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STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD  
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

Thursday 18 October 2007



**STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Sherwood.

**DRIVE AWAY HUNGER TOUR**

**Mr. Mitchell:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

If any Islander was traveling on our provincial highways at any time yesterday, in all probability they would see a truly wonderful action taking place: two 100 horsepower tractors hauling two 16 foot trailers two days on the road, 300 kilometres. Forty-eight thousand pounds of food was collected for the combined food banks of Prince Edward Island. One of these units left Tignish, the other from Souris; both headed for Charlottetown.

Madam Speaker, they traveled this province collecting this terrific amount of food to fight hunger and the event didn't stop there. When these units arrived in the capitol, they came together at the Crops and Livestock Research Centre on University Avenue where another event took place. I am happy to report that quite a few of my colleagues attended this event where additional donations of food and cash were collected. Again, Madam Speaker, another event for a truly great cause.

Congratulations to all those generous Islanders who gave so much to this wonderful initiative. Congratulations to all those involved with the 2007 'Drive Away Hunger Tour'. You did yourselves proud.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**HABITAT FOR HUMANITY PEI**

**Mr. Watts:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to publicly congratulate a wonderful organization and for the unheralded work that they have accomplished in our province of Prince Edward Island.

On Sunday, October 14<sup>th</sup>, Habitat for Humanity PEI celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> home dedication. Habitat for Humanity takes a family who, for whatever reason, couldn't adequately house themselves on their own and with their help and their labour and the labour of the community, they are now in an affordable, comfortable home. Habitat for Humanity has built over 200,000 homes worldwide in over 100 countries since 1976; over 1200 homes in Canada since 1985. And with the recent dedication, they have now built 20 homes right here on Prince Edward Island.

I believe we have with us today Jim Wicks and his wife, Myrna Wicks, from Habitat for Humanity. Jim Wicks is on the national board of directors for Habitat for Humanity. Jim Wicks is also a founding member of Habitat for Humanity right here on PEI and his wife, Myrna, is also a member of the board for PEI Habitat for Humanity.

Madam Speaker, on Sunday, October 14<sup>th</sup>, Denise Arnold and her family, Ashley and Charlie, were presented with the keys to their new home at 5 Hunter Lane in Hillsborough Park. This was the third home constructed by Habitat for Humanity on that street alone, Hunter lane.

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It was a distinct honour and privilege to be given the opportunity to participate in the dedication of these homes this past year. These people, our new neighbours, are now part of their community. They are no longer renters here today, somewhere else tomorrow. The community is their community. The street is their street. They have a stake in what happens with the neighbours because they are going to be here today, tomorrow, and tomorrow.

With the continued hard work of this excellent organization, I look forward to future dedications and to the happiness that Habitat for Humanity brings to Prince Edward Islanders and, in particular, to the families involved.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**ISLANDERS DONATE TO FOOD BANK**

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

As you are aware, families on Prince Edward Island may occasionally need a helping hand.

As every parent on the Island would know, the most important item that you can provide for your children is the food that they will eat. Young Island students need to have meals provided to them and for them so that they can excel and develop into our future business leaders and members of the community but what about families suffering through hard times? Families do everything within their power to keep a roof over their heads and oil

in the furnace. Here on Prince Edward Island we can rely on our friends and neighbours and even complete strangers for assistance.

As a parent and a member of this House, it warms my heart to see so many Islanders participating in the fourth annual Drive Away Hunger Tour this week. This ambitious cause, which has been sponsored by Farm Credit, has experienced great success in delivering thousands of pounds of food to the Upper Room Food Bank and Island families.

Volunteer crews from Tignish to Souris were out collecting food from caring and compassionate Islanders for those in need. I rise in the House today, as the previous member spoke, to pay tribute to the sponsors and volunteers who are making the Drive Away Hunger Tour such a great success and to pay tribute to all Islanders who are able to participate by making donations. This display of compassion is another great example of the exceptional place where we live and I want to remind people that we need to continue on a daily basis to think of those people who require the services of the food bank all year long.

Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

The hon. Minister of Tourism.

**REDECORATING OFFICE COSTS**

**Ms. Docherty:** Madam Speaker, yesterday the hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir asked

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for costs regarding my office and I am now tabling this. And I move, seconded by the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, the answer be received and do lie on the table.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry?

**Some Hon. Members:** Carried.

**Speaker:** The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

**Mr. Sheridan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Yesterday, the Member from Montague-Kilmuir asked a question on the cost of office furniture purchased for the deputy minister. I have that information here today and I'll be tabling it during the Tabling of Documents.

**Speaker:** Mr. Minister, do you know that you can do that now?

**Mr. Sheridan:** Thank you very much. I have a second, may I?

**Speaker:** Yes.

**NUMBER OF VEHICLES(FURTHER)**

**Mr. Sheridan:** Yesterday, the Member from Montague-Kilmuir asked a question on how many vehicles or leased vehicles the ministers or deputies have purchased since this government has taken office. I have that information today and will table it at this time.

**Speaker:** Shall it carry?

**Some Hon. Members:** Carried.

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

**WORK ENVIRONMENT OF O'LEARY NURSES**

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

In May of 2007, this government won the endorsement of the people of the province. This government won the election five months ago based on a number of factors, not the least of which was the long and expensive list of promises.

Health care continues to be the number one priority of Islanders. This government's promise for a doctor for every citizen is one that they will be evaluated on month to month, year to year until the next election. However, as bad as the crisis is with doctors, it is not the only health care issue.

My question is to the minister of health. Could you please describe the work environment for nurses, especially RNs and Bachelors of Nursing in the hospital of O'Leary?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, I want to acknowledge it's a great question and I certainly want to point out that in our health care system, the reality of our situation is physicians do get a tremendous amount of attention in respect to the shortages. We know the importance of LPNs and nurses in this province. They are the backbone of a wide range of health professionals across this province and we certainly place them in high priority in this province to make our health care system viable and strong for all Islanders.

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**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the minister of health. Could you please describe the work environment for those valuable nurses in the hospital of O'Leary?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, to acknowledge the question, certainly we're very aware of all health care institutions across this province are in a tremendous amount of stress. It's been an ongoing issue. To no surprise, it's been an ongoing issue with the previous administration and it's certainly a huge priority. After ongoing discussions with community boards and being in the hospitals, hearing the concerns over the past five months as the minister of health and we're working aggressively at recruiting strategies and, most importantly, we're hearing the concerns from front line workers as I traveled across the province from Souris to Tignish and certainly have a tremendous amount of respect for health care professionals, particularly nurses who sometimes lose focus on the front page of *The Guardian*. So certainly, they are a priority and will continue to be a priority with our government.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**DAYS O'LEARY HOSPITAL CLOSED**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker,

my question is to the minister of health. It sounds like the environment in O'Leary is pretty disastrous. Can you tell the House if there were any days this past summer that the O'Leary Hospital, not the emergency department but the hospital was shut down?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, to acknowledge the question, certainly over the past 4.5 months, there's been a lot of challenges. It's no hidden secret in this province about the health care professional shortages. Certainly, we've been having ongoing discussions in respect to how to alleviate those. Recently, we met with the School of Nursing at the University of Prince Edward Island and are looking at present spaces and looking at an accelerated program to help us in addressing the shortages that have been an inherited problem since we've taken government.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**An Hon. Member:** Great idea.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the minister of health. Often with a vision, it's really important if you can take action. In regards to the hospital in O'Leary that you describe that's under a lot of pressure, my question is: can you please tell the House and the people who are watching us how many days this past summer the O'Leary Hospital, not the emergency department but the hospital itself, was shut down?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, it has been an issue that we've been dealing with. I know that we have- there was a commitment under the previous administration for four positions in O'Leary Hospital. To date I understand that we've filled two of those positions and recruiting practises and interventions and strategies are ongoing.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

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

My next question is actually to the minister of health. It's important that when you have vision that you can create hope and my understanding of the pressure the nurses are under in O'Leary with almost 50% of the nursing still needing to be filled is immense. Could you describe in detail what kinds of things you're doing to alleviate that kind of distress in the hospital in O'Leary?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, that's a good question. We basically since coming in and being sworn in since June 12<sup>th</sup> as minister of health, I've had the opportunity to be on the front lines. I've had the opportunity to engage with nurses, LPNs, resident care workers across this province in hospitals, in long-term care facilities and certainly this government will be very decisive. We'll be very committed to alleviating all health care professional

shortages across this province.

