

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



May 20, 2021

CONTENTS

TOURISM

Mr. Melanson

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace

Mr. Melanson

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace

Mr. Melanson

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace

Mr. Melanson

Hon. Mr. Higgs



Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

CULTURE

Ms. Thériault

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace

Ms. Thériault

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Mitton

Hon. Mrs. Shephard

Ms. Mitton

Hon. Mr. Crossman

BILINGUALISM

Mrs. Conroy

Hon. Mr. Higgs

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. G. Arseneault

Hon. Mr. Fitch

Mr. G. Arseneault

Hon. Mr. Fitch

SENIOR CITIZENS

Hon. Mr. Fitch

Mr. Gauvin

Hon. Mr. Fitch

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Original]

TOURISM

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, there is good news this morning. This weekend will be the first long weekend of our tourism and summer festivities season. I hope the weather is nice, but who knows? It does not really matter. We will certainly enjoy it.

In 2017, there was a tourism strategy announced for the province with which, by 2025, we would reach \$2 billion in tourist or visitor spending. In 2017, we were at \$1.3 billion, and in 2019, before COVID-19, we were at about \$1.5 billion. I want to ask the Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture whether she can get up and explain what the tourism strategy actually is now so that we are able to reach the \$2 billion in tourist spending for the province.

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Minister responsible for Women's Equality, PC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to have the first question today. Thank you very much.

We know that tourism is so important and that, along with it being important, it was also seriously damaged by this pandemic. We can look at promises made a couple of years ago, absolutely, but no one foresaw what we would experience in terms of tourism this past year.

We know that tourism is not going to be growing this summer. We are not going to grow our industry this summer, but we are working with our industry to make sure that, when we come out of this pandemic, these businesses will be strong and will have trained people. They will have all the things that they have been asking us for, Mr. Speaker. So as we celebrate this weekend and look forward to the long weekend, I think that our tourism operators will be smiling because they have been given all the resources that they...

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

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, the minister is absolutely right, and nobody will be blaming anybody about the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry. But we will be blaming the government for doing nothing to try to help the tourism industry survive.

I will give you some statistics. Hotel occupancy rates are pretty much a strong indicator of the impact of the pandemic on tourism. In 2020, the occupancy rate was 27%, and so far in 2021, it is 20%.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

In the Acadian Peninsula and in northern regions, the hotel occupancy rate was 25% in 2020. In the Saint John area, it was 23% in 2020. For 2021, it is 19%.

[*Original*]

I have all of the list, but I have just one minute. It is pretty critical, Mr. Speaker, that the minister clearly indicate what is going to be done for the industry to be able to survive and prosper beyond the pandemic.

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Minister responsible for Women's Equality, PC): Mr. Speaker, thank you. I am not sure why the opposition seems to constantly underplay the importance of our Explore NB program because it is something that our businesses are applauding us for. They are thanking us for it, and we are constantly evolving. As of a few weeks ago, we have now involved the outfitters for fishing and hunting packages. We have created a plan for going forward, and it includes the industry. Industry people want us to help them build their online presence so that when we reopen, they will be stronger than ever. They want us to help train staff and to entice young people to get involved in this career.

Mr. Speaker, we are not sitting back and doing nothing. We know that this is a summer in which we are going to have to find our moment, find our experience in New Brunswick again, but we have a strategy going forward.

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

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, I think that after this pandemic—and we are getting close to the end through vaccinations and herd immunity—New Brunswickers and tourists overall will just want to start moving. I think that there will be a surge in the tourism sector. What is critical for the New Brunswick tourism industry is that this government make sure that we have a plan, a targeted plan, as to how we can maximize on what will come forward in tourism.

The minister has a minute to explain these questions: Can you give us the exact plan? Which market are you targeting to bring tourists into New Brunswick beyond the pandemic? What is the support going to be for our New Brunswick operators to be able to receive these tourists that will want to spend their money in our province?

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Minister responsible for Women's Equality, PC): Thank you very much. I talked about our Explore NB program. I know that we do not want to keep talking about that, although it is incredibly important to our operators. We have developed a plan, and we are planning our summer. We are going to make the best of this summer, and tourism



Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

operators are up for that. They are excited about that. On our very first day in February that we opened reservations for campgrounds, we had 30 000. Our campgrounds are busy, and our attractions are busy.

We do not profess to know how we are... We cannot return. That we will not be growing over this summer is the point I want to make; however, we are targeting Ontario and Quebec. We have “Where will you go first?” in New Brunswick, which is a campaign that we are targeting at them. We want to know where they want to go and what in New Brunswick they have missed the most, and we will welcome them with open arms.

