

February 8, 2018

[Translation]

Day Care

Ms. Dubé: The government made announcements about our day care services with great fanfare. Parents were certainly excited, and so were day care owners. On the opposition side, we thought these were good strategic investments.

That being said, it is always necessary to look at the details. Educators expected a wage increase, because the Liberal government had made a promise to them. On page 11 of the budget speech, we can read that there will be wage increases over the next four years, but there will be no increase before the next budget.

Can the minister confirm to us that this is indeed a broken promise and that he is letting our educators down when they have been waiting for a long time?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: I am very proud of our government and its investments in day cares and educators in this province. We have an agreement with the federal government, and we will invest \$71 million over the next three years; this is an incredible agreement.

[Original]

What I have to say here today, too, is that the estimates for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will be coming up in the next couple of weeks and more details will be coming. As I said, that money is being spent now, as we speak. Moving forward, it is a very complex file with regard to early childhood development. We are very proud of what we are doing—engaging our stakeholders, engaging our day care operators, and engaging our parents. This is going to be a game changer for New Brunswick, and we are very proud of the record that we have here. I would ask the member opposite to wait until the estimates to go through the final details on how that money will be spent over the next year in the upcoming budget. We are very proud of our record.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: I do not need to wait until the minister's estimates, since the information is on page 11 of the budget speech. It says on that page that there will be no wage increase for educators this year. Increases will only occur after the next election, when the next budget is tabled. We have not even considered this year's budget yet.



This is a broken promise, and educators in the province are extremely disappointed in the government. Again, I note that this is a campaign promise and that the people concerned will have to wait and see if this government is re-elected—I did say if it is re-elected. We agree on that, on our side of the House.

We are also hearing that there will be only two pilot projects, one of them in Edmundston. Several day cares would really like to develop their early learning centre. Why was this choice made? The government boasts, with its federal Liberal cousins, about having an agreement and investing \$71 million. So, why are there only two early learning centres in the province?

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Kenny: This is a very complicated file, but we were very clear in the announcements that were made a couple of months ago. We are going to deal with one piece of this file at a time.

[Original]

We are going to take pieces at a time to make sure that we spend the money wisely. What is taking place here is revolutionary. With regard to her... We are very proud of the fact that we have included pay equity for those workers, and we are going to go on top of that. What we have here today is trying to find a negative connotation on a very positive announcement that we made.

We are very proud of the work that we have done with our day care operators. The people that I have talked to throughout the province are so happy to see what is coming down the pipe in the next few years. I would love to be able to spend all the money at once, but we are going to spend it wisely. We are going to make sure that our families and our children have the best education possible in the province.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: According to the budget speech, it will not happen this year. It might be put off for another year, because it is not even in the last budget. Once again, the disappointments are piling up. Only two day cares, one of them in Edmundston, will develop early learning centres. Financial assistance from the government will only be available when the day care becomes an early learning centre and meets the criteria.

Throughout the province, day cares are already full. Imagine that. Are we now selecting parents? The first parents are all lining up and would all like to have access to the service and



receive their financial assistance. Once again, the government is letting educators and parents down and letting day care owners down, too. The government wants to have about a hundred early learning centres. As part of his plan, does the minister intend to shut down the other day cares that currently exist in the province?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Kenny: Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah. What we have here is an opposition that says that we are spending too much money and that we are doing all the wrong things, yet it wants us to spend more money right now. That is what she is asking us to do, to spend more money right now—\$71 million. Shame.

What we have here is the day care operators throughout the province making applications to take a look at how they can become a centre. We are getting a very big uptake around the province. There are two pilot projects, one in Saint John and one in Edmundston, so that we can make sure that we work out all the details to make sure that we have a fine-working machine.

We are very proud that we have day care operators and parents coming to us to say thank you for the investments that we are making in early childhood development. We totally believe that these investments are going to pay huge returns for our children's welfare in the future. The investments that we are making in education compared to the opposition over there, which cut and slashed... We are investing, and we are making the best choices.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: With each budget, the government has to make choices. What the government has decided to do is wait four years until after the next election. That is the problem. I am not surprised that applications have been made. Throughout the province, people are panicking a bit. The minister and the government have let these people down after promising to take action during their current mandate. They are once again letting people down.

