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STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS AND ORAL QUESTION PERIOD
(PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS)

FOR

Friday 2 November 2007

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD 2 NOVEMBER 2007 PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Speaker: The hon. Member from Charlottetown-Sherwood.

HOLLAND COLLEGE OPEN HOUSE

Mr. Mitchell: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As a former graduate of Holland College, it gives me great pleasure to inform this House that next week will see the commencement of National Career Week and National Technology Week across Canada and especially across Prince Edward Island.

In honouring that special week, our friends at Holland College are holding an open house on Monday, November 5th from 2:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. and they are promoting a wonderful opportunity for interested students, parents, and the general public to visit the college at any of their locations to visit the program areas, meet the instructors, talk with the students, tour the facilities and see for themselves what hands-on learning is all about.

I feel this will be an exciting event which will promote our famous Holland College and provide information about all of the institutions' programs.

This National Career Week and national Technology Week will be partnering with Skills Canada in celebration of national Skilled Trades Day to provide interactive displays at various locations across the Island.

Like I said, I am a graduate of this fine institution and I would invite all who are interested to visit any of the college locations

on Monday. It will make for an interesting day.

My colleagues and I would like to congratulate Holland college and wish them great success with this special week and to wish good luck to the present and potential students of this world famous learning institution.

And at this time, I'd like to also welcome the Holland College students who are with us today, especially Cheryl Trainor who came today to visit us and I hope they enjoy all today's proceedings.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: Thank you. The hon. Member from Alberton-Roseville.

90th ANNIVERSARY NAZARENE CHURCH

Mr. Murphy: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Church of the Nazarene located on highway 2 in Elmsdale serves a large portion of the Alberton-Roseville district.

The pastor of the Elmsdale Nazarene Church is Pastor Sheila McRae-MacCallum. Pastor Sheila, as she is affectionately called by her congregation, first came to Elmsdale in the 1960s as a young lady and returned again in 2004 where she served until the present day.

Pastor Sheila is truly involved in her community. One that I would like to mention here today is the counselling classes which she

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and the Church of Nazarene offer. She organizes these counselling classes for families that have lost loved ones. Madam Speaker, I'm sure you and all of us here today realize what a thoughtful and helpful service this is to her community and her congregation.

The Nazarene Church started in 1917 and this weekend it will celebrate it's 90th anniversary with special services and a concert with the LaPointes.

My colleagues and I would like to congratulate Pastor Sheila and the fine people of the Church of Nazarene and Elmsdale and wish them a truly happy anniversary. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Montague-Kilmuir.

KIDSPORT FUND

Mr. Bagnall: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

These upcoming months are very busy for most across the Island, especially the kids. Not only is it a busy time, it is an expensive time as well. Many young Islanders enjoy playing hockey or ringette throughout the winter months; however, not all children are able to take part due to high costs. Hockey registration fees can range from \$50 to \$525 for the different age groups. Then it costs about another \$300 for equipment. The expenses don't stop there either, Madam Speaker, as there are tournament fees and travel costs.

Kidsport was started in 1997 here on Prince Edward Island so that no child would be left

out of team sports due to limited financial resources. The Kidssport fund is a charitable organization which has been designed to help eliminate financial obstacles that may prevent some children from participating in sports. Funds are given to individual athletes whose families are unable to afford sports' expenses. Since 1997, the Kidsport fund has allowed more than 2200 Island children to participate in sports regardless of financial status.

I would like to extend thanks to the corporate sponsor of the program, Aliant, who assists with administration costs as well. I would like to applaud all those who have helped by donating money or old equipment to Kidsport. It is the generosity of the province, the corporate community, and the general community which has allowed Kidsport to make this upcoming hockey season possible for all.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

The hon. Leader of the Opposition. The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Questions by Members

POLITICAL PATRONAGE'

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

My question is for the Premier today. During the last election, you went across PEI and you made a commitment to Islanders with a stance on political patronage. My question is a lot of people believed you, Mr. Premier, on your

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stance and how you were going to end political patronage and you even banished Mr. McGuire there from your party. Do you still stand by those words?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

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

Premier Ghiz: And for too long now in the Province of Prince Edward Island after governments fall and new governments come in, we've seen a purge on the public service. And as the hon. member knows being a former minister of transportation and public works back in 1996 when there was a change of government, they came to power. They fired 800 individuals at a cost of millions of dollars to the taxpayers of Prince Edward Island without talking about the impact that that had on the families at the time. What we committed to was an end to that. No longer can you discriminate based on political belief. No longer can you come in and commit a purge on the public service and we stand by that.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Well, Madam Speaker, I watched Compass last night and I believe I saw one individual who doesn't believe the Premier.

