

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



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SPECIAL CARE HOMES

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, a situation arose in the northern part of the province with regard to the special care home pilot project. Today, CBC disclosed new information. Now, family members are revealing information.

Personally, I must ask the Premier this question. A situation arose where a person arrived at the home to find his father lying on a bed, naked, with no service being provided to this resident and when an employee got to work at 6 o'clock in the morning, a resident was lying on the floor because no one had come to provide him with service.

Mr. Premier, your mother is 99 years old. If she found herself in a similar situation, what would you do?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. These articles that I read are very, very concerning when they concern the health and care of the seniors in the facilities that are run here in the province. I share the concern of the member across the way about the care that our seniors are getting.

Again, when it comes to adult protection, there is a process. If a complaint is received, it goes through a process of looking at it locally and right down to a process that goes to an adult protection case, which has the force of the law behind it in making sure whether these allegations are founded or not founded. I was just made aware of these specific cases in the media this morning. Certainly, from a standpoint of investigating, I myself am more than happy to look into these allegations and see what went on. But from the pilot project...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, minister.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, the minister just said something that really bothered me. He said that he was just made aware of those two situations while reading the news this morning, but last week, the minister said that there was investigation of all complaints. We know from this reporting that there was a complaint and that the family members were told that the situation or the care would not be better in other places. Why is the minister not being consistent? I would be ashamed to get up here this morning and say what he just said. I would be ashamed. I would be ashamed, Mr. Speaker.

(Interjections.)

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Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Order, please.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Premier, this is serious. I know that you love your mother, and I love my mother also. She is 99 years old. If she were in a situation like this one because of a decision of a government—in this case, your government—to reduce the level of services, what would you do?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, you know, the member across the way is trying to be dramatic with something that is so serious. We are talking about the most vulnerable population in the province, and he is trying to score a political point.

What I am trying to say here is that if there is a complaint, in our department, we take that very, very seriously. We take it seriously. I take it seriously. Many people here have parents or grandparents in care. You know, Mr. Speaker, this is a subject that is very, very concerning to all of us on this side. Again, when it comes to specific investigations, I do not do the investigations myself. We have staff who look into them, and there is a full process, a full process that gets right to the point of adult protection cases, which are very, very serious matters.

The pilot project that they are blaming has ended. The initial intentions were to improve care, and if that is not the case...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, minister.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are not blaming the pilot project. We are not blaming the staff at these special care homes. They are doing their very best. We are blaming the government. We are blaming the government and the Premier—this present government that made a decision in 2019 to reduce the level of care for our most vulnerable in those special care homes. That is whom we are blaming here this morning, and the minister should take action right now—right now—and do a complete investigation. Ask the Auditor General—we have—and support an inquiry into this decision.

Society is not only a budget and financial statements. We have people we need to care for, and in this case, it certainly seems that this government did not care. When you have somebody lying in his or her bed naked and nobody is taking care of this person, there is a problem.

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): Again, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is trying to score points, but I just take this seriously from the standpoint that many of us have adults or parents who are in care. You know, I personally have a mother in care. This is not to personalize it, but to generalize it, to say that if there is anyone who feels that a parent, grandparent, brother, or sister is not getting the proper



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care, this person needs to make a complaint. The person needs to make an official complaint, which will be investigated.

Mr. Speaker, our staff is very proud of the work that they have to do, and we know that they are on the front line every day caring for our loved ones. That is why we have a process. That is why we have a process, so that if somebody feels that a loved one is not getting the proper care, it will be investigated. It will be investigated, and it will continue along the process to the point of being an adult protection case, which is very, very serious.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): I would really like to see the Premier speak on this.

