

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions



**October 6, 2022**

### CONTENTS

#### HEALTH CARE

Mr. McKee  
Hon. Mr. Fitch  
Mr. McKee  
Hon. Mr. Fitch  
Mr. McKee  
Hon. Mr. Fitch  
Mr. McKee  
Hon. Mr. Fitch  
Mr. McKee  
Hon. Mr. Fitch  
Mr. McKee  
Hon. Mr. Fitch  
Mr. McKee  
Hon. Mr. Fitch

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

### NB POWER

Mr. K. Chiasson  
Hon. Mr. Holland  
Mr. K. Chiasson  
Hon. Mr. Holland  
Mr. K. Chiasson  
Mr. K. Chiasson  
Hon. Mr. Holland

### HEALTH CARE

Mr. Gauvin  
Hon. Mr. Fitch  
Hon. Mr. Fitch  
Mr. Gauvin  
Hon. Mr. Fitch

### HOUSING

Ms. Mitton  
Hon. Mr. Fitch  
Ms. Mitton  
Hon. Mary Wilson

### EDUCATION

Mrs. Landry  
Hon. Mr. Cardy  
Mrs. Landry  
Hon. Mr. Cardy  
Mrs. Landry  
Hon. Mr. Cardy

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

[Original]

### HEALTH CARE

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to try to do things a little differently today. We are going to be a little more direct and hopefully get answers back that are a little more direct. Yesterday, the Minister of Health talked about a pilot project in the Bathurst area to reduce wait times for cataract surgeries. He spoke of it during his minister's statement, and he also brought it up earlier in the week, saying that they are reducing wait times for surgeries and that they are working on that.

We know that at the present time, there are many people on the wait list for all surgeries in the province. It was last reported that there are 22 000 people in the queue waiting for surgeries that have astronomical wait times. So, could the minister please advise how many New Brunswickers are on the list and waiting for a surgery right now.

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, maybe the member opposite could clarify. He said "waiting for a surgery". Could he clarify which specific surgeries he wants the number for?

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): I said that I want the number of people in the queue waiting for a surgery in the province—all surgical procedures. It was last reported that there were 22 000 people in the queue waiting for a surgery in New Brunswick. I want to know how many are on that list and waiting for a surgery at this present time.

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, that list changes on a day-to-day basis, so if the member has a number or if I give him that number, it will change tomorrow. Obviously, he has done the research, and he knows the number. I am wondering why he is asking that question today.

What I will tell you about, Mr. Speaker, is the work that we have done to make sure that things are going to get better here in New Brunswick, especially for those people waiting for surgery—be it hip, knee, cancer, or cataract surgery. The list goes on and on and on. Hip replacements, again, are moving to a point that... I have heard of a hip replacement even being done as a day surgery if it is uncomplicated and, again, if looking for a bed available for the surgery.

One of the things that is so important is to make sure that we have the recruiting and the staff in place to do those surgeries and to provide support. That is why we have undertaken a significant amount of recruitment, unlike what the member said in the member statement, right across the board. Mr. Speaker, we are ready to do the work, and we will continue to do it.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, if the minister cannot give the number for how many are on the global wait list, in the queue, right now for surgeries in the province, could he at least give us... The minister mentioned a few surgeries—hip, knee, cancer, and cataract. Could he tell us what are the top five medical procedures in demand right now that have the highest surgical wait times in the province? Could he say what the wait times are for each of those surgical procedures? How many people are on each of those lists?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): That is a very specific question, Mr. Speaker. As the rules of the House say, some of those questions for specific details can be taken under advisement. I would be more than happy to take that information under advisement and give the member the specific details while again acknowledging that those lists, those numbers, change on a daily basis. That is because we have so many people working so hard in order to accommodate New Brunswickers and get those surgeries done and done in a timely manner.

You know, as a matter of fact, again, the member's statement this morning talked about the recruitment not being done, but I can point to a significant number of things being done to increase the number of RNs in the system today. We have increased the number of medical seats, which was just announced the other day. We have a significant amount of recruitment activity going on right now to attract internationally trained RNs to, again, provide services...

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

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, the minister can take it under advisement. I want him to come back with the numbers. What we are asking for are specifics, because he is sitting here this week boasting: We are doing this. We are doing that. He just said that they increased the seats by 10. They did not increase the seats by 10. They transferred 10 seats from Memorial, and they are the same 10 seats. There has been no increase.