Could the Premier please tell me who his special assistant is for Kings County and what role did he play in the last election?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And I'm surprised the hon. member is asking that question. He should know who that is. We've already discussed it. His name is Danny Walker and, in fact, he ran against the hon. member.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Well, Madam Speaker, the question for the Premier what everybody is having trouble trying to figure out is we have a twice defeated Liberal candidate and he's a special assistant for the Premier. They're paying him over \$70,000 a year to find jobs for Liberal Party supporters. I'm just wondering if he has the courage now to stand up and say that you misled Islanders and apologize.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Not at all, Madam Speaker. And I would encourage the hon. member not to make false accusations here in the House. He knows full well that the honourable or the member who's working, Mr. Walker, in Kings County for myself does not make over \$70,000. We went over that on the floor of the Legislature and I encourage you to please retract those remarks now because it's not a good idea to mislead Islanders.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. M. Currie: Well, Madam Speaker, I

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think what we're seeing here is a flip-flop. The Premier says one thing to get the support of the people and then when he gets in power, he changes his mind. So again I ask the Premier: Do you still stand by your word that you're going to end political patronage in this province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I asked the hon. member to retract his false statements. I'm still waiting for that retraction.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Well, Madam Speaker, I don't think I'm getting anywhere with the Premier. I guess everybody understands what he's doing.

My question today then, I'll go to the Minister of Transportation and Public Works and -

Premier Ghiz: Keep coming to me.

Mr. M. Currie: Oh no, you won't answer any questions, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: Order.

QUESTIONS ON MINISTER'S PROPERTY

Mr. M. Currie: Question to the minister. Is the minister still farming?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: No, I - but I have permission from the commissioner, Conflict of Interest Commissioner to clean up the barley and stuff I had planted. And by next spring if I plant barley or potatoes - didn't grow any potatoes this year but we did have barley in the ground. He gave me permission to clean up the barley so, basically, I'm not farming. By the looks of my hands, I haven't farmed in quite awhile.

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

Mr. M. Currie: I'm wondering, Madam Speaker, if the minister would indicate to Islanders if he has rezoned his property then.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: If the member likes to know the property, which one are you talking about?

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

Mr. M. Currie: The one next to the subdivision.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: Are you talking the subdivision in Elliott Park, the one on McRae Drive, the one in Muttart subdivision, the one in Meadowbank, the one in Upper Clyde River Road? Which one are you talking about?

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, the minister

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is just trying to avoid the question. He knows very well it's the land that's behind his house next to the subdivision.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: Thank you very much.

The land where my warehouses are is under MacKinley Farms, which I own, and then the land in behind there is owned by myself too and probably, I don't know, sometime the town of Cornwall made it for a plan or something for compensated development.

An Hon. Member: Compensating development.

Mr. MacKinley: Is it? Compensating development, same as the land was done down behind the Dutch Inn. That's also part of my property and that was done by the town of Cornwall or the town of North River a long time ago.

An Hon. Member: Great businessman.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, does the minister have an option to sell that land to any developers?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: Well, to tell you the truth, when I was away and the price you were quoting, I'd maybe like to sell it to you for that kind of money if you'd just come out. But if

that's an offer you made, come out and go through my lawyer and maybe they'll accept it. But other than that, I haven't heard anybody saying what it was worth.

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

Mr. M. Currie: I'm wondering, Madam Speaker, if the minister would answer the question. Do you have an option to sell that property to any developers?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: He doesn't listen. What I'm trying to tell you is go down and talk to my lawyer and the price you said it was worth on the floor of the House when I wasn't here without being in conflict. I'm behind the rails now so I don't think it's admissible. You could probably get yourself a deal but other than your offer, nobody has ever made me an offer. I've got nothing signed with anybody. Furthermore, it's where I live and my son uses the farm for horses now. I don't think you'd want to sell your back field, not like you did. You know, our government is different.

An Hon. Member: Yeah, they are.

Mr. MacKinley: When you did it, your buddies, your poll captain or campaign managers bought Harry Nabuurs farm and within a few weeks flipped it back to you as - what was it? - industrial park across from Poole's Corner. That's what he's used to doing, giving to his friends and his poll captain and then the Eaton's building.