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

**COSTS TO CLOSE O'LEARY HOSPITAL**

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

My next question is to the minister of health. In regards to O'Leary when the hospital shut down this summer, what was the cost?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, coming into the position in June, one of the realities that I quickly realized that this previous administration in respect to bed closures in this province should have put a plan in place and something that we will be doing as early as February of next year, we'll be looking at a long-term planning process for bed closures across this province. The reality of the situation is our nurses are working hard. They're committed professionals and they do deserve holidays in this province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**DAYS O'LEARY HOSPITAL CLOSED(FURTHER)**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you for that answer.

My next question is to the minister of health. I believe you said you were sworn in about June 12<sup>th</sup> and you have to wait until January

and, yes, people do need to take a vacation. Yet this summer you were minister of health. The hospital in O'Leary had to shut down not because of one particular but because of many, many stressors on these people who work long, hard hours and they also are at the beck and call even when they should be home taking a break; however, the hospital in O'Leary shut down. How many days did it shut down and what was the principal reason?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, certainly, I want to reiterate this government is and as my role as minister of health, my huge priority is to looking at solutions. And any time you inherit a government and it was very clear through the budget process over the last number of days, you inherit the good things that the previous administration has done but you also inherit the challenges. And we've inherited a huge challenge in this province with respect to health care recruitment and as minister responsible for recruitment, we've got a number of initiatives on the table, the building of the office of recruitment and retention. We are working aggressively with all health care professionals in respect to their needs and what their priorities are and I'll continue to stay focused and have objective and goal.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Health, Social Services and Seniors. Oh, sorry. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

#### **PHYSICIANS IN SOURIS(FURTHER)**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you. You may be predicting the future.

My next question is to the minister of health. Basically, to my knowledge, once a government wins an election in May of 2007, you've actually won the confidence of people in government. When you accepted the position as minister of health in June, that allowed you a chance, probably a week or two like the rest of us to get familiar with your department. It's now in mid-October. The crises in health are getting more and more extreme.

My next question is: could you please tell us how many full-time family physicians are practising in Souris?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, to acknowledge the question, recruitment right now is ongoing. We are obviously - we are down in physician placements, down from the complement. We have some positive word coming from the office of recruitment inside the department of health and I do want to commend the work and the ongoing service that our bureaucracy is working at resolving this issue. I've been working very closely with the town of Souris, the member from the area in resolving these issues. I've spent - I've been to Souris twice meeting front line staff and as the minister I'm committed to putting a face on health as the minister responsible for recruitment and retention in this province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!



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

**SOURIS EMERGENCY ROOM**

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

My next question is to the minister of health. I notice in the Budget the other day there's \$1.5 million removed from salary dollars at the QEH Hospital. I guess I'm assuming that that money is going to your office of recruitment. But my question, to be exact, is earlier this week in the House, the Premier in answering a question about his government election promise to re-open the emergency room in Souris stated that his government would re-open the emergency room in Souris if physicians were found who would be interested in emergency medicine. Is this your view as well?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, one of our challenges in recruitment for two areas of this province are Tyne Valley and Souris, which are rural areas. Right now we've inherited a challenge in respect to the rural stabilization, which I want to clarify. There's two grievances with the medical society in respect to the implementation of the rural stabilization and the message has been very clear from most communities that the rural stabilization has hurt their ability to attract quality physicians into their communities.