So, if you cannot give us the numbers, how are we able to efficiently and effectively do our role as the opposition? We are trying to be constructive and collaborative in our approach here, Mr. Speaker, and we are asking for real figures. If the minister is going to stand here and talk about what they are doing... We know that hip and knee replacements have a benchmark wait time of 182 days, but for a hip surgery in Moncton, 9 out of 10 times, it took 646 days. For a knee, it took 824 days. What are the minister's goals to improve this? We know that there was a pilot at St. Joseph's Hospital to increase orthopedic surgeries. Are they going to expand that to Moncton and Fredericton, as they talked about doing? What are the minister's targets, and what is he doing to improve these wait times?

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

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much. As I mentioned before, the RHAs are tasked with making sure that the medical procedures are ready. We continue to challenge them to make sure that those wait times are reasonable. If the member has all the numbers, why does he not just send them over and we will verify them?

Do you know what? If the Gallant government had not sat on its hands on a number of initiatives, we would have a lot more RNs here in the system right now. Mr. Speaker, I know that the interim Leader of the Opposition was not there at that time, but we know as a fact that there was much money given to UNB and it did not create one more RN graduate. So, let's not get into that pettiness. I will tell you this once again that I will ask the RHAs to provide those numbers. Again, that is where that task lies.

But let's just talk again about the cataract surgeries that you mentioned earlier and what this is doing. It is freeing up two days a week—two days a week—in the Bathurst hospital for other surgeries such as hip and knee and even shoulder replacements and cancer. The list...

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

*[Translation]*

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is good to treat cataracts, but what is being done for knees and hips? We are asking for the facts. The government says that it is making improvements, so give us the facts. It is not up to us to provide the facts to the government. That is completely...

I do not know what to say about this government. It continues to play its little games. We are trying to avoid insults and adopt a new approach. Nevertheless, insults keep coming from the other side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

This week, we asked the minister about the wait list for primary care and his plan for the future. He told us that he is continuing to ensure that people are removed from this list, but he cannot provide us with the numbers. He told us that there was a pilot project in Moncton, in the southeastern part of the province. Could he provide us with the data? How many people in the province are currently on the wait list for a primary care provider? We know that there were 74 000 in August and 63 000 in June. The number is rising. We are familiar with the data. However, can the minister tell us today how many people are currently on the wait list?

*[Original]*

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, there was a lot of political dialogue there. Specifically, when we talk about Patient Connect NB and the NB Health Link... Yes, as a matter of fact, that project is moving forward at a very, very good pace. It is

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

interesting that, when contacted, a number of people who were on the list that the member opposite mentioned said: No, I have a family doctor. I have a connection. I was not taken off that list, and I did not call back to say that I have a family doctor.

The good news is that they are connected. The other good news is that a significant number of those people have been connected and are actually getting appointments right away. There was an article not too long ago in the *Telegraph-Journal* by Andrew Waugh, the political editor. In one of the comments underneath the article, a patient said: I was impressed with the quick action. My wife and I were assigned to a clinic in Dieppe. I had my first appointment and the second one within two weeks.

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

[*Translation*]

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, I want this minister to provide us with the data and stop boasting about his great ideas. Instead of saying that the government has done this and that, he should give us the exact data relating to what he has done. We have asked how many people are currently on the wait list for a primary care provider and how many people have been removed from the list because of this pilot project in the southeastern region. Can the minister also tell us when this program will be extended to the rest of the province and what his plan is for the future?

Mr. Speaker, these are very specific questions. I do not want to hear stories about one person who may have had a good experience when there are so many others who are having a miserable time, waiting year after year, and getting no service. Can the minister provide us with the data we are requesting?

[*Original*]

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member across talked about 74 000 people on the wait list, and again, that changes on a day-to-day basis. We talked about the link. As a matter of fact, a lot of this data is available through the websites of the RHAs. Maybe that is where the member across the way got his information, but they, the opposition members, use stories all the time. They use stories all the time of somebody who has had a bad experience, so why would the Leader of the Opposition not allow me to use the story of someone who has had a good experience?

The members of the opposition cannot have it two ways. They cannot sit there and tell stories about things that did not go as well as they could have and then tell us not to use stories about individuals. Mr. Speaker, we respect the confidentiality of individuals, but what I am saying here is that the wait list is being reduced on a day-to-day basis. That is the case, and here is an example of someone who had an excellent experience.



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, absolutely, it is good to talk about the feel-good stories, but we cannot look at this through rose-coloured glasses. We have to know the real facts, and those are what I am trying to get at today. What I am trying to get at is that, all week, government members have been talking about successes, but we have been trying to get down to the nitty-gritty of what the numbers actually are. That is what our leader is talking about—having openness, transparency, and, most importantly for New Brunswickers, accountability. Government members are going to talk about having plans with targets, but what are the deliverables on those targets? They set timelines, but they never reach them.

