

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions



**March 22, 2023**  
**CONTENTS**

### HEALTH CARE

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

### PROPERTY TAX

Mr. Bourque  
Hon. Ms. Green  
Mr. Bourque  
Hon. Ms. Green  
Mr. Bourque  
Hon. Mr. Allain

### EDUCATION

Mrs. Landry  
Hon. Mr. Hogan  
Mrs. Landry  
Hon. Mr. Hogan

### SCHOOLS

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

Mrs. Landry

Hon. Mr. Hogan

### SPECIAL CARE HOMES

Mr. Gauvin

Hon. Mrs. Shephard

Mr. Gauvin

Hon. Mrs. Shephard

Mr. Gauvin

Mr. Gauvin

Hon. Mrs. Shephard

### HEALTH CARE

Mr. Coon

Hon. Mr. Fitch

Mr. Coon

Hon. Mr. Fitch

### MIDWIFERY

Mr. Coon

Hon. Mr. Fitch

### CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Mitton

Hon. Mr. Crossman

### COST OF LIVING

Mr. McKee

Hon. Mr. Steeves

Mr. McKee

Hon. Mr. Steeves

### TAXATION

Mr. McKee

Mr. McKee

Hon. Mr. Steeves

### ELECTIONS

Mr. McKee

Hon. Mr. Higgs

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

[Original]

### HEALTH CARE

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, the Premier's budget yesterday showed us once again that his sole focus is padding the bottom line while ineffectively responding to New Brunswickers' needs. During the time that this government has been in power, we have seen a global pandemic with real consequences for New Brunswickers. We have seen record inflation. We have seen an aging population coupled with the largest increase in the tax base that we have seen in decades. Meanwhile, this government is actually spending 2.2% less per New Brunswicker compared to its predecessors, Mr. Speaker. This matters because we are seeing real challenges and we are not seeing this government move the needle where it matters most for New Brunswickers.

I will start with health care—access to primary care. We saw a progress report in December that showed that the five goals for primary care that the government members set in their health care plan have not been met. Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier think that he is succeeding when they have a record surplus, a new health care plan in hand, and they are not meeting their goals?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Premier and the Minister of Finance on a great budget. It is obvious that it is a good budget because the member opposite did not ask the Minister of Finance a question. His first question came to Health to talk about health care. I am more than happy to talk about health care because we have seen here in New Brunswick one of the biggest increases ever on record in health care spending.

Mr. Speaker, the members across can play with the numbers and play with the percentages, but here are the real dollars—a 10.6% increase in the investment in health care in New Brunswick. That is an actual total dollar amount of \$3.6 billion being invested in health care for the people of New Brunswick. That is going to get results. That is going to increase health care.

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, they can manipulate the numbers they want and throw out percentages, but the facts are clear. They have set goals. They are not meeting their goals. They want to stand up here and pump their chests. Well, look at the facts. We have seen that most of their goals in their health care plan are not being met, Mr. Speaker. That is showing a lack of leadership from this government, and it is not only with its health care plan that the members opposite have shown a lack of leadership.

They want to talk about dollars and cents. I will talk about \$2 million. They have to pay \$1.8 million to Dr. Dornan, the former CEO of Horizon. They have to pay him almost \$2 million because the Premier's lack of leadership in handling that file made that doctor the scapegoat following a death in an ER in Fredericton last year. If they want to talk about

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

dollars, Mr. Speaker, they should tell us the impact of that health care decision by the Premier on the efforts toward recruitment and retention of other doctors in the province. What message are they sending with their inability to handle the health care file?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, it is pretty clear what is in this budget. It is pretty clear that the investment being made in health care with this budget is having results. I can point to a number of different initiatives. One is for the people on the wait list. There has been a reduction of over 30% in the number of people waiting for a doctor, and we are doing that through our Patient Connect and our NB Health Link. That is over 20 000 people who are now connected to a clinic where they can receive primary health care.

And I can go on and on about the different things that we are doing here in this budget. There is \$10.4 million for primary health care transformation. Mr. Speaker, that is a significant investment in that area. There is \$8.5 million to pay for the increase in the volume of services for the fee-for-service physicians. There are a number of options for physicians to practice here in the province, and we are adding \$8.5 million for the fee-for-service physicians.

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, the minister can save his breath. We read the speech yesterday. We heard the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Health can continue to regurgitate these numbers, but the real facts show that there is a lack of leadership.

When the Premier's emotions get the better of him and cost New Brunswick taxpayers \$2 million, that is not leadership. When it comes to health care leadership, the blunders from this government keep piling up. We know that to solve the crisis in access to primary care, the Premier said again last month, Oh, let's ask doctors to take on two or three more patients per week. Doctors are already overworked. They cannot take on more patients. We are asking them to make hospital rounds. Mr. Speaker, these comments from the Premier, when he lets his emotions get the best of him, are detrimental to our recruitment and retention efforts when it comes to recruiting physicians and increasing access to primary care.