Speaker: Thank you, the hon. Minister of

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Transportation and Public Works.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

Mr. M. Currie: He likes to rant and rave a little bit there. Madam Speaker, another question. Were you lobbied by any developers for the lights now at Maddison Heights subdivision?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: No. The developer that you're talking about that owns Maddison Heights or is it Kent Homes? We're not sure yet but, apparently, some of the money goes to Kent Homes. That's your buddies that you put the lights in down here by the Irving. You know where that was, your buddies where you put your lights in. They never lobbied me and the developer never lobbied me and, furthermore, that developer you're talking about is a guy who tried to get the coup to get rid of me before I got the nomination back in 2003. He was a kingpin which came from your department, said you couldn't beat me with the public so you tried to go in the back door and take me. That was you bunch who did it who made the thing up -

Speaker: Thank you hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

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

I think what all Islanders are trying to figure

out is why a developer such as Mr. McQuaid could - what tasks or what did he do for the Liberal Party to deserve such a generous gift from the purse strings of the taxpayers of PEI?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: Well, so much different our department and our government run now that Mr. McQuaid, which as I told you a brief history of him in 2003 - You see I can't discriminate against anybody here on my position so I got to use Mr. McQuaid as fair. I got to use the member over there. This might take a long time getting to me but I'll have to look at it. The question I have here is paving driveways should be - could a drainage problem by the former minister of transportation. The minister paved three private driveways in his own riding -

Speaker: Thank you hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: Well, I'm just trying to explain out what he did and I believe one of them -

Speaker: Thank you hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works. The hon. Member from Georgetown-St. Peters.

CORNWALL BY-PASS

Mr. M. Currie: (Indistinct) control, Madam Speaker.

I think if anybody should look at paving driveways, I believe yours is being paved this morning by your own department.

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Madam Speaker, I would like now to go and look at the Cornwall by-pass and that was one that you and the Premier have always indicated that was a priority for you. Is that still the same case, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: Well, the first question of the statement made, the minister should retract that. To the best of my knowledge, the Department of Highways is not out paving my driveway or that would be to the barn or my wife's driveway to the house that I know of. They're not paving it but if the minister can prove it, fine, we'll have a look at it. If not, he should retract his remarks because, basically, when something goes by your place, they rip up the pavement and got to replace it and I made sure that the driveway to the farm was what you call chipped asphalt and it was bought from Island Coastal a few years ago was replaced with chipped asphalt. If there's any difference, somebody would be in trouble.

Premier Ghiz: Good job.

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

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

You announced in the House here a little while ago that Mr. Harper had given you \$40 million for road improvements. Is any of that money being dedicated for the Cornwall by-pass?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: We have to get a study.

Actually, Pat Dorsey phoned me there today and he wants to get a study set up and Mr. Harper would like to pay half of it and the province would like - he wants us to pay half of it. And basically, that hasn't been decided where any of that money is going. We haven't even seen a cheque so if you could phone your friends in Ottawa and get the cheque here real quick, then we'll sit down and figure out where it's going to go.

An Hon. Member: Great.

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

Mr. M. Currie: So Madam Speaker, he stood up here and announced that he had \$40 million and he did a great job of negotiating. Now he doesn't know if he has it.

It's my understanding that the corridor of land for the Cornwall by-pass is about 90% completed. Is that true, Mr. Minister?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: If he could give me a second, I might have some of that here. There's so much but I believe I have pretty well all - I think you spent about \$2.5 million or something out there and you never did anything with it. The minister - I'm not sure how much is bought up. I haven't even looked into that but I know one thing that when the Liberal government was in power, we didn't make any announcements. We went and did it. We put the by-pass around the industrial park what you call the circle around there. All you people did was pave it. All you did was pave it. You put a little bit of pavement in.

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Everything was bought. Everything was done. The roadwork was done. It was in the budget and you people, you know what you did? Absolutely nothing but buy a bunch of property from a bunch of your friends trying to make them millionaires. That's what you did.

Premier Ghiz: Shame!

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

LAND IN CORNWALL BY-PASS

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, all Islanders know who's going to be a millionaire out of this deal.