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

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps saying that we cannot grow this summer. I think that we can at least sustain or get back to where we were and grow on that.

Before I walked into the Legislature this morning, I went on the website. I did check the 2021 Explore NB Travel Incentive Summer Program. It tells us to look for regular updates. Do you know what I found out, Mr. Speaker? The long weekend is starting, and the government is still talking about the winter program. The summer is here. How can tourists in New Brunswick know what the programs are and be able to benefit from them and grow the industry so that our small and medium-sized businesses in the tourism sector can get back to some of the levels they were at before the pandemic and keep growing beyond that? Can you at least change the website?

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

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I recall, back in the early days of 2018, looking at the tourism plan that the Opposition Leader speaks of, and there was some uptick in that year too. At the time, I asked this of the member opposite, the Tourism Department, and the deputy minister: What do you attribute that to? I was told: Well, the U.S. dollar and the Canadian dollar exchange rate is helpful. That was the extent of what they attributed to the plan—that we had more people coming because it was cheaper to be here. It was not an overarching plan other than just where can we continue to spend money and hope for the best.

In relation to the opening of the Explore NB plan, the Opposition Leader knows full well within our current COVID-19 scenario, especially here in the Fredericton area, that we are a little reluctant to go full hog on this because we need to understand that we have gone the extra mile and that we have beaten the pandemic. We are over 50%—I think it is 50.7% today—vaccinated. Our goal is to get up to the 60%, 70%, and 75% range and then watch out because...

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

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to talking about economic growth, tourism investments, tourism spending, and concrete results, I will never use the Premier as a reference. The Conference Board of Canada has said that the growth in tourism from 2017 to 2019 was actually increasing. It went from \$1.3 billion in tourism spending to about \$1.5 billion. That is credible.

Premier, I know that you do not want to invest any money in economic growth and certainly not in the tourism industry. I know that. The tourism sector knows that, and tourists are understanding that. It is not going to be very expensive to at least change the website and bring in the summer program so that people are able to benefit from it and so that tourism operators can also survive.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, to the Leader of the Opposition, yes, certainly, the website will be updated. When we can be ready to go for tourism in New Brunswick in an open way, it will get updated. The timing could reflect that. The timing is a bit precarious right now as we move into the final stages and, yes, get ready to open up New Brunswick. That is certainly the key.

Mr. Speaker, I think that if the Leader of the Opposition wants to quote some of the outside agencies, maybe he would also like to quote the credit rating agencies—all of them. They look at New Brunswick as a leader in the country. Look at where we are. Look at the private-sector investment right now, which is beyond where it has ever been before in New Brunswick. People want to work here, live here, and invest here. That includes tourism operators. We have people who want to open new facilities here, and they are not looking for handouts. They are looking for a way to get into New Brunswick and be part of the success story. Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition can talk about, talk about, and talk about, but we act.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, I notice that the Premier has to shout to convince himself. He has to hit the ceiling to try and convince us that everything is just fine with the tourism sector in New Brunswick. I understand the pandemic does not allow the Premier to travel much, but the phone is not infected with COVID-19. The Premier could reach tourism operators to discuss the issues with them.

Mr. Speaker, what I want to know from the Premier is what his plan is for tourism. Once this pandemic is behind us and the other provinces are actively attracting tourists, what will New Brunswick do to ensure that we maximize tourism opportunities? I am talking about people who will be coming to visit us, which will help create jobs here at home. So we want to see a thriving tourism sector in New Brunswick.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the plan. Let's talk about what our plan was to keep New Brunswick moving all through the pandemic. We did that at a higher level than any other province, Mr. Speaker.

So what were the tourism operators able to do, and what was the plan that the minister put forward last summer? It was the Explore NB plan, and it was an unprecedented success. Other provinces looked and asked: How did you do that? That came out of Tourism. It put forward a plan to get people to travel around New Brunswick. Guess what! People found out what a wonderful province we have.

So what have we been doing through the whole thing, Mr. Speaker? We have been keeping businesses open as much as we can, keeping things moving. We had very few full shutdowns. Early in the pandemic, we had the issue in the Edmundston area. We have had a few here and there, but basically, we have been keeping New Brunswick moving. Yes, the tourism, accommodations, and restaurant sectors have been hit hard, but these sectors have been in business more here than in other provinces, Mr. Speaker. The goal is to get back to normal and to have the summer with New Brunswick open for business.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, the Premier never believed in tourism. He never believed that tourism was a growth sector. But he should understand that when people come to New Brunswick, there is new money coming in from outside to help our tourism operators to create incremental jobs and to allow good feelings for New Brunswickers, our tourism operators.