Physician Recruitment

I would now like to move on to health and talk about waiting lists. Parents are going to be on waiting lists for day cares, and, when it comes to health, waiting lists are also getting longer. Can the minister tell us if his plan will provide for specialists in rural areas, where there is a serious shortage? To date, the Liberal government has done nothing to attract specialists to our areas to help people and definitely to reduce waiting lists.

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I am pleased to rise in the House and set things straight because the opposition's aim is indeed rather off at the moment. When it comes to physician recruitment, I am very pleased to say that, since our election, we have achieved a net gain of 92 physicians, specialists and general practitioners combined. This comes to more than 40 or so general



practitioners and specialists, for a total of 92, and that is not just in urban areas; rural areas are included too.

So, contrary to what the member opposite is claiming, we are getting results. We are also addressing the whole issue of waiting lists. The member just had to read the press release we issued two days ago in which we talk about hiring new family physicians and specialists, on top of the net gain we have achieved.

Ms. Dubé: Can the minister tell us, for example, how many physicians have retired? How many...

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: How many physicians in New Brunswick work part time? They are still on our lists. They are still practising, but only part time. What I am asking the minister is for our region to have... I can certainly talk about what is needed in my region: ENTs and radiologists; the list goes on and on. People have to wait a long time because the government has no specific strategy for attracting specialists to non-urban areas. The government wants to attract specialists throughout the province, and I agree that efforts are being made. We are also making efforts. However, there are no incentives to attract specialists to non-urban areas. That is my question for the minister.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Order. The member from Shediac will come to order.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I appreciate the question, because it gives me the opportunity, once again, to set things straight and say that we are indeed getting results.

When a net gain of 92 physicians is mentioned, that is a clear statistic showing a definite result as well as positive progress and improvement. Yes, there are more physicians throughout the province.

The member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre can jump up and shout all she wants, but we are getting results. When we look at our recent announcement, we see that this is over and above the net gain of 92 physicians—and I am indeed saying this is a net gain. Since opposition members have spoken at length about this in previous years, they fully grasp the concept of the term “net”.



(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Bourque: Yes, opposition members understand the concept of “net loss”, whereas we understand the concept of “net gain”.

[*Original*]

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Bourque: Here is what is going to happen: We will hire more physicians, both specialists and general practitioners, throughout the province.

Ms. Dubé: My question was about a strategy for specialists in rural areas. Right now, if you go to the Edmundston Regional Hospital, you will be told how many specialists are needed, and you will be shown the waiting lists.

My specific question for the minister is not about his vast general statistics, since we are familiar with those and have them here. What is happening on the ground? My question to the minister is about a strategy to attract specialists to rural areas in the province. It is a very simple question: Do you have a strategy, yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: Listen, this is very clear: Yes, we have a strategy, and yes, it is for the entire province.

[*Original*]

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre will come to order.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Bourque: So, we really do have a strategy. We are working with the two health networks and the New Brunswick Medical Society, and we are getting tangible results. In fact, we can once again talk about the net gain of 92 physicians, and I must add that about half of them are general practitioners, whereas the other half are specialists. These physicians are located throughout the province: They are not just in urban areas, but in rural areas too. So, yes, we are very much aware that there are shortages, and we recognize that. We have been addressing the issue since our election, we continue to address it, and we are seeing results. I can guarantee to you that we will have more positive results in this regard in the future.



Ms. Dubé: You can see the minister is starting to bend at the knees. This becomes obvious when rural areas are being discussed. Maybe the minister should be invited to come visit rural areas.

Is the minister willing to table the strategic plan concerning medical specialists? Is there a specific strategy concerning specialists in non-urban areas? I think the answer is coming and that it is going to be no.

Hon. Mr. Bourque: Before I clarify our strategy—because we have one—perhaps the member opposite should recall her leader’s strategy, which was to streamline operations in hospitals, as he clearly stated.

That being said, our strategy is clear, and further details about it will be provided during the estimates process. Over the next few weeks, I will be pleased to elaborate on the subject. Improving access and hiring new general practitioners and medical specialists are measures being discussed. Having more nurse practitioners and a new form of electronic consultation between primary care providers and specialists are measures being discussed. Also, having two new autism centres, improving the quality of care, introducing electronic medical records, having a diabetes strategy, and providing various services in New Brunswick are also being discussed. The list is long, and I have barely gone through half of it. There are a lot of strategies for addressing the health care issue.