My next question is for the minister and could he tell me who owns the remaining pieces of land in the Cornwall by-pass?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: Listen. That was a promise that you made back in 1998 or 2000. You went to the roadbuilders. I remember saying it in the House that it was, I believe, a few of the roadbuilders got together and got you under the influence of something and they wrote your speech and you announced it prematurely. Whose lands are left to buy I am not sure.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, the minister, I believe, is not quite being forthcoming because it's my understanding that the minister does own the land that's remaining. Is

that true?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And I'd like to congratulate the hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works. He's, as usual, 100% correct. Back in 2000, there was a commitment made by the former government to build the Cornwall by-pass. The federal government has approached us with an interest in helping to make that happen and I can assure you if there is any land to be purchased in relation to the hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works, he's already informed me that he's not going to be involved in the process as that could be a potential conflict of interest and everything will be handled through the Premier's office. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Well, I see the Premier jumped in and tried to take the minister off the ropes but I do have a question. I do want to know if you own the land that's remaining on the Cornwall by-pass and it is a priority for you and the Premier to do this, are you going to buy the land from yourself?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And this goes back to a commitment that was made in the year 2000 when you, I believe, might have been Minister of Transportation

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and Public Works when the hon. member was a long-standing member of the area from Cornwall. With regards to the Cornwall by-pass, of course, it still remains a priority for our government, the same as it remained a priority for your government. The only difference is we're going to put some action to it, make sure that the Cornwall by-pass can happen and if there's any, any land involved whatsoever with the hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works, he's already indicated to me that he's going to dismiss himself from those files and I'll deal with it in the Premier's office.

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

WEST PRINCE PLOWING CONTRACTS

Mr. M. Currie: And we all believe that.

A question for the Minister of Transportation and Public Works. I did ask you the other day about the snow contracts in the western part of the province and it's my understanding that there are going to be some government plows possibly taken off the road this year and the workers sent home that you're going to contract that out to private contractors, is that true?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: Well, the debt he left us in when they left and I'll make some announcements here today that we're going to be able to keep the plow service going because we put stuff out for tender and we saved millions of dollars. I just, probably the minister (Indistinct) or somebody. But you

know we're not going to make the mess that government did when they were in power.

And I've got in my briefcase, I believe it's Wayne Thibodeau wrote a story where you made a mess up there, Mr. Minister. You went in there and Wayne Thibodeau quite a few years ago and I believe I have it in my file here somewhere. I know it's busy and there was somebody up there by MacArthur or something was complaining that you had the plow operators deliberately smashing his mailboxes and everything else. We don't do that. We don't look at what colour people are like you did and also we're not going to have a bunch of people sitting home getting cheques which amounted to about -

Speaker: Thank you Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: All right. You want the answer.

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

Mr. M. Currie: Madam Speaker, I'll try it again. It is my understanding to the same minister that you are relieving some government employees of their employment. You're going to take the plows, government plows that we already own and put them, park them by the fence and that you're going to issue a contract to a company up there, a private contractor to plow roads in the main roads in West Prince. Is that true?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: See the difference with our

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government compared to his, the agriculture critic uses my own words, 'clappers' they used. Those are my words. Use different words. We're not going to use your ideas that you did and not fire anybody. If Tignish residents snowed in, Eric MacArthur said he is being targeted by local snowplow operators hired by the Tories because he's a local Liberal supporter. We're not going to do anything like that and I'll be tabling that with Wayne (Indistinct). Actually, he was a lot younger looking than this. This is quite a few years ago but there's a whole story on you there, Mr. Minister, and we're not going to follow your procedures.

Premier Ghiz: There you go.

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

Mr. M. Currie: I guess, Madam Speaker, would it be fair to say then, hon. minister, that you are going to award a contract and it is to a private contractor in West Prince. Is that true?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: Listen. We haven't even got through the mess of who was hired and who was supposed to be working and who is not and I know it's getting late and close to being snow removal. They got to be going by November 15th and we're going to have some meetings in this but you left the department in such a mess, such a shambles. Your former minister that was there, the best thing she did was wear out the couch but I'm not buying a new couch because then you would ask me how much it was worth. Mr. Minister, I just can't believe that you think we're going to

follow the same tactics as you did and that's just go and make - like they used to call you minister of disaster or something.

Speaker: You're finished? The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

FULL-TIME DOCTORS IN MONTAGUE

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

In May of 2007, this government had won the endorsement of the people, government. That's six months ago and it was probably based on a long list of factors but a long list of promises. My question is going to go to the acting minister of health. Who is the acting minister of health?