I want to know, from the Premier, what are the set goals? When we were there, we had a plan to get to \$2 billion in visitor tourist spending by 2025. I think that Nova Scotia was aiming for \$3 billion. What are your goals? How are you going to measure? How much money will you invest in marketing to attract those tourists? Other provinces are doing it, and it is very competitive. Please get up and tell us what it is.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I referenced the Leader of the Opposition on what I saw in 2018. It was not a plan. It was a headline. It was a headline on how much money could be spent while hoping for the best. I asked the question: What can the increase be attributed to? It was not a great increase, but it was an increase. And the answer was, well, the dollar changed.

How many times have we seen that—the headline about an \$8-million investment to have more nursing students in our universities? Not a single seat was attributed to that, but the \$8 million was spent, Mr. Speaker—another headline.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

As the minister referenced, when it opened up for reservations, we saw record numbers of people wanting to book, to get out into our province. We see that happening. Opportunities New Brunswick and Tourism have been working directly with operators. I would say that there has never, ever been more engagement with tourism operators and accommodations across this province than there has been under this minister, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the Premier raises his voice, trying to convince himself that tourism is going well. It is as though he wants to destroy anything that was done before his time—even what was done by his previous Progressive Conservative Premiers.

Now, he wants to destroy a well-thought-out, market-driven plan from 2017—a market-driven plan. It was not what government thought was best to attract and grow tourism but was actually what the market and consumers wanted, with some very specific goals. The Conference Board of Canada confirmed that we were growing. The pandemic hit—I get it. The pandemic hit, but now it is almost behind us. I want to make sure that New Brunswick and the tourism industry are ready, and the province of New Brunswick, the government of New Brunswick, needs to be a partner—needs to be a partner. Tell me exactly your plan for tourism beyond the pandemic.

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

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think about what has been done over the past year, but I also think back to when there was the whole issue around who would market New Brunswick. We heard this so many times: Oh, if only I had advertisements like Newfoundland's. Guess what! We have advertisements like Newfoundland's—only they are about New Brunswick. You should look at them. You should look at the videos. I assume that you have been online to look at them because they have been all over the country and they are about what is here in New Brunswick.

Do you know what the plan was in 2018? It was to farm out our entire tourism marketing plan to a company in Quebec or a company in Toronto—the entire plan and the coordination. Do you know what we did? We farmed that plan out to every advertising company all around this province because we believe that the people who can market New Brunswick live in New Brunswick.

I would like the Leader of the Opposition to check that out because I am proud of the companies that are standing up for their communities and saying: We want you here.

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

CULTURE

Ms. Thériault (Caraquet, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, since it is impossible to know what the tourism strategy is this morning, let's talk about culture, meaning artists in our province.

The contribution that our artists make to our GDP is \$572 million, which, it must be said, is more than the forestry, fishery, residential construction, and mining sectors combined. There are 12 000 jobs in this sector, but, since COVID-19 hit, there are losses that amount to 17%. Across the country, economic spin-offs have decreased by 50%. Given that we have been in the midst of this pandemic for 14 months now, can the Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture explain to me what the strategy is for saving artists, cultural industries, and festivals?

[*Original*]

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Minister responsible for Women's Equality, PC): Mr. Speaker, thank you again for another question, now on arts and culture. The member opposite made a comment this morning about our despising, I think it was, the arts and culture community. I absolutely could not believe that this type of language was being used on that side of the room.

Our arts and culture are so vital to us as a government. We have been working with the Premier's Task Force on the Status of the Artist for over seven years. That began with the Progressive Conservative government. It crawled during the Liberal government years, and when our government returned two years ago, we picked the ball back up. We now have a report, we are working with that industry, and we have a great relationship with that industry.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Thériault (Caraquet, L): We have been in this pandemic for 14 months, but the minister has never explained to me once what the strategy, the allocated amounts, and the investments are. You talk about discussions and task forces, but what are you really doing, Madam Minister? What are you doing?

I can tell you this: There will be a 50% decline in GDP of \$572 million—half of the revenue—and this means that there will be a \$300-million GDP loss in New Brunswick. You are telling me that you will have extraordinary discussions and continue to support artists, but what are you actually doing, Madam Minister? Are you able, once and for all, to stand up in the House and tell me, please, what the specific initiatives are for supporting artists, cultural industries, and festivals?