[Original]

Child Protection

Mr. Steeves: Two and a half years ago, in the fall of 2015, my colleague from Saint John Lancaster published a commentary in the *Telegraph-Journal* about children and referred to the inability to take action. Here is a quote:

My experiences, particularly in the past three years, have taught me that we do not have a system that puts the needs of children first. We have a system that does not want to accept that parents can fail to provide their children with basic necessities of life.

In a media story yesterday, there was a tragic, tragic situation. It was a story of five children living in filth and neglect. It was so, so sad. Will the Minister of Social Development tell us how files are assessed when it becomes known that the department has missed an opportunity to intervene to protect children?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: As the Minister of Families and Children and a father of two children and soon to be a grandfather, very shortly, it breaks my heart to hear a story such as this one. As the member opposite knows, I am not able to discuss the specifics of any case, but what I can say is that the safety and security of our children in our province are top priorities for this



government. I have asked the Department of Social Development to conduct a complete review of this case, and it is important that we determine what happened and when.

Most importantly, we must do everything that we can to ensure that situations such as this one described in the court do not happen again. I would encourage anyone who has concerns about the care of children in their community to contact the Department of Social Development or their local law enforcement. I want to give the number out, if I can. It is 1 888 99-ABUSE. That is 1 888 992-2873. All children have the right to a life free of abuse and neglect, and I encourage everybody to make sure that this occurs.

Mr. Steeves: I would like to continue the questioning a bit. This is a quick question.

As I go back to that commentary again, it says:

We need to protect our children. We need to put the benefits of children first. We need to act when we know we can and we need to be mindful our actions (or inactions) have consequences for families in need.

I am asking the minister this: How do we convey what steps are being taken to ensure that it never happens again?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I want to reaffirm that as the Minister of Families and Children with the Department of Social Development and, again, the father of two children, my heart breaks with this case. I cannot comment on the particular case, but I can assure New Brunswickers that when concerns about child care are brought to our attention at our department, action is taken immediately. Over the past decade, significant changes have been made to our child protection system, and we are committed to continuous improvements.

Again, I want to reiterate that all children have the right to a life free of abuse and neglect and all members of our society have a role to play in protecting vulnerable children by reporting all cases of suspected abuse and neglect. We should be upset. I am probably the most upset of anybody in this province. First thing this morning, I asked the department to conduct an investigation into this, and we will see what happened and why.

Mr. Steeves: Once again, I am going to quote another commentary that was done just before Christmas by the member for Saint John Lancaster. She said:

We need to challenge our protective services to continually improve. If there are roadblocks, we need to uncover them. We need factual information to understand if it is policy, regulations or law that continually sends children back to incompetent parents. We need an unbiased approach from outside the Department of Social Development.

I understand that the minister is saying that there is going to be some work done by the Department of Social Development. I am asking and calling for the Child and Youth Advocate



and the Auditor General as well to be involved in this and to collaborate on a joint or parallel report to improve child welfare in the province. We cannot ever—ever—let anything like this happen. Has the minister, along with the department, asked—I understand that he said that—for the Child and Youth Advocate and the Auditor General as well to be involved in this investigation?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: Again, my heart aches for the children who go through this. I will not discuss the specifics of any case, but what I can say is that the safety and security of our children are top priorities of our government and will continue to be. I have asked the department to conduct a complete review of the case. It is important to determine what happened, why, and especially when.

More importantly, we do everything that we can to ensure that situations such as this one described in court do not happen again. I would encourage everyone in our province... Again, I want to get that number out because it is important that people know this number. It is 1 888 99-ABUSE or 1 888 992-2873. Please call. It is everybody's responsibility to be sure to call in to report it if they see something. Again, all children have the right to a life free of abuse and neglect, and all members of our society have a role to play in protecting vulnerable children by reporting all cases. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