Okay. My first question is: How many full-time family doctors are practising in Montague today?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And that's a very good question. What we're trying to do is to make sure in this province that every Islander has access to a family physician. We're in the process right now of recruiting in another doctor to the Montague area and we're going to do our best to make sure that we can deliver on making sure that every Islander has access to a family doctor by working right now to introduce a residency program in this province. By doubling the budget for doctor recruitment in this province, which we've already done, of a million dollars already in this latest budget and our

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commitment remains steadfast. We're going to work hard to make sure that every Islander has access to a family physician in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

USED TIRE PROBLEM(FURTHER)

Ms. Dunsford: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I have a question for the Minister of Transportation and Public Works. I'll take us down a different road, if you will. I have a question concerning the stockpile of tires that the hon. Member from West Royalty-Springvale has been working so diligently on lately to address. We know that it's a health hazard. We know that it's an environmental hazard. What is being done to get rid of those tires? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: Well, you know, I want to thank the member from Springvale, also the member from Miscouche area because they have also the problem. It's been there for a number of years and what this previous government did was give this stuff to their friends and I believe it was \$220 a ton or \$225 they were paying their Tory supporters to move them. Well, I'm happy to tell the Hansard is we put that out for tender because once we untie the political hands of the managers out there and let him do what he's supposed to do, he's saved the taxpayers or I saved the taxpayers or we saved the taxpayers, the government. We're getting the same job

done. If we had of continued on at the same price they were paying, it would have been \$2.5 million. I even - treasury board might even have approved that. But I'm happy to say that when it's all done and said and we did it fairly, tendered, we saved the province \$1.3 million on getting rid of the tires that this government would have put in somebody's back pocket and probably kicked back maybe don't know where but there's something going on.

Premier Ghiz: Great job.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Member from Stratford-Kinlock.

Ms. Dunsford: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

And thank you for the hard work on that. What is the time line? When are we going to see those tires gone?

Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: Well, the Tories when they were in power, they used to, they took and they baled them or something that didn't work. Then there were two many tires so what they did, they hid them. They buried them out there and then I found out about it being buried so I had to go and dig them all up again because they couldn't cover it up, which is true. They dug them all up and then they were full of clay and everything else. When are we going to get rid of them? It could take up to two years to get rid of them because all the tires for all the time they were there other than a few they could haul away to their friends to put money

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in their back pocket -

Speaker: Thank you, hon. Minister of Transportation and Public Works.

Mr. MacKinley: We're getting rid of them probably within a couple of months, a couple of years I mean.

Premier Ghiz: Great job.

Mr. MacKinley: Madam Speaker, a couple of years.

Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader and Member from York-Oyster Bed.

GAMING ON PEI

Mr. Vessey: Madam Speaker, my question is for the Provincial Treasurer. It's been some time since the House has been updated on the provincial gaming issues. Could the minister please update us on what his department is doing?

Speaker: Madam Speaker, I can always count on this hon. member to try to keep us on our toes. Thank you very much for that question.

With regards to gaming on Prince Edward Island, it is something that we take very seriously and we know that gaming has been with us for a number of years. I think the racetrack in Charlottetown started in around the 1880s, Summerside in around the same time period so we have had that history. However, as you know, over the years it has evolved and Atlantic Lottery Corporation came to be 35 years or so ago and now we have internet gaming. So one of the priorities that I felt was very important is that we look at

a full gaming strategy when I first took office and I have taken into consideration what a gaming strategy should look like. And I did strike a working committee and we are now in the process of looking at what we can do in regards to putting the strategy together. I've given them the time line of having this report ready for us to table here in the Legislature in the spring sitting and we're going to look at the responsibility piece that has to go along with this. We have to look at the part of gaming that would be associated with people making their own choices but we also have to look at the side that we have to stay away from the excesses and make sure that we're taking responsibility for what's taking place. So I hope that answers the hon. member's question and thank you.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'd like to return to the acting minister of health. We were discussing the number of family doctors who were practising in Montague. I believe in April of 2007 there were seven doctors; today there's five so we've lost two.

FULL-TIME DOCTORS IN O'LEARY

My next question is for the acting minister. How many doctors are practising full time in O'Leary today?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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The complement in O'Leary currently right now is five. It fluctuates, as the hon. member knows, with locums and vacations anywhere from three to five practising right now. We actually have a couple of physicians who are a married couple who are considering right now on going to the O'Leary area which would keep the complement up at five and that's what our goal is going to be.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

DOCTORS LEAVING PROVINCE

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is to the same minister, acting minister of health. How many full-time doctors have left rural PEI since June of 2007?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