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

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

My next question is for the minister of health. Earlier this week in the House, the Premier had stated that government's policy would honour an election promise that was made in Souris to re-open the ER, emergency room, would happen if physicians were found who would work in emergency rooms. My question to the minister of health is: is this your view as well?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, my view as minister responsible for health in this province is that health care is a huge priority, not only in the urban areas of this province but in the rural areas. And I've sent a very clear message when working with the boards and community groups that we'll continue to work diligently and support the department of health in addressing the challenges for rural physicians in this province. And it's no secret that rural physician attraction is a very, very challenging responsibility and it's a challenge not only in this province but across Canada but our focus is the quality of health care in the Province of Prince Edward Island and we will not forget about the rural communities in this province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you for the answer to that question and my next question is actually for the minister of health.

Thank you that the commitment is there to keep rural hospitals open but my question is actually just on your point of view. Do you share the same view as your Premier that the

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election promise your government made during the spring election of 2007 about re-opening the ER room in Souris? And I remind you that your minister of fisheries also was singing from the same page that if physicians who would do emergency medicine were found, you would re-open the ER in Souris.

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, I want to continue to reiterate that health care in this province is a huge priority and we'll continue to work and introduce interventions and strategies to enhance the recruitment of health care professionals all across the Province of Prince Edward Island. We'll continue to work very closely with the communities. We'll continue to listen to the communities in respect to what their needs are and we want to make sure that every Islander will continue to under *Medical Act* will have access to a family physician.

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

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

In terms of the ER in Souris, your election promise that stated that if you were able to find physicians who would operate under emergency room conditions were available, you would re-open the ER in Souris. When are you going to honour that election promise?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Yes.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you for that answer so I'm taking it that your intention is if ER physicians are found, you'll honour the election promise to actually re-open the ER in Souris.

So my next question to the minister of health is this week - I guess I'd ask the question this way. You mentioned recruitment. Who is in the process of the negotiations with Dr. Matsusaki who is leaving O'Leary who says that he's quite interested in ER medicine and is quite willing to relocate to a rural practice with that doctor who is interested in emergency medicine? Who is working on those negotiations and how are they advancing?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, in respect to the doctor in discussion, I'm not prepared to discuss personnel issues on the floor of the House.

**Premier Ghiz:** (Indistinct) negotiations.

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you. So that sounds really good for the people in Souris. It sounds like negotiations are taking place with Dr. Matsusaki from O'Leary will help re-open the ER in Souris. Thank you for that.

**UPEI SCHOOL OF NURSING**

The next question I have for the minister of

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health is I noticed in the Budget that there's over one million dollars, one million dollars - that's correct - in the government's budget that's going to UPEI and I think it's \$1.5 million. My question to the minister of health is: how much of this money is committed to the School of Nursing?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, as the minister of health, one of my priorities is to build and develop strong partnerships, particularly with the University of Prince Edward Island. They have a dynamic, expanding, growing Bachelor of Nursing program and we've had ongoing discussions with them about some wonderful possibilities to enhance space seats in the School of Nursing and also looking very seriously at an accelerated nursing program to assist us in addressing the health care shortages in nursing in this province in the years to come.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you. Excuse me. I'm fighting a cold here. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is to the minister of health. I'm quite interested if any of that \$1.5 million that is put in your budget to go to the University of Prince Edward Island will go directly to the School of Nursing.

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, I've been excited to date about the discussions we have had with the School of Nursing. We've had two formal meetings. I'm extremely impressed with the Dean, Dr. Kim Critchley's work at the University of Prince Edward Island and I am welcoming future discussions with the School of Nursing. They are excited about the new, fresh face in government and the welcoming response that they're getting from our government.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**NURSING POSITIONS IN O'LEARY**

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

It's really nice that the minister is excited and delighted and into great discussions. It would be even better if he actually took some action.

My next question to the minister of health. As of October 18<sup>th</sup>, today, there are a number of physicians posted on the Prince Edward Island website on the health recruitment page. My question for the minister of health is: what is the status on the following position? It's a registered nurse 1, community hospital O'Leary position that's vacant. What is the status on that position?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, we do have seven facilities in this province that do require staffing. We have over 4,000 staff in the department of health and to reiterate, we have

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a wonderful group of professionals working hard, diligently. And I must add 2.5 years after program renewal that they eradicated 150 positions inside the department of health. I tip my hat to the daily work that they do.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Excuse me.