NB Power

Mr. Stewart: Everyone in this House, including me, truly believed that the next tax that the Gallant government would put on New Brunswickers would be the Gallant-Trudeau carbon tax. Now, we learn that the government has sent NB Power to the Energy and Utilities Board asking for a temporary rate hike every time there is a weather or other event. Call it a disaster tax or call it a weather tax, but it is another tax. Who taxes the weather? NB Power is looking for a blank cheque to charge customers more because of an extraordinary event or circumstance beyond the control of the company. My question is to the minister. Who dreamed up this latest scheme to take more money from New Brunswick families?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I thank the member opposite for the question. I think sometimes we have to light a lightbulb here. We are talking about electricity, and we talk about electricity rates. The fact of the matter is that people have been facing some very high electricity bills. I was hoping that something like that would be concentrated on, would be talked about. There are a lot of people having some very difficult times right now when they talk about their electricity rates. They have seen some skyrocketing rates, and they are very concerned. We have had some extremely cold weather, and I think we have to be mindful of what is taking place. On that, people need to pick up the phone and call the utility.

On the matter that the member is bringing forward regarding the EUB, the EUB is the oversight for NB Power. Is he saying now that maybe we should meddle in the affairs of the utility again?



I think this is something that they were pros at before, but the *Electricity Act* clearly states that the operations of NB Power are by the utility.

Mr. Stewart: It is the application. This one is actually on the government. My problem is that they are taxing the weather.

In 2014, Premier Gallant said that New Brunswickers are all taxed out. He believed in this statement so much that he has been raising taxes ever since. People are already questioning their power bills and how high they are. NB Power raised rates. The government raised the HST on power bills. Where will it end? Is there any other publicly owned utility in Canada that is slapping on a weather tax or disaster tax or tragedy tax—I do not know what you want to call it—to tax power bills? Is this a made-in-New Brunswick idea courtesy of the Gallant government?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I hear from members on that side that maybe we should walk down the street and run the affairs of NB Power. I am thinking that maybe that is what they want to do.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I do not think that many of them over on that side of the House have read the *Electricity Act*. I happen to have read the *Electricity Act* because I was on that side of the House and debated it. It was Bill 39, and Bill 39 set out that NB Power is to be run like a business. If I recall, their minister of the day was slamming his fists on the table and saying: NB Power is going to be run like a business. They brought in the *Electricity Act*. By the way, section 68 states:

68 *It is declared to be the policy of the Government of New Brunswick*

(a) that the rates charged by the Corporation for sales of electricity within the Province

(i) should be established on the basis of annually forecasted costs for the supply, transmission and distribution of the electricity, and

(ii) should provide sufficient revenue to the Corporation to permit it to earn a just and reasonable return...

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Mr. Stewart: For a minister who prides himself on not meddling in the affairs of NB Power, he seemed to meddle in it quite a lot when it affected his charging station in his constituency. I am tempted to ask whether rates will go up to pay for the Energy Minister moving e-charging stations all around his Liberal supporters. I am also tempted to ask whether he spent all the



quarter of a million dollars that he got from lobster consulting, but I will stay with my line of questioning for today.

Is this a disaster tax? Is this going to hit everyone, including his new best friends, the Irvings? Or is it the intention of the Gallant government to hit only New Brunswick families again?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: If the member wants me to go down that road and talk about lobster, I would be more than happy to. I would be more than happy to talk about it, but I think what he should do is to zero in on the questions.

The fact of the matter is that, very cleverly, prior to the election, the rates were at 0% in 2011, 2012, and 2013—0%. After the election, the *Electricity Act* was proclaimed. At that point in time, the utility ran as a business. Is the member going to order his leader to cancel the *Electricity Act*, as he did the Medavie deal? Let's just get clear on this, because that cost the utility \$480 million at the time—\$480 million to go to 0%. Now, he is saying this: Let's cancel that and go back to the way it was.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Southwest Miramichi-Bay du Vin will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I think we have to get some lessons here and not from these people.

Health Care Services

Mr. Savoie: Back in July 2016, I introduced a motion concerning prosthetic eye coverage for those who either could not get any coverage or could not afford it. It was a really good debate. The government members seemed really interested in the motion. They did not seem opposed to it, and they were very supportive. That was almost two years ago now. It has been a long time. The government members indicated that we would have an answer within a few weeks, and so far, there has been radio silence. I have been dealing with successive ministers on this, so I am just wondering where this file is. Could the government please advise as to what its intentions are concerning prosthetic eye coverage in the province?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. It is important that people who have this condition are properly treated, and a prosthetic eye is definitely a viable option. We are very seriously considering this matter. It is on our radar. We really feel that it is an important issue, and we are giving our utmost to make sure that this is treated properly. I am confident that in a relatively short time, we will have news regarding this file. Again, we want to reiterate the fact that it is important. A prosthetic eye is something that really helps people, and it allows them to have a better quality of life. We at the Department of Health really believe that, and we agree with the member opposite regarding this file.