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Original]

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Minister responsible for Women's Equality, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that we have obvious challenges with festivals, if we are going to talk about those. But I will tell you that we have been supporting artists throughout this pandemic, and we are supporting artists this summer with programs that they have asked us for. Open-air concerts in our parks—we have expanded those. We have talked about all these things. The Inspire NB program allows us to offer a digital venue for artists to sell their tickets and their paintings.

We have incredible arts and culture organizations throughout the province. We have been working very closely with them. They are going to present their recommendations to the Premier for improvements to their socioeconomic status in this province. Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely working with them and talking with them regularly. It is a good conversation.

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

[Translation]

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, V): Mr. Speaker, New Brunswickers, especially those living in the Acadian Peninsula and the Chaleur Bay area, are scared. They do not know what is causing this unknown neurological disease or how to protect themselves. They are looking for answers.

Luc LeBlanc, from Dieppe, spoke to the media to share his situation because of the lack of answers to his questions. He says he has a lot of questions. He stated that the lack of answers left him feeling lost, turning to a group of patients on Facebook for answers, and that there is a large gap in communication.

Will the Minister of Health commit to holding a public press briefing over the next week about this unknown neurological disorder to update New Brunswickers on what is known so far?

[Original]

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. I understand the anxiety that New Brunswickers are feeling about a mysterious illness that we do not have diagnosed. I think it is really important to note that there is no information being held back here. We have made everything transparent.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

I wish we had more information to convey to the public, but we do not have a diagnosis. In fact, because Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease was ruled out, we are now starting from scratch. All the patients—those who can—will need to be reinterviewed, and a new path for diagnosis will begin. I understand that having to wait for that process to happen is frustrating, but this is science and research. There are methodical measures that have to be taken in order to do it properly. That work has begun, and it is going to continue in the coming weeks.

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Articles by the BBC and the *Washington Post* last week revealed that the government is looking at the possibility that environmental toxins are causing the disorder. In particular, two suspects are naturally occurring toxins produced by certain types of algae, including domoic, which is responsible for the deadly outbreak that contaminated mussels in Prince Edward Island in 1987, and BMAA, a neurotoxin produced by blue-green algae, also called cyanobacteria.

To get to the bottom of this, we need cooperation from DFO and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to provide data on the occurrence of these algal blooms in our coastal waters and we need to know whether the federal government is monitoring for these toxins in shellfish. Can the Minister of Environment confirm that he has the full cooperation of DFO and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and that he has received their monitoring data to determine whether these neurotoxins are present in New Brunswick's coastal environment?

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, PC): Thank you very much for the question. What I can tell you is that the Department of Health is the lead department for this investigation. With the support of the Department of Health in its investigation, however, we can and certainly will make all data and information available to you as soon as it is available. As you may know, the Department of Environment and Local Government strives to make data publicly available. Hopefully, we will have some of this information in the very near future. Thank you.

BILINGUALISM

Mrs. Conroy (Miramichi, PA): Mr. Speaker, the government has been asked how many employees cannot obtain positions due to language, but we can never get an accurate number because many unilingual employees do not apply for jobs when they are posted as bilingual. We heard yesterday about the leaders of the past doing so much to bring about these amazing accomplishments that we have today. Well, many would argue that what we have now was not the intention of the leaders of the past but that it has evolved from a small group that the majority of the Anglophone and Francophone populations do not agree with.

This issue affects many across the province, and I have heard the Premier state multiple times that if people are leaving the province because of the inability to get employment due



Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

to the language requirements, he wants to know. The problem is that a great number of people will not speak out, for fear of repercussions. My question is for the Premier. With the language review coming up, is there protection in place for the government employees within all departments and Crown agencies who wish to share their experiences in relation to hiring and language requirements? If not, will there be?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question. Yes, Mr. Speaker, as the two commissioners do their work, the idea is that people would have an opportunity to share their experiences.

Obviously, there are two components to the review of the *Official Languages Act*, and one is about education. In terms of education, there is also an understanding of where the concerns and the barriers are. I have often said that our education system—and I am talking about the Anglophone system here—should be able to graduate all students with the ability to converse in a second language. I think that is what we aspire to, but we have done a very poor job of that, Mr. Speaker, over the past 50 years.

The goal is to get it right. It is not to talk about how we tweak a program or what we do but to have these discussions about the challenges that people are facing in real terms, in real life, and then what we can do for the long term so that, at the end of the day, we will be one harmonious, bilingual province.