You know, this is not about process. This has nothing to do with process. This has to do with caring—caring for our seniors. Think about the employee who walked into her shift at six o'clock in the morning. She walked into a room and found a resident on the floor because that person went to the washroom and fell and nobody was able to go and help. How does that employee feel? Bad—because this government reduced the level of care. It reduced the number of employees or allowed it to happen, and the ratio was not even respected in terms of employees and residents. It has nothing to do with process. This should not be an investigation because this would not have occurred if you had not gone forward with your pilot project. Can you please answer that question?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am more than happy to answer the question. That is why there is a process in place. That is why we do investigations. If there is a complaint that the care is not proper, then people need to make that complaint. They need to bring it forward to the department. If they are not satisfied with that, again, they need to look at that. We have staff that go in and review those complaints and files. They review them, and if they get to the point where there is an adult protection investigation actually open, then that is very serious. That is very serious.

Again, if the member opposite, who tried to reach into the pockets of all the seniors and drain them until they had nothing left, wants to stand up in here and start talking about the care the opposition gave... That was the truth. When they were on this side, he was the Minister of Finance that directed the Minister of Social Development to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I am telling the member opposite that on this side of the House, if there is a complaint, we take it seriously. This pilot project has ended...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, minister.

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LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, I think this question is for the Premier. He is Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs. The government of Canada and the Prime Minister are offering more money to establish national standards for care services in long-term care. Based on what we know now, we know why the Premier had originally refused extra dollars to establish national standards for the care of our seniors. We know now that if those standards are not accepted or elevated, the money will not come to New Brunswick. Is the Premier going to be stubborn as he is always stubborn and not accept federal dollars to enhance the level of care for our most vulnerable in the province of New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, there have been a lot of discussions federally with my colleagues and with the Prime Minister in relation to standards of care, particularly as it is related to the outbreaks that we have seen in other provinces in this country. Speaking to the quality of our people and staff and operations and organizations that run the nursing homes and adult care facilities here in New Brunswick, we have done exceptionally well. The residents have obviously been cared for exceptionally well. If you look across the country, you will see that it is an easy comparison to make to demonstrate that.

In the discussions about the standards of care, we said that it applies differently in different places. What is it going to look like? Is it saying, since it is a provincial jurisdiction, that we can actually work to provide better care at home? Can we allow more people to stay at home? Or is the idea that the federal government will just say to build more buildings because that will give better care? Mr. Speaker, we want home care. We want people to feel good in their homes as long as they possibly can.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): I hope that the Premier is going to have discussions with the federal government keeping an open mind and is not trying to play politics with potential additional dollars coming to New Brunswick to elevate the level of care for our seniors. We, as New Brunswickers, are all Canadians. This is also our money that could be available for us here in New Brunswick. This Premier seems to be so stubborn when it comes to dealing with the federal government and having additional dollars for investing, in this case, in our seniors.

Premier, I know that you had approved this pilot project to save money on the backs of our seniors and to reduce the level of care. If that is still the way that you see things, it is going to be problematic to sit down with the federal government and accept additional dollars for additional levels of care. What will be your attitude in discussions with Ottawa?

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Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, what is problematic is the fact that we have challenges to face that require real, innovative solutions. They require us to have a different model in how we are managing and dealing with our senior population while, at the same time, providing them the opportunity to live in their homes as long as they can. It is providing that mobility of service when and where it is needed.

The thought process from the opposition is always to take more money and just spend it because it is there. I have had numerous discussions with the Prime Minister and with his ministers about flexibility in how we can spend to enhance what we need here in this province. What has been demonstrated through the pandemic thus far is that the quality of care and the ability for our seniors to be cared for in their homes today have been exemplary compared to the other parts of the country. As a result, let's put it in what will really make the difference. Let's keep people in their homes for as long as we can and provide that service. That is what I want to have, the ability and flexibility...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, Premier.

[Translation]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, I am tired of hearing the Premier trying to say that we, on this side of the House, only want to spend money. Money must be invested to improve the care provided for our seniors. These people have contributed all their lives—all their lives—to our society and our economy, and they looked after their families. The last thing they want is a Premier who, by not investing in the care they need, is not looking after them.