Mr. Savoie: I thank the minister for that answer, but with all due respect... I understand that he has a lot of different files that he is trying to juggle and that this may not be on the very top of the heap, but we are talking about it being almost two years for something that we were originally told would be answered within a few weeks. This issue is certainly important to those who are suffering. This was a very responsible motion. All we were asking for was a co-pay similar to that taking place in Nova Scotia. This is something that would really help people who really have need of it. They need their prosthetics cleaned, and they need to have them replaced.

What is holding this up? Is it Cabinet? Is it the department? Is it the Premier's Office? I am only asking these questions because I have no idea. As I said, all we have been told is this: Well, it is on the radar, and it is coming. Now, we are looking for something that is a little more concrete. I would appreciate something that is a little more concrete from the minister in terms of the government's actual intent.

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I can only reiterate my previous answer and say that we agreed with the motion that was presented at the time and we still agree with the motion now. We are working diligently to ensure that this will be followed through on in an appropriate manner. We are confident that we will have a proper follow-up relatively shortly. I cannot go beyond those words, but I can say that we are committed to looking into this very seriously. We feel, as does the member opposite, that it is an important issue. We will continue to make sure that this issue and all the other issues are dealt with in an appropriate manner.

As we know, we on this side of the House are all about investing and making sure that we have better quality of care for our citizens. I know that they on that side of the House are looking to us because if they were looking at their leader, they might not get the same answer. Thank you.

Mr. Savoie: That was a very unfortunate political answer. I will tell you that on this file, there has been no politics played at all. This is about doing what is right to try to help New Brunswickers, so that is where we are at.

Is the minister alluding to the estimates process? Is there something identified in the budget? This is certainly something that he could answer with a simple yes or no. Is this going to be in estimates? Is this identified in the budget of the Department of Health for this year? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I can only reiterate my two previous answers regarding the timeline. Yes, there is an estimates process coming, and we will be giving a lot more details.

I can certainly give the outline of what I will be detailing in the coming weeks in terms of how we will address better wait times and better quality of care. We are going to hire new family physicians and specialists. We will also have an increased number of nurse practitioners. We will introduce e-consult, a new form of electronic consultation between primary care providers and medical specialists. We will have two new autism centres in New Brunswick. We will accelerate the adoption of electronic medical records to improve the health status of New



Brunswickers. We will enhance the diabetes strategy and enhance the addiction and mental health services for New Brunswickers. The list goes on and on. These are things that will help improve the lives of New Brunswickers.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hospitals

Mr. B. Macdonald: The Minister of Health just referred to the announcement that he made with the Premier this week. However, they chose to make the announcement in a hospital treatment room while, at the same time, there was a seven-hour wait in that very hospital. Now, everyone knows that hospital treatment rooms are for medical treatment and not for press conferences. Perhaps they could not hold the press conference in a hall or in a foyer because, these days, there are often beds there too. They did not tie up the room with the press conference for just the hour they used it. They also had resources and time to get it ready and resources and time to sanitize it afterward, and in my experience, some stenches are harder to get rid of than others.

Now, my question is for the Premier. What could possibly be the rationale for holding a press conference in a hospital treatment room when holding it anywhere else would have allowed New Brunswickers to get better access to health care?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: There are protocols in place, and I can assure you that no lives were compromised nor was the quality of health care. We would not do that. We on this side of the House value the quality of health care.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I can assure you that everything was in place and no risk whatsoever was involved with this. Once again, the members opposite like to talk about these types of things. Let's talk about the substance of this announcement. Let me continue.

We announced the creation of a new program for social pediatrics, the addition of more than 1 000 new nursing home beds and memory care beds across the province, the hiring of additional resources to support suicide prevention, the implementation of a provincial dementia strategy, the implementation of a colon cancer screening program for all men and women between the ages of 50 and 74, and, finally, the establishment of a pilot project to free up acute care beds by providing transition beds in special care homes. All these things are for improved health care. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The time for question period has expired.