We are calling on this government to have a dashboard with open data to show New Brunswickers how many have gotten off the list this month, how many have been added to the list, and what the wait times are for specific surgeries and to not have data that is hard to unscramble. I know that there is a wait-time tool on the Web, but it is not user-friendly. Is the government prepared to open all the data on its reform plan so that New Brunswickers can hold this government accountable?

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

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, the member just acknowledged that this information is available on the website. Again, if it is not user-friendly, I am sure that we can have somebody from IT help him out to allow him to get through it. That is no problem—or if there is someone else who needs assistance in navigating that. We try to make it as user-friendly as possible. We told the RHAs, who deliver the statistics and have the wait lists, to make it user-friendly.

I can talk about Tele-Care 811. Tele-Care 811 is a way to access medical information and advice, and that is pretty easy to use. Mr. Speaker, again, eVisitNB has a website available for people who are trying to receive medical attention right away. I can tell you that over 3 500 people used that service last week. The turnaround time, before they talked to a doctor, an NP, or an RN, was less than 10 minutes. That is real action.

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

## NB POWER

**Mr. K. Chiasson** (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the Minister of Energy. When were you aware that NB Power was in financial trouble and was getting ready to go to the EUB to ask for a rate increase—the biggest rate increase in the past 40 years?

**Hon. Mr. Holland** (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Now, the member opposite is my new critic. I have gone through five or six. Apparently, I

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

am the unofficial trainer for the Liberal critics over there. I encourage your colleagues to take note. Who knows who is going to have a crack next?

Nonetheless, I have stood in this House for a long time. With respect to the utility, in fact, a couple of years ago, I am on record in the media as saying that we have to get better results from the utility. We have been talking about ways to refine and have provided the utility with the tools to get the results that we need, as evidenced by the recent transformations in the senior leadership of the utility and by the bringing in of a credible third party and objective reviewer in the form of Pricewaterhouse. It is not a secret that we have said that we demand better from our utility. We are a government that has said that it will stand up for our ratepayers and do everything that we can to deliver affordable, reliable electricity at the best rates possible.

**Mr. K. Chiasson** (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Again, this is a question for the Minister of Energy. NB Power justifies its demand for the rate increase by saying that it is to cover the cost of operation—to pay its bills. It is saying that the cost of operation has increased because of the pandemic, probably because of the war in Ukraine, and because of the increase in the average cost of fuel. This is not something that happened overnight. Obviously, this is something that has been ongoing for the past two or two and a half years. I want to know why the minister did not step in and give NB Power a call to say, Listen, how are you guys doing there? The result today is that NB Power is turning around and gouging the taxpayers of New Brunswick to pay for its cost of operation.

**Hon. Mr. Holland** (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member opposite. But that is usually a typical Liberal initiative, to get in and meddle around with the utility. As a result, we have seen a variety of initiatives that have put us in a financial situation that we have said that we are going to remedy. From day one, we have been saying that we are going to have the utility stand on its own. In fact, I would say that we are the first government that has really given it clear direction. We have given it debt targets in its mandate letters, and we have said that we want to see results.

Now, keep in mind that the member opposite must not have looked beyond the scope of New Brunswick's news cycle. If he had, he would have seen that Nova Scotia has just filed for a double-digit rate increase and that Saskatchewan, in September, had a 5% rate increase and is asking for another 5%. In case the member opposite did not realize it, things have changed significantly on the global landscape over the past couple of years.

The utility has put forward a rate increase. It is a Crown corporation. The EUB, an independent organization, is going to come back and tell us what is justified, and we are finally going to move on...

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



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

**Mr. K. Chiasson** (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess that the minister's definition of oversight is to pull up a lawn chair, crack a beer, and watch the show.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. K. Chiasson** (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Mr. Speaker, on page 18 of the *Consolidated Financial Statements* that were tabled in March 2022 to explain the huge profits that the province made, it states that NB Power gave back 9.2% to the government. Now, obviously, it was tied in with NB Liquor, but what I want to know from the minister is this: Were you aware that last year, NB Power gave back money to the province and actually contributed to the \$777-million profit that this government tabled?

**Hon. Mr. Holland** (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, is the member opposite aware that this is the first time a government has given the utility a mandate to get its debt into targeted areas so that it can move forward? Is the member opposite aware of the fact that we changed the legislation twice, based on what the utility said that it needed, which was based on past government meddling that compromised its ability to do work and create positive results? We came to the Legislature twice to amend the legislation on that.