What I can inform the minister is since June of 2007 this year, we currently have now more doctors practising in the Province of Prince Edward Island than in any other time of the history of this province. We will continue to ensure that all Islanders have access to a family physician. The hon. member knows full well that there's a lot of locum physicians that come in, especially in our rural areas where some are going and some are coming. There's a couple of retirements that are taking place right now and we're working very hard to fill all those positions and we have a lot of success as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is to the same acting minister. How many doctors, full-time physicians have left rural Prince Edward Island practice since June of 2007?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

That is a fluctuating number, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows, and what we're trying to do is make sure that every Islander has access to a family physician. That's why we've committed to increasing the doctor recruitment budget, especially for our rural areas so that incentives can be put in place to attract rural doctors to those areas. We're also working hard on trying to implement a residency program in this province so that we can have young doctors working in this province. Of course, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition probably knows, in their second year of a residency, many of those residents are able to fill in locum positions themselves which will actually make it easier to fill in a lot of those vacancies and at the same time save taxpayers a lot of money.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

O'LEARY HOSPITAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

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Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is to the acting minister of health. As bad as the crisis is with doctors, my question is: Would the acting minister please describe the work environment for nurses, RNs, Bachelors of Nurses in the hospital of O'Leary?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And that is a very good question. Of course, the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows in the summertime there had to be a shutdown in the O'Leary area and it mainly had to do with a shortage of our nurses. And our nurses and our RNs and LPNs and resident care workers, all our health care professionals in this province do omen service. We're in a position where we're a small province. We have a lot of small communities in this province and our health care workers, in my opinion, are second to none. They go above and beyond on being on call. They go above and beyond. For example, if there is a nurse who could be off on sick or off on vacation pay, other people coming in to fill in those positions and we're going to do our part to make sure that the supports that are necessary are going to be in place to help out the nurses in this province.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR NURSES

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is to the acting minister of health. How many additional dollars does he hope to have in the spring budget to deal with the crises in nurses across the province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And the hon. minister of health right now is working very hard on making sure that we have provisions in place to alleviate these problems with regards to nursing shortages now. For the last number of years, nurses have been predicting a shortage in nursing care. Health care professionals have predicted a shortage in nursing care. It was unfortunate that only a couple of years ago the nursing program with the health recruiter was cut in the Province of Prince Edward Island. The health futures program was cut in the Province of Prince Edward Island by the former administration. We lobbied hard to get those back. It's creating some backlogs but we're doing our best to introduce new, innovative programs to attract more nurses to this province to make sure that our young nurses have the opportunity to stay here and we're also talking to UPEI about increasing our nursing positions at the University of Prince Edward Island.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**V A C A N T N U R S I N G
POSITIONS(FURTHER)**

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is to the acting minister of health. On October 18th, I asked the status of filling a huge number of vacancies. If people remember, I read off probably 50, 60 of them from West Prince to Souris. What is the status of filling those 50 to 60 vacant positions and in addition to those are there more vacancies today in the province?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And our department and our new health recruiter office is working very hard to fill in those vacancies. As the hon. member would know, when you have 1,000 or over 1,000 employees in a certain area, there's always going to be rollover. Rollover could be as much as 5% or 10% and what we're going to try and do is make sure that we can fill in those voids. We've committed to and have done where we've re-initiated the health recruiter position here in the Province of Prince Edward Island. We're working very hard on negotiating with UPEI, talking to UPEI on getting more nursing positions at the University of Prince Edward Island. We're working very hard to bring in more nurse practitioners to this province. What we're trying to do is fix the problems that currently exist and I believe our minister of health is doing a great job in taking on that task.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

FUNDING TO SCHOOL OF NURSING(FURTHER)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is to the acting minister of health. A few minutes ago you talked about the residency program. You also talked about some activities to enhance more nurses and discussions that you're having with the school of nursing. A question to the minister of health - In lieu of the crisis in nursing on PEI and we're not just talking about the number of vacancies, we're also talking about the environment that nurses work under. We also talked the other day when the health minister did his estimates on the floor the use of information technology, the requirement for training, et cetera. Last year the school of nursing had 300 applications for 2007. You know they only can accommodate 60 students. A few minutes ago, you mentioned your discussion. How much money do you have available for next year to assist in expanding the school of nursing and will we expect to see in the capital budget today the dollars to actually do the physical requirements to be able to take an additional 20 students?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And as the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows, we formed government back in May of this year. We're confronted with the situation with the shortages in the nursing area. One of the first things our new minister of health and myself did was sit down with our nurses' union in this province. We sat down with