Yes, there are people who should live in their homes as long as possible and receive care at home. I agree. However, there are many people who have to go into health care facilities. Some people are already there and need more care. The Premier must tell us whether this is his priority or if it is to keep blaming others.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, no one is blaming others. The only thought process or blame to go around here is inaction. If people think that we can keep doing the same thing over and over again and meet the challenges of the demographics in our province and have the ability to find resources—I am talking about human resources—to fill those needs in the same way that we have always done it, we have a major problem.

We can debate back and forth here about doing the same thing over and over again and expect to deliver quality of care, but we will not deliver the quality of care that we need and

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the improvements that we need. We will look at all avenues to improve that health care standard, and we will look at new, innovative methods in order to achieve better results and better outcomes for our citizens and residents to be at home for as long as possible. To say that we just keep doing what we have been doing...

I know that we have a very different interpretation of the word “invest”. To the Leader of the Opposition, “invest” is just to throw money at it and hope for the best. In my term, “invest” is to get a result that improves the lives of the citizens when the money is put out there, Mr. Speaker.

SCHOOLS

Mr. Bourque (Kent South, L): Mr. Speaker, I, like many others, was very puzzled by the announcement on Wednesday by the Minister of Education regarding the capital budget spending. Once again, he is proving that he loves to intervene on the priority list for school infrastructure. Not just I am saying that, but also the Auditor General. We saw it once again with that latest announcement. I have heard from many DEC members, who are elected, that are disgusted by this announcement. They seem to think that it favours the three big southern cities and that there is a clear lack of province-wide representation, especially at the top of that list. When we look at all of that, we clearly see that this minister loves to dabble in the priority list. We saw it again with this announcement on Wednesday.

He loves dabbling and dabbling, and one cannot help but think that he is dabbling in order to favour some regions more than others, including especially the southern regions of the province. I would like to hear the minister on that. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, merry Christmas.

On this side of the House, we are interested in evidence. So to hear the member opposite raising the questions that he is, is somewhat surprising, given that he was part of a government that itself used the same tool that this government is using, except that we did things differently. We made the QBL process public. We shared both the criteria that are used for building new schools and the list of new schools, something that the government of the member opposite concealed from the people of New Brunswick when it was in power. The only reason that he is even able to answer these questions...

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): It is simply the truth.

What this government just did was to make it clear that to avoid the pain that we have heard from communities across the province as projects moved up and down the QBL list

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for entirely valid reasons, rather than locking the information down, the government would make it public and take five schools off to build those schools...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, minister.

Mr. Bourque (Kent South, L): Merry Christmas to the minister as well.

[*Translation*]

Francophone regions of the province shared their deep, deep disappointment after the announcement and the release of this new list by the minister. It seems to very much favour one sector over another. This is even more obvious when we see that the minister has postponed several projects since he became head of this department, especially in the Francophone sector.

We just have to look at the midlife upgrades for Cité des Jeunes A.-M.-Sormany, in Edmundston, and Polyvalente W.-Arthur-Losier, in Tracadie. Even worse, this minister put a stop midway to the midlife upgrades at Polyvalente Louis-J.-Robichaud, in Shediac.

How can such a radical about-face on those three projects be justified? Now that there is a new priority list, people in the affected regions see that it will take several years for those projects to see the light of day. Given that work has begun in some cases, how will the minister deal with this and work with school districts to complete those midlife upgrade projects quickly? Thank you.

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Again, what we have done, what this government has done, is to make the process public, to make the list public, and to avoid the pain that we have seen from communities when schools have been moved up and down the priority list. It is based on evidence, not politics. It is something, the building of schools, that the specialists on the other side have for years interfered with politically. What we have done...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Order.

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): We have had clear and public criteria set out, and that list, again, as I said, is public. The criteria are public. What the member opposite is actually asking for is a return to political interference in the building of schools. I have spent my time in this department working hard to remove political interference so that I am no longer involved

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in the location of schools and in the naming of schools and so that the process is completely and utterly public and transparent. I make no apologies for that. Yes, it means that the people who are on the top of the list are happy and the people who are on the bottom of the list are unhappy. I suggest that you talk to your colleague from Campbellton who is quite happy about the location for his school, which is coming up quite soon on the priority list.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, minister.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Order.