We have given the utility debt-reduction targets. We have mandated that. We have said for two years that, as a result, we must do better with our utility. We have made massive changes at the top level of government and supported the utility when it moved in that direction. We have one of North America's foremost consultants looking at the utility to say where it can move forward and achieve results. Quite frankly, I would put the efforts of this government, as they relate to the utility, up above those of anybody else in the utility's 100 years of existence. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

## HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Gauvin** (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are many challenges in the health care sector. This is known, and the difficulties that arise from them are understood. This should not be a political issue at all. Recently, I took part in an interview about seniors in hospital who are medically discharged and have to pay fees. During the interview...

[Original]

I thought that it would be a straightforward interview.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

The question was this: Should these people pay fees if they stay in hospital for a long time? During the interview, I was requested to ask this question: Do all hospitals adhere to this policy? The question for the minister is very simple: Is it a policy, and do all hospitals charge fees to seniors who stay in hospital for a long period? Thank you very much.

[*Original*]

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to go back to the interim leader's question about the website not being user-friendly. I just brought it up on <www.gnb> and went to surgical wait time. That was one click; there is the second click. What operation do you want to know about? There is carpal tunnel, cataract, cholecystectomy. Let's go to carpal tunnel—another click. Oh, there is every hospital in the province. Which hospital do you want to check? Edmundston? Okay. I see 38 days, and the average wait time for 9 out of 10 surgeries is 14 days. Mr. Speaker, if I can do it, I think that it is user-friendly.

I appreciate the question from the member opposite when it comes to seniors in hospitals. This is a very sensitive topic for sure because Social Development...

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

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Oh.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gauvin** (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): So, Mr. Speaker, the question remains. It would be nice to know whether all hospitals adhere to this policy. Now, there are also challenges caused by the difficulty of filling vacancies in nursing homes. It is just the nature of the issue. As was mentioned in the House, this issue is the same throughout the world. New Brunswick is not immune to this phenomenon. I will now move on to another question.

[*Original*]

Another question that I was asked by stakeholders is very important. In the hospitals...

[*Translation*]

Again, my question is for the minister. Are nurses working in hospitals subject to the same labour codes as nurses or other people working in long-term care homes? Are the codes for hospitals similar to those for long-term care homes? Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

## Oral Questions

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much. In talking about patients who are in hospitals, have been medically discharged, and are waiting to go to a nursing home, it is an issue that is very well known between Health and Social Development. That is why we have made significant moves to try to help the individuals who have been medically discharged and who have been there for a while. We try to find a home that they will move into in order to get the proper level of care at the proper location, whether it is going back home, into a special care home, or into a nursing home.

We have actually ramped up the process to make sure that the assessments are done, to work with the discharge teams, and, again, to allow the individuals in the hospitals to take a temporary placement in a nursing home until they get the nursing home of their choice. We are encouraging them to do this. We are doing it in a way that is loving and caring, to make sure that they are not forced. But, again, we need to continue to make sure that the right people are able to work in the nursing homes and special care homes...

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

## HOUSING

**Ms. Mitton** (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Mr. Speaker, we have a housing crisis in New Brunswick, but you would not know it by the lack of action taken by the Higgs government. There are an increasing number of people joining the NB Housing wait list. These people may end up waiting for years and years. Many people are living in inadequate housing or are unable to find somewhere to live at all, especially if they have children or pets or need accessible or affordable housing.

Mr. Speaker, successive governments were wrong to abandon housing as a priority. We need serious investments in creating more housing. The current 10-year plan aims to add just over 1 200 affordable units. Some of these will not even be new builds. Why does this government not treat access to affordable housing as a basic human right? What is the Premier going to do to show leadership and to invest the amount of government money that is needed to build new affordable housing?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much. I am more than happy to take that question. The NB Housing Strategy is a very, very important plank in making sure that people do have proper and safe accommodations. Mr. Speaker, I am sure you and some of the members are aware that as people go on that housing list, there is a triage that is done to make sure that people with the highest need get placed as soon as possible. There are people who may be on that list who already have accommodations and are in a safe living space, but we know that there are continued demands.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

We know that those demands are increasing. That is why the budget for housing has increased substantially over the last two years by more than 20%. I know that there is still a lot of work to be done, and that is why this government continues to do that work. In the future, as we look at housing and the whole spectrum, whether it is entry level or right up to affordable apartments or whatever, I think that you will be seeing a lot more significant work and investment in those areas.

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

**Ms. Mitton** (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Mr. Speaker, the government's current plan will not even make a dent in the NB Housing wait list. It is not good enough, and frankly, it is pathetic.

[*Translation*]

In recent years, rents have skyrocketed, and people have lost their homes as a result. Housing is a fundamental human right that is becoming more and more commercialized and less and less affordable. To resolve the housing crisis, one of the measures would clearly be for the government to maintain the rent cap. The Premier could announce it right here in the House today. Without this cap, we are sure to see people lose their homes, because prices will be out of their reach on January 1. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier ensure that the rent cap is maintained to protect tenants in our province?