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UPEI. We're working to alleviate this problem. I'll be the first person to admit it. We're not going to solve the problem overnight. There's been neglect for the last 11 years but our government is now currently in the course of taking action to make up for the neglect of the last 11 years and our minister of health is working extremely hard in talking with the nurses' union, in talking with UPEI, and looking at new models where we have to be very outside the box and how we're going to make sure that we're going - recruitment and retention - on how we're going to make sure that that's going to be in place and how we're going to train our nurses in this province and how we're going to keep our nurses in this province. But I know that our minister of health is working very hard on making sure that we can alleviate these problems as soon as possible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

FREE BREAKFAST PROGRAM

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is to the minister of education. Mr. Minister, where in the Budget for this year was the money for the free province-wide breakfast program that your party promised during the election campaign?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And that is a great question by the hon. Leader

of the Opposition. And she knows full well that this was an issue that myself and the hon. Minister of Development and Technology took up quite a bit.

Speaker: Order.

Premier Ghiz: There seems to be an echo in the room, Madam Speaker. They must like the answer so much that they want to repeat it themselves.

It's an issue that myself and the minister of economic development and the other two ministers to my left here have fought very hard over the last number of years. It is something that we're going to be looking forward to implementing over the next four years working with communities because right now we have a lot of volunteer groups in this province that are delivering top-notch breakfast programs. And it's something that as a new government, we've already sat down with the Department of Education, sat down with people who are helping to implement the breakfast program. What we're going to do is find a way to help enhance that breakfast program so that all our Island children will have access to a breakfast program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

FUNDING FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is to the minister of education. We noticed that you weren't able to

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live up to your promise of \$2,000 a year for the students at the University of Prince Edward Island for this year so my question is: In next year's budget of 2008, will you have \$4,000 in that budget - \$2,000 for the broken promise of this year and \$2,000 for the promise for next year?

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

And I'm glad to know that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is so supportive of our platform and as the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows, that the budget that was introduced in the spring of last year did not have the opportunity to pass before a general election. And a lot of the initiatives that were put in place were already in the process of being done. The student applications were already going out and we're looking forward to next year delivering on that promise of making sure that our first year university students do have the required resources necessary to enter into the University of Prince Edward Island and Holland College.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is for the minister of education. In the spring campaign, at least 100 plus promises were made with no costing for each promise. People voted with the notion that when people said something, they were going to offer their support based on that

promise. My question is to the minister of education. Will you be introducing in the Legislature - we didn't get it this fall so I expect it will be in the spring - legislation that will provide for class sizes in grades one to three to be no more than 15 students as promised in your campaign literature.

Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Premier Ghiz: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Another great question from the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I'm glad to know that she's paying so close attention to our election platform because that was a platform that we wanted to put forward to Islanders because we believed that it was time to end the neglect of the last 11 years and we believed that it was time to put Islanders first for a change. And one of those commitments that we made was reducing down class sizes, especially for grades one to three where there would be 15 students. What we first have to do, of course, is change the way that we calculate class sizes in this province. Where the former government brought into account a whole bunch of different areas so that numbers that were being put out for student-teacher ratios held no water. What we want to do is make sure that we can introduce in this province the best possible education system to give all our Island students the best possible opportunity.

Quant à les enfants ici de la quatrième année comme s'en viennent de l'immersion, comme s'en viennent (Indistinct) de les cours en anglais on doit avoir les classes où nos étudiants pour étudier pour la plupart de leurs vies et pour où ça peut aider pour toutes leurs vies. Merci.

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Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

TOBACCO TAX REVENUE(FURTHER)

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is to the Provincial Treasurer. The Provincial Treasurer stated in his budget speech that there were a number of corrections that he had to make to the budget in the spring implying that his figures in the budget that he brought down a couple of weeks ago were more accurate and that the deficit of \$42.3 million was the result of some of these corrections.

This Liberal government adjusted the tobacco revenue by \$7 million. They blamed the previous government for over-stating this value. The actual tax collected on tobacco products in 2005 was \$27,539,000. In 2006 the actual tobacco tax collected was \$28,183,000. Both of these numbers are actual audited numbers. There is no estimating here. The former minister budgeted \$27 million for tobacco tax revenue, which is around the average of the previous two years.

Speaker: Is there a question?

Leader of the Opposition: My question is: Does this not appear reasonable?