[*Translation*]

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. G. Arseneault (Campbellton-Dalhousie, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government has announced an investment of over \$3 billion to help ensure that provinces and territories provide a high standard of care in our long-term care facilities. Mr. Speaker, our loved ones deserve the highest quality of care that we can give them, and this program can help do that. Is the Premier prepared to accept this federal money and improve the standard of care for our seniors?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that our record is very good when it comes to obtaining funds from the federal government and passing them on to the nursing homes. With the restart funding of this past year or so, we have invested \$15 million to help the nursing homes in the province. It went to purchasing things such as personal protective equipment. It went to adding staff in order to accommodate some of the visits and the screening as people entered the nursing homes. It also accommodated some increases in salaries to reward the folks who were working on the front lines.



Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

I certainly appreciate the work that folks have done in the nursing homes, and I cannot say enough in my statement here today about just how much I appreciate it and how much this government wants to thank the folks who have been working in not just the nursing homes but also the special care homes and all the other adult residential facilities that, again, have coped very, very well during this last pandemic. Certainly, we will work...

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

Mr. G. Arseneault (Campbellton-Dalhousie, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question had to do more with the \$3 billion that the federal government wants to contribute to provinces and territories. Will this province participate in that? We have all heard stories about seniors being neglected because there are not enough staff members in many of our long-term care facilities. We need to improve our long-term care standards, including our staffing levels, and the federal government is willing to help. Will the Premier commit to adopting national standards in long-term care and using this money to help give our seniors the quality of care that they need and deserve?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): If the member opposite knows of a senior that is being neglected, why does he not call the line and make a complaint? Do not stand here on the floor and make an unsubstantiated allegation. Call, and there will be an investigation. There was a statement made here earlier in the year about a senior being neglected. We sent in a team the next day to make sure whether or not that was the case. Mr. Speaker, we will not sit back and let any senior be neglected here in New Brunswick, I will tell you that.

As for funding, the member across the way talks about \$3 billion. Mr. Speaker, we will fight for every cent that is deserved here in New Brunswick for the seniors and their protection. Maybe the member across the way will call his federal cousins up in Ottawa and tell them to be flexible in letting us have that money. You know, Mr. Speaker, that is sometimes what we want to make sure of—that we have a high level of standard here in New Brunswick. We do not want our standards to be watered down by any federal issues that they think will cater to...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, minister. The time for question period has expired.

SENIORS

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to rise and answer a question with regard to the Saint John Seniors' Resource Centre. It was asked by the member across the floor yesterday, and I took it under advisement.

The Department of Social Development deals with a number of third parties and organizations that provide services to various groups, and we thank them for that. There are a significant number. During the pandemic, it has certainly been upon us to take a hard



Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

look at some of the current obligations. We did not want to put seniors at risk with some of the functions that these organizations were undertaking, so that is why we have looked at the funding of some of these programs. It was never permanent funding. That was made plain right at the start.

But we are certainly not closing the door to any of these organizations if there are projects in the future that will provide services to the seniors that will keep them safe from COVID-19 and allow them to get information. We have redesigned information and put it on a senior-friendly website. Also, 211 and other services are allowing them to get the information that was being provided by some of these other organizations through a drop-in or sit-down centre. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): I would like to thank the minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that answer.

[Translation]

I want to thank the minister for coming back to us today with an answer. I really appreciate that. I believe that I also heard a certain degree of open-mindedness regarding the possibility of keeping the doors open.

[Original]

It is very important because some monies that were cut from these different organizations were not big amounts. For some, it was \$20 000 per year. These were not big amounts.

[Translation]

What concerns me a little bit in all this is that the organizations that were using this money were organizing activities week after week to help keep our seniors healthy by getting them to exercise. That is really important, particularly with COVID-19. Heaven knows that the workforce issue is important. So, when we have organizations such as these that do not cost us much money and take care of seniors by getting them to exercise to keep them physically and mentally healthy, I find that it is very important. So, we will have...

[Original]

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

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): To echo what the member mentioned, we are not closing the door. We acknowledge the historical relationship that we have had with a number of these organizations. But, again, during COVID-19, we looked at some of the outcomes that were expected. Some of those outcomes were impossible to meet just because doors were closed and the whole gathering of information had changed. There were no drop-in centres necessarily.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

When we deal with these organizations, it is clear up front that this funding is not forever. That is why, again, we have had to refocus and redevelop. In the future, depending on what the outcomes might be, we are always open to looking for opportunities to provide good service to the seniors.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

