was done with the previous government and, actually, it's worked and there's no problem with potato wart.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: Final question. The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you. Thank you for the answer. I finally got - you finally got out with the answer over the protocol.

My next question is and since it's the last one, I'll put two or three together as one question

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for you. How large was the field where the potato wart was discovered? Overall, how many incidents of potato wart have been detected on PEI since 2000 and what is the total acreage involved and how many fields have been taken out of potato production permanently?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. LeClair: That's quite a few questions, Madam Speaker. I'll get back to you on a lot of those. I was away over the weekend and I've been getting caught up. I didn't have time to get caught up on the whole thing this morning. I could answer a couple of these but I don't want to make a mistake so early in my mandate. No, I'll answer them but don't you worry. I'll come back with that.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

End of Question Period.