Mr. Bourque (Kent South, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, what I am getting from the minister's answer is that it is okay to go against the Auditor General's report. That is exactly what we are saying. Whatever he is saying is like this: Hey, I make no apologies for going against the Auditor General. Well, if that is what he wants to do, that is pretty much in line with this government anyway, so it is what it is.

We also know that the minister has been claiming publicly that DEC's have... He has said that DEC's have been changing their minds in terms of their infrastructure priorities, making it difficult for the department to manage this. Well, I can tell you that this is not the case. The priorities from the DEC's do not change. I have been assured of this by them. They do not change willy-nilly, as the minister claims. Having these announcements, saying that the next five... It is not going to change because the DEC's keep changing. It is not true. How can the minister... Will he start listening to the DEC's instead of his own priorities? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, I am sure whether the information here is being... If I am having difficulties communicating, let me try once more.

There is no involvement anymore, thanks to this government, of politicians in the allocation of school projects. There is no involvement from politicians anymore in the ranking of schools that are to be built in New Brunswick. If the member opposite would like to read the Auditor General's report, he would see that more than half of the recommendations in her report were completed by my department before the report was even published.

As to the bizarre assertion that the DEC's never change their priority lists, there is an amazing tool called Google. Many members around the House are familiar with its use. I suggest that the member opposite pick up his phone and check the facts that he receives before he raises them here in this Legislature because it does a disservice to this House when information that may or may not be accurate is shared. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again, have a merry Christmas.



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FIRST NATIONS

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, frankly, I was dismayed to find out that New Brunswick's Minister of Aboriginal Affairs requested that the federal government delay introducing a bill in the House of Commons to give the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* the force of law in Canada. It is a declaration to which Canada is a signatory, a declaration in which many First Nations leaders from New Brunswick participated during its formulation and discussions at the United Nations in New York City over the years leading up to its adoption.

The letter that she signed claimed that the bill could undermine investor confidence and harm all communities, industry sectors, services, and Canadians. This is nothing more than fearmongering, Mr. Speaker, and it further divides us, non-Native and Indigenous peoples, in this country. The question is simple: Had the minister discussed these concerns in detail with First Nations leaders in New Brunswick before providing her signature to that letter?

Hon. Ms. Dunn (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB, Minister responsible for Immigration, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, PC): Thank you, member opposite, for the question. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to say this: This is an opportunity for the government to look inward, and that is one of the requirements as per the UNDRIP recommendations. We need to do a technical compliance review across all departments to see whether we can actually implement the provisions that are in UNDRIP instead of making false promises, and that is what we are attempting to do. We are attempting to get that compliance review done, and there will be a full accounting of that when it is completed.

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I proposed that delegations from the Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik, and Peskotomuhkati First Nations be invited in January to address a special session of this Legislative Assembly, which would be convened specifically to hear from them on the matters that they deem important for MLAs to hear. As parliamentarians and lawmakers, we need to listen, learn, and understand in order to build a meaningful relationship with our treaty partners. Will the Premier agree to convene a special session of the Legislature for delegations from the three First Nations of New Brunswick to address this House of elected representatives on those issues that are priorities for their people and their communities?

Hon. Ms. Dunn (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB, Minister responsible for Immigration, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, PC): Thank you once again to the member opposite for the question. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest today that we need to go further than that. I think that every member of this House actually needs cultural awareness training, and that would be one of the things that I will be working on moving forward. Everyone will be required to take it. Thank you.



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SNOW REMOVAL

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Leader, PA): Mr. Speaker, this has been an exceptional season as it relates to weather. Generally warm temperatures allowed us to better enjoy the outdoors without the winter weather that we usually experience. However, it is only a matter of time before the snow falls and the roads become tricky to navigate. As such, my question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Can she inform us whether the fleet of plows is ready to go for the next storm, and do we have an adequate number of drivers to ensure that our roads stay clear in the worst of winter conditions?