Speaker: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

Mr. Sheridan: Madam Speaker, it couldn't be better timing of that question. The piece that the hon. Leader of the Opposition left out is that the actual numbers for 2007 were also

available at that time and those numbers were \$24,200,000. So how we were - and our question and why it was ever set above that \$24,200,000 was what the actual was for 2007 year end. So when they put their budget together and estimated that they'd bring in \$27,000,000, that's why the reaction from the Opposition at that time. Were smoking rates going to go up? Was smuggling going to stop immediately? It was ridiculous to think that they would grow from \$24 million up to \$27 million so the actuals, of course, as we go through this year are showing to be tracking to \$20 million. That's why we had to readjust it so that our numbers would be in line with being transparent to the Island taxpayers so we had to bring it down from 27 down to 20. It's the only responsible thing to do. We just have to question as to why they would ever raise the actual numbers knowing they were at 24.2 and take them to 27 in the spring budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Premier Ghiz: Great.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My next question is back to the same minister. Last night I understand that the tobacco act got passed. I asked both the minister of education or the office of Attorney General as well as yourself the intention of this legislation. I also asked the question in terms of how much is being anticipated revenue that would be brought in because of that act is in place. You both quoted between \$4 million and \$7 million. Is that correct?

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Speaker: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

Mr. Sheridan: The number that was quoted in the House here is between \$3 million and \$4 million and again last night as we were going through budget numbers, I explained to the other hon. members that it is impossible to really put an exact figure on this. We're trying to get a handle on what the actual cessation numbers are with the number of smokers going down and with what's actually being smuggled into the province. Yes, we realize that there are quite a number coming in through smuggled means and that's what we're trying to get a handle on. Actual numbers - our best guess estimate is between the \$3 million and the \$4 million level and that's what I put forward in the House and I believe also the Attorney General quoted the same number from his research. So what we're trying to do by hiring this person is to try to make up for the last couple of years of inaction by the previous administration when they could have been trying to get a handle on this position. We're going to take that move and we've hired that person and they will now try to recoup some of our Island taxpayers' dollars.

Premier Ghiz: Great job.

Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition. Final question.

Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

In the final question then I just want to make sure I understand this. We know the figure of 2005 was \$27 million plus. In 2006 it was \$28 million plus. In terms of so far in 2007, you said the figures were tracking around \$24

million with a minimum \$3 million because of the tobacco act now being enforced. Wouldn't that be reasonable to expect \$27 million in revenue?

Speaker: The hon. Provincial Premier.

Mr. Sheridan: Madam Speaker, I'll have to ask the Leader of the Opposition to listen very carefully this time. I believe it's the final time she's going to have a chance to hear this. Two thousand seven fiscal year ends in March. Those numbers were \$24,200,000. That's a year end figure. That's over, done with. That ended March 31, 2007. The minister knew at that time those were the numbers when he put his budget together and decided to put an estimate out there for \$27 million for this fiscal year which goes around to March 31, 2008, expecting that he was going to raise revenues from \$24.2 million of last year. Through this year he was going to increase it by \$3 million over and above what he tracked on last year. Now impossible situation knowing that smoking trends are going down and the fact that smuggling was going up so we knew that it was going to go down from the \$24.3 that were actual numbers year end, fiscal end, March 31st, 2007, in the books. That's all. Please get that into the record. That's done. So when he put it out there at \$27 million, it was a grand mistake. We had to correct it. It's tracking this year to this point at \$20 million.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Simple.

EMPLOYER APPRECIATION AWARDS

Speaker: Hon. members, before we move on to statements by ministers, I'm going to go to

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the hon. Member from O’Leary-Inverness
who has requested to make a statement.

End of Question Period

Mr. Henderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the people in the gallery for attending. They are very attentive and hopefully we’ll start to see some of those people in this House in future years.

But I want to inform the House about an event I attended last night as a representative of the western MLAs. It was the employer appreciation night hosted by Community Inclusions as part of Canada Career Week.

It was a great evening. There were five West Prince employers that were nominated for the Sherry McInnis Inclusive Employer Award, two of which were from my riding; the O’Leary Farmers Co-Op and the Howard’s Cove Seafoods for their efforts in hiring persons with intellectual challenges.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize the winner last night of the Sherry McInnis Inclusive Employer Award for 2007 was the *West Prince Graphic* for their efforts in hiring a number of individuals to help their organization with their papers.

And I want to commend the hard work of the staff at Community Inclusions, two individuals especially Natalie Horne Gallant and Jackie Stewart for their efforts in helping people with intellectual challenges find employment.

Speaker: Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!