My question is to the minister of health. Would you please explain for us the status of filling the following position? It's a registered nurse one position and it's located at the community hospital in O'Leary.

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, as I've alluded to a number of times, recruiting and the work of recruiting health professionals in this province is an ongoing challenge. We are continuing to address the needs at various hospitals across this province. They are priorities and we'll continue to intervene with concurrent strategies to assist us in recruitment of health professionals.

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

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

My next question is to the minister of health. There is a position for a licensed practical nurse at the community hospital. That's the Margaret Steward Ellis Home in O'Leary. Could you please tell us what the status is on

that particular position?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, once again, recruitment is ongoing in this province for health professionals and I do want to reiterate we've had some great discussions with LPNs in this province as well as nurses. We are looking very intensely at the scope of practice and there's a recommendation coming forward in the jobs and duties of LPNs in this province that will assist us to provide quality care in this province.

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

**NURSING POSITION IN SUMMERSIDE**

**Leader of the Opposition:** Thank you for that answer.

My next question is for the minister of health. It's a question in regards to positions that are available in the community of O'Leary. So far there is one available at the hospital and the other position is actually at the Margaret Steward Ellis Home in O'Leary. My next question is: what is the status of filling the registered nurse one position at the Prince County Hospital in Summerside?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, just to clarify, we certainly want to reiterate the importance of the Health Futures Program in this province. It's been a program and compliments to the previous administration for their vision in respect to the program. It's been

very well received and it's basically a program that we want to continue to build on. Ongoing recruitment is a daily challenge and we are aggressively looking at filling all vacancies on a daily basis across this province.

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

### **ECO-TRUST FUNDING INITIATIVE**

**Ms. Dunsford:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I have a question for the minister of environment and energy. Yesterday in this House, we learned that the previous government chose to use the Eco-Trust funding initiative of \$15 million as a one-time cash cow over a one-year period and it was just a couple of minutes ago we heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about how a hefty purse of \$1 million was with regard to health care. We're talking about \$15 million, minister. Could the minister tell this House what new plan, new environmental initiative the previous government had to spend this \$15 million over a one-year period.

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

**Mr. Webster:** Madam Speaker, I want to tell the hon. member that I certainly can't speak for the previous government but it appeared to us that the \$15 million did go in as one lump sum, if you like, or it was in general. That money was actually allocated for a three-year period so I think we've corrected that as to the way it ought to be.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Speaker:** The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

**Ms. Dunsford:** Just another question, Madam Speaker, for the minister of environment and energy.

We also learned yesterday that our government, of course, corrected that and is going to spread that \$15 million over three years as it was originally intended for. Could the minister tell this House what the plans are now for our government and what kind of new environmental initiatives will take place that we can look forward to in the coming year.

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

### **OFFICE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY**

**Mr. Webster:** Madam Speaker, we are in the process of developing the office of energy efficiency which we are crediting \$200,000 to that fund, if you like, and that program will be developed over the next three months so we can launch a project in February, March, April that will actually lead to energy reduction and clean air for the Province of Prince Edward Island.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

### **WATERSHED FUNDING**

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

A question for the minister of environment and energy. The safety of our watershed is an issue

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that affects each and every Islander. The recent Budget announced \$350,000 for watershed funding. I'd like to ask the minister. Is this a new funding program and what kinds of initiatives can we expect?

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

**Mr. Webster:** Madam Speaker, yes, this is a new fund. We have allocated \$350,000 for the next five months. The previous government prior to the election budgeted, didn't budget actually, but promised \$750,000 for watershed groups on PEI to enhance our watershed system, rivers, and streams. Obviously, the money was not in the Budget at that particular time; therefore, it couldn't go ahead. It was a pre-election promise as we understand it but what this government has done is allocated \$350,000. It's going out to watershed groups over the next two, three months and we want to do some work prior to snowfall, of course. This will develop plans for the next number of years. We believe our watersheds and rivers and streams are very, very important to Islanders and we intend to try to make a difference in this area.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**WATER PROTECTION PROGRAMS**

**Mr. Murphy:** Supplementary question for the same minister.

We all know the commission on nitrates is busy doing its work. Does the minister anticipate that this commission may result in

additional programs aimed at protecting our water supply?