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a little hairy up here when trying to walk down to the microphone.

I would like to assure the leader of the party that, yes, DTI is ready for the winter storms. We actually began preparing in the springtime, getting our orders, getting our plows ready, and doing our maintenance. We are continually hiring and training and safety training our employees, and they are ready to go when the first storm hits. Thank you.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Leader, PA): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether the minister could elaborate a little on that. I am curious as to how many of the plows that we have are out of service. Also, how many plows, if there is any equipment, through capital spending, are going to be purchased for the maintenance season as it relates to weather? If the minister could elaborate, do we have any plows out of service, how many plows do we have, and does capital spending include any new plows or new equipment for the winter maintenance season?

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are continually renewing and replacing our plows. We are currently in the process of purchasing new plows to be ready for next year's storms, so we are very far ahead. I cannot tell you the exact number of plows that might be in the shop getting maintenance performed on them at the moment, but I would be happy to take you up to the maintenance depot and give you a tour, show you around, and show you all the trucks, the plows, and the work that we do at the DTI maintenance depot at the top of the hill.

[Translation]

SMALL NUCLEAR REACTORS

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. New Brunswick is in the enviable position of being a leading player in a new industry. Producing small nuclear

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reactors is a new technology that could represent a stable source of energy for the province while reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. It creates well-paid job opportunities in energy production and modular assembly. Those jobs are absolutely critical for the future growth of the province, especially in the northern region.

A few weeks ago, the Premier came out publicly saying that a funding agreement for the two provincial projects would be concluded by the end of the year. Can the Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development confirm that this timeline can still be met?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you very much for the question, and I appreciate the opportunity to have an exchange with my critic. I think that this is the second time that we have had a chance, and I look forward to having a wonderful discussion about this and many other things.

We are not in the business of making announcements in question period, but what I do want to speak to is the story of collaboration that is behind this initiative. Whether or not it is a collaboration between us, this is a project that predates this government. We have reached across the aisle and have worked very closely with each other. I am very proud of that foundation that we are building on. The federal and provincial partners are working very closely together. There is also a collaboration between the proponents. I do not think that we have seen very often where two proponents working in the same industry have come together to form an MOU and collaborate, find synergies, and move us forward. On all cylinders, whether it be from the proponent level, the feds, or the province looking back and recognizing the bipartisan nature of it, this is moving forward.

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Thank you for the answer, minister. I do not expect an announcement today, but there are still a few days left before the end of the year.

The Premier previously stated in an interview—during the election, no less—that a deal had been struck with the federal government. There were three elements clearly indicated in this statement: both projects, Moltex and ARC Nuclear, would get funding, they would get the \$70 million that they requested, and the province would be participating in the funding. Recently, the Premier alluded to the fact that potentially one of the projects may not qualify for the federal Strategic Innovation Fund. The reason is that one company is further advanced in R & D and closer to commercialization, which is great for the province because commercialization is only one step away from actually getting a return on investment. Can the minister confirm that the original three statements from the Premier are still in play and that we can expect that both of these projects will get the funding that they require?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): To the member opposite, thank you very much for the question. As evidenced by an MOU

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between ARC Nuclear, the public utility, and Moltex, we have seen a cluster has come in together. We have seen that the work is taking place within both of these companies moving forward toward vendor design review certification. We have achieved milestones along the way. The previous government invested in this, and we are seeing a return on that investment come to fruition, even though we are still in the development stages.

These companies have set up offices and have hired highly skilled New Brunswickers. They have projections and plans to continue and expand that operation. Combine that with the collaborative, openhanded relationship that we have had with the federal government and a discussion about progress and planting the flag in New Brunswick, as not only a provincial and Canadian leader but also a world leader, as it leads to this technology. Our name is all over it, and I am looking forward to seeing that come together.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): The time for question period is over.