[*Original*]

**Hon. Mary Wilson** (Oromocto-Lincoln-Fredericton, Minister of Service New Brunswick, Minister responsible for Military Affairs, PC): Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. I will tell you that, as our Premier mentioned yesterday, it is a topic that is still being discussed. The decision has not been made yet. I will tell you that this is a government-wide approach. My colleagues and I are discussing this at this time to make sure that we do the right thing going forward.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that we have done a lot in the past year, since December 2021, to make sure that we protect the tenants in New Brunswick. Just last December, we made changes where rent can only be increased once in a 12-month period. Landlords now have to give tenants a minimum notice of six months for a rent increase. It used to be three months. Of course, going forward, as always, the Residential Tenancies Tribunal is there to address any unreasonable rent increases if a tenant reaches out. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



## Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

### EDUCATION

**Mrs. Landry** (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions to learning and teaching in our school system. That being said, I would like to recognize and thank New Brunswick teaching and non-teaching staff, since World Teachers' Day was celebrated yesterday. My question is this: What specific assessment did the department undertake and conduct to measure the impact of COVID-19 disruptions on children's learning?

**Hon. Mr. Cardy** (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for her question, and I want to congratulate her on her new role as Critic for Education and Early Childhood Development; I look forward to working with you.

As for the issue of catching up, the exam results for the Anglophone sector are out, and they are fairly stable. In the Francophone sector, results have deteriorated; clearly, these results are going to help us focus our efforts, but we do want to hear from teachers.

We do not want a plan that is developed in Fredericton, with a press release that is not connected to classroom realities. So, over the next two weeks, after the Thanksgiving holiday, the intention is to see what results teachers have seen in classrooms since the beginning of the school year, in order to develop a plan to ensure that adequate resources are available to meet the challenges. I am absolutely certain that we will have challenges, but we will ensure that resources are available to meet them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. président.

[*Original*]

**Mrs. Landry** (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): We are hearing from parents and from the New Brunswick Teachers' Association that measures are going to have to be put in place in order to ensure that children who have fallen behind have the opportunity to catch up in their learning. Is the minister proposing an educational catch-up plan, and what are the details of that plan?

**Hon. Mr. Cardy** (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much to the member opposite for the question. In terms of a plan, we want it to be based on evidence. In this case, the evidence comes from our classroom teachers. Absolutely, we, as educators and as people in positions of government, are concerned. Public servants around the world are all concerned about the learning impacts created by the COVID-19 pandemic, which, of course, is still ongoing.



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

We are taking advantage of this period of relative calm in the pandemic to get classes back to normal and to make sure that we have resources in our classrooms. That is why the department and why this government have invested unprecedented new resources in terms of cash—but, more importantly, in terms of hiring specialized staff—to deal with issues that include mental health challenges. We are making sure that we have social workers to deal with the disconnection that sometimes exists for students between when they are at school and when they may be experiencing challenging home lives. In many cases, those problems were made worse by the pandemic.

We are working across government departments with colleagues in the Department of Social Development, the Department of Health, and other ministries to make sure that we are properly supporting our students. To properly support our students, we have to support our teachers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*[Translation]*

**Mrs. Landry** (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*[Original]*

Mr. Speaker, I am obviously looking forward to hearing more about those investments. In addition to being absent from classrooms due to school closures, children in rural areas of New Brunswick without adequate high-speed Internet were further disadvantaged in remote learning. What measures will the minister take to address this further educational challenge in the event that we find ourselves in another wave of the pandemic and school closures become necessary?

**Hon. Mr. Cardy** (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for the question. When the pandemic hit, one of the first things that we did—and I want to thank the Minister of Finance, the Premier, and his office for working to assist in this—was to push the Internet companies hard to increase service. When they said that they could not do it right away, we bought the devices, routers, laptops, and iPads for students across this province. We put a program in place to make sure that every high school student has access to a computer and that schools have access to the highest possible Internet connection speeds so that we could make sure that they were connected and online. We got Starlink to pilot having New Brunswick as one of the provinces where a beta for the Starlink satellite Internet service was launched.

All those things happened during the first weeks of the pandemic. Since then, we have continued to work on rolling out access to high-speed Internet. The Finance Minister has made some exciting announcements in that regard. We are going to work to continue to do what we can to make sure that the school system is properly connected to government



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

networks and, most importantly, to the web, and that students have the tools to use it properly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Thank you, minister. The time for oral questions is over.