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

**Mr. Webster:** Yes, Madam Speaker. The Armand DesRoches Commission is out there working as we speak. They are developing a policy, if you like, or recommendations with regards to nitrates in this province. Nitrates have been escalating for the last decade on Prince Edward Island and we see that as a major, major threat to our environment. We will be developing programs and policies around that in the spring. We will be downloading, if you like, a watershed enhancement program in the spring so it will be focused on two issues: one is buffer zones and silt removal, if you like, or silt enhancement reduction programs; the second one is the nitrate issue and those will happen as the spring and summer unfolds.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**VACANT NURSING POSITIONS**

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

My next question is for the minister of health. What I would like to know, minister: what is the status of filling the following positions? Medical Palliative Care Registered Nurse I, Prince County Hospital, second vacancy; Registered Nurse I, Maternal Child Care Unit, Prince County Hospital, Summerside; Registered Nurse I, Primary Obstetrics, Prince County Hospital, Summerside; Medical

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Surgery, Restorative Care, Registered Nurse I, Prince County Hospital, Summerside; Registered Nurse, Medical Palliative Care, Prince County Hospital, Summerside; Registered Nurse Float, Prince County Hospital, Summerside; Registered Nurse Float, Prince County Hospital, Summerside, second position; Registered Nurse, Medical and Palliative Care, Prince County Hospital, Summerside; Registered Nurse, Souris Hospital; Registered Nurse, Queen Elizabeth Hospital; bilingual Critical Care Float Nurse, Queen Elizabeth Hospital; Registered Nurse I, Queen Elizabeth Hospital; Registered Nurse I - again this is part of the question. I want to know the status on all these positions. Again, keep in mind that each of these nursing positions has separate competitions and numbers and they're all individual jobs. I continue with the question - the status for the Registered Nurse I, Medical Unit, QEH Hospital; Medical Surgical Float Nurse, QEH Hospital; Critical Care Float Nurse, Queen Elizabeth Hospital; Registered Nurse I, Queen Elizabeth Hospital; Registered Nurse I, Queen Elizabeth Hospital; Registered Nurse I, Emergency Services, QEH Hospital; Bilingual Registered Nurse I, Unit II, Surgical QEH Hospital.

Again, I want to know the status of all these positions. Registered Nurse I, QEH Hospital, Unit II Surgical; Medical Surgical Float Nurse, QEH Hospital; Registered Nurse I, Orthopaedics, Oncology, QEH.

That is to the minister of health. What is the status? And that's not all the health positions that are available.

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

**Mr. Brown:** Just give me that again.

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, a number of those positions, not to speak specifically to any one of the many positions, have been vacant certainly a lot longer than my arrival on June 12<sup>th</sup>. Certainly, that's why this government is taking the leadership in providing the vision to obviously enhance our ability to attract health care professionals into this province. Obviously, this problem has not been created in the last five months. This has been an ongoing issue in this province and this government will tackle head on the ability to attract with new vision, new insight, and new hope for health care professionals in hospitals across this province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**U P E I    S C H O O L    O F  
NURSING(FURTHER)**

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

My next question is to the minister of health. In lieu of the crisis in nursing care in the Province of Prince Edward Island - and let's be clear. I'm not referring just to the numerous vacancies in the nursing field. My question is: why is your government so insistent on a medical residency program when you consider that PEI's own medical society has questioned its value and yet you have an accredited School of Nursing at the University of Prince Edward Island. This year alone there were 300 applicants of good candidates who could have been accepted in 2007. Those are just a small sample of what's available.

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My question is: why is your government so focused on the Medical Residency Program and not increasing the number of seats at the School of Nursing?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, could I have the question repeated please?

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Absolutely.

**An Hon. Member:** Sleeping. Oh, oh!

**Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, I take health care really serious. I take it really serious the number of calls that I'm getting from nurses that can't cope and there's nobody else working in the positions. My question to the minister of health is it's not only about the vacancies. Your government is insistent on a medical residency program for doctors. A medical residency program, I understand, needs a medical school like the one in Dalhousie yet we have an accredited School of Nursing here in Prince Edward Island through the University of Prince Edward Island.

I get really passionate about this because when you think of how many people who rely on nurses. My question is there were 300 applications last year alone. The School of Nursing can take 60 students. There's \$1.5 million in your Budget that's going to the university. Is it going to the School of Nursing?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, just following some information I shared earlier. We've had some ongoing discussions with the University of Prince Edward Island. It is not our responsibility as the government of the day to change entrance and academic requirements into the BN program at the University of Prince Edward Island but we have gone on record with the university. The president of the university, Wade MacLaughlan, sharing our concerns about entrance requirements and looking at all possibilities. I have to respect the communication from Dr. Kim Critchley. They do have some standards in respect to the quality of program that they do have at the University of Prince Edward Island and I do respect that. Nursing programs are very competitive and I take great pride in saying that I was a graduate of the University of Prince Edward Island and they've got huge, high academic standards.

In respect to the work that's being done, we've had ongoing discussions in respect to enhancing the capacities, the seats. We're looking at further discussions on the accelerated nursing program which will continue to provide support for vacant nursing positions in this province.

And to clarify the point in respect to the Medical Society and the residency program, the last time I was briefed, which was as early as this morning, the new presidency of the Medical Society, Dr. Billy Scantlebury, is excited about the partnerships that we're building. We've also set in place the Physician Advisory Committee, which had over 50 applicants. The medical community is embracing this new government; finally, a government that will sit down and listen to the needs of physicians and other health care



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professionals in this province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

**Leader of the Opposition:** Madam Speaker, my next question is to the minister of health.

It sounds like for some reason - and it's important that doctors - we certainly need doctors. However, the crisis seems to be even worse in the nursing profession. What I hear from you is you're saying the 240 applicants that have applied to the nursing school aren't qualified. I beg to differ that a huge majority certainly are. My understanding is there's not enough space.

My question though is a simple one. The \$1.5 million that's in the Budget with your government for the University of Prince Edward Island, is that \$1.5 million going to the School of Nursing?

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

**Mr. D. Currie:** Madam Speaker, discussions with the University of Prince Edward Island have been very productive. We've had discussions around the application, the academic criteria, which I certainly respect in respect to how the University of Prince Edward Island takes applicants into the program. We certainly have had very serious discussions. The issue right now at the University of Prince Edward Island is around space. Certainly, we've had ongoing discussions with the dean and the president of the university about how we can partner with the University of Prince Edward Island to

address this issue which we take as a very serious issue.

**An Hon. Member:** Great job.

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

**COURTHOUSE IN ALBERTON**

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

I listen with great interest here this afternoon. The pre-election promises and one that I know was made during the last election was certainly very - one member was very passionate about one question and the election promise that he made and I thought your government was going to follow up on it.

My question is for the Attorney General. Are you going to open the courthouse in Alberton?

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

**Mr. Greenan:** I want to thank the member of the Opposition for that question. That exact question has been sent to me by people from the Alberton area and I have discussed it with officials of the office of the Attorney General. They have briefed me on the reasons why the courthouse is not in operation in Alberton. Each county has a courthouse and it is felt that the people of the province are served in each county by having one particular courthouse in each of the counties.

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

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

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I believe I read in your literature you were putting Islanders first and I just don't understand why you don't want to follow up on the wish of the town and the member from the area and open the courthouse.

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

**Mr. Greenan:** Madam Speaker, in the course of getting updated on this file, it was determined that we were not turning a deaf ear to the wishes to the people of Alberton. We will take under consideration and I have indicated to the member from that area that we will be in our mandate taking under consideration the re-opening and considering re-opening the courthouse in Alberton but we are not about to make any announcement at this time. It is under consideration.

**An Hon. Member:** Good answer.

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** So do I gather from that you're not breaking your election promise. You are indicating that you are going to open the courthouse in Alberton.

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

**Mr. Greenan:** Madam Speaker, I do believe I said that we will be considering the question of opening the courthouse in Alberton and considering it. We will be doing it.

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

**Mr. M. Currie:** Could you give me a timeframe and a dollar amount?

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

**Mr. Greenan:** Madam Speaker, the timeframe, the member of the Opposition asked for a timeframe. I believe that within our mandate, the first four years, we will have to deal with that. I have no idea at this present time when that will be considered but we will consider it. The cost of re-opening it, my understanding is that the present three courthouses in the province have been updated with modern technology. They've created child-friendly courthouses and we - that was not in place in Alberton and if we were to re-open Alberton, all of that would have to be considered so I have no dollar figure on the cost but it is something I could get, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

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

**CLOSURE OF GEORGETOWN SAWMILL**

**Mr. M. Currie:** Well, I guess the member over to the right of me is not too happy. I guess that's another promise broken.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, I'll ask my next question to the minister of development. I know you feel that Queen Street is the center of the universe. But with your responsibility as minister of development, you do have to look after companies all across PEI and we are experiencing a bit of a downturn in the forestry industry. We have a sawmill in Georgetown that has 35 full-time employees.

They've been employed there for years upon years and I'm just wondering if you would take the time to cross the bridge. I'll give you a map showing you where eastern PEI is and go down and talk to the workers and see if you can, I guess, give them some courage and demonstrate that you want to work with that there's opportunities for retraining and maybe retooling, working with the infrastructure that is there so that they have some hope and we don't send them out west also.

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

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

The member from Georgetown poses a good question. When I was in Quebec, I was talking to the head of the Irving pulp and paper and sawmills and I was talking to him there, the vice-president, and I indicated to him that we really need this mill open. He said: We are shutting down a number of mills. I asked him: How long do you think the process - how long are the mills going to be shut? He said: Look. This is a worldwide problem. The Irving company is working on this problem. Up there he did make a commitment to me that he will look at taking the employees from the sawmill into the shipyard and if we are successful in getting more contracts for the shipyards, those employees will be transferred over. The Irving company has also indicated they are working with the employees off the pulp mill right now in terms of seeing - they have 20 jobs in their french fry plants and they're looking at transferring some of the employees to those plants if they can but we are working on this. This is a world problem. The dollar is going up and as the dollar increases against the US dollar, it is going to be a hard time for lumber

in Canada but we're going to work on this issue. I'm going to be meeting again with the vice-president of pulp and sawmills for the Irving company and discuss this further with him.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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

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

I appreciate your comments and I'm not certainly blaming the government for the crisis situation that we have with the lumber industry but what I'm asking for, I guess, is I know you want to go to New Brunswick and meet with the vice-president. What I'm asking - would you go to Georgetown and meet with the workers and give them a level of comfort that the provincial government is there. I know Peter MacKay is there and he'll support us and work with them but I just wondered if you would do that and take the drive. Take the time. You got a new car. Take a drive down and see the workers.

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

**Mr. Brown:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I just want to correct the minister. I do not have a new car. I got the Premier's principal secretary's old car and I'm using that. And surely, I'll go down to Georgetown and meet with the staff in that area. I've been down in Georgetown quite a few times. I've been across Prince Edward Island quite a few times and if the member for the area wants to join

me and join with Peter MacKay and seeing if we can get a program together in order to rejuvenate that industry, I'll be glad to go down with them and meet with him and Peter MacKay and the staff. I notice Quebec is getting a special deal for its lumber industry and its workers. With your connections with the federal government, hopefully, we can work together here in order to see these employees. This is not only the problem in Georgetown. There's a major sawmill up west and sawmills up west. This is a problem province-wide and we've been working with the sawmills across the province in order to see what we can do in this area but I'll gladly go down with you at any time.

**Mr. M. Currie:** Great.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

End of Question Period