Mr. Speaker, does the minister agree that doctors should take on more patients?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the investments we are making here in the province are going to assist New Brunswickers to have better access to health care. When you look at the additional funding of \$39.2 million to support improved access to primary care in New Brunswick, you see that it is real investment that is going to have real results. We are continuing to do the work.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

I know that the members across the way may have heard the speech, but I do not think that they understood it fully. The leader of the opposition from the gallery was baffled out in the rotunda. That was the comment that I heard. Well, Mr. Speaker, the math here today is clear. We are investing an additional \$344 million in health care. That is a total of \$3.6 billion, and there is a significant amount, \$29.7 million, to help address recruitment and retention challenges here in the province.

[Translation]

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Leader of the Official Opposition, I have my seat here, but I am not surprised. The Premier's comments about health professionals are what I find surprising.

We know that the burnout rate among nurses is high, but, last fall, the Premier made some comments. Again, he said that nurses lacked compassion regarding health care. These are comments the Premier made without thinking of the consequences.

When we undertake recruitment and retention initiatives, the Premier's comments hamper those efforts. We know that there have been advertisements paid for by taxpayers. We were told that 1 000 nurses were hired, but we see the reality: We lose as many nurses as we hire. So, I want to know what this government is doing, in the wake of the Premier's comments, to restore confidence and to recruit nurses.

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think that it is important to realize some of the successes that are actually happening in health. The minister talks about reducing the wait list by 20 000 and opening up primary care access to the pharmacists. The cataract surgery reduced the wait list by 70%, and hip and knee surgeries are up by another 20%. Everywhere we are looking, things in health care are improving. And you want to talk about recruitment. In the past several months, we have hired more people than we have actually lost through retirement or otherwise, so the tide is turning.

But do you know what we are doing most of all? We are listening to the nurses who are on the floors of the hospitals, in the rooms. We are asking: What can we do better to make your work-life balance a success and make you want to be part of a solution for New Brunswick? That is what is changing the game: Listening to nurses where they work and when they work about why they wanted to be a nurse and getting back the conviction they have had through their entire career. Mr. Speaker, listening to the people who want to be part of a solution is not listening to that crowd across the hall.

(Interjections.)

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

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

[*Translation*]

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, we are listening to health professionals and we know that they are discouraged by the comments we have been hearing from the government for a long time. Our phones have been ringing nonstop since yesterday. We want to listen to health professionals.

We see that there is \$30 million in the budget for a bit of recruitment. Let's look at what neighbouring provinces are doing. Nova Scotia has implemented a \$350-million program to speed up the certification process and to recruit nationally and internationally, in foreign countries.

What are we doing here? The government is not listening to the professionals; it accuses them of a lack of compassion and asks them to take on two or three more patients per week. Government members will then rise and brag: We resolved the crisis, and now we are listening to health professionals. However, that is not the case; the government is not listening to them. Mr. Speaker, is the Premier prepared to listen?

[*Original*]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would say that, no, we do not have it all fixed. You know, the interesting part about the Liberals over there is that they cannot see success when it is staring them in the face. They cannot see a province that is actually rebounding from the hole that they dug over the previous years. They cannot even begin to fathom the changes that they are seeing in this province.

Yes, recruitment continues to be the challenge. We have had people visiting foreign countries and signing up more people to come here, to New Brunswick, to be in the health care field. We will continue to do that because it is needed. We know that, and we know that we need to keep looking for better ways to deliver results for patients.

Do you know what is changing both in the schools and in the health care system? There is a focus on the student and a focus on the patient. So why are we here? We are not here to debate back and forth on idle time. We are here to get better results for the citizens of this province, and that is what we are working on. We are seeing it, and their friends are seeing it. They get a call, and they say, oh, I have my surgery coming next month, but I thought that it was going to be in another two years. Things are changing, Mr. Speaker.



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

### PROPERTY TAX

**Mr. Bourque** (Kent South, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, things are changing for the worse. Just ask the latest poll that came out.

New Brunswickers are seeing unprecedented increases in their property assessments that are prompting many of them to request that the government do an assessment review. Recently, Service New Brunswick openly admitted that it was experiencing a considerable backlog of requested reassessments. We are receiving multiple calls from constituents who are frustrated by the lack of response from SNB.

Furthermore, New Brunswickers are being told to pay those taxes, which will be readjusted afterward if needed. Let us remember that New Brunswickers have seen a dramatic increase in their cost of living over the past couple of years. Many of them are struggling, and it is unfair to ask them to fork over more than is possibly needed only because this government is not organized enough to deal with this backlog. How can the minister justify this action? How will this be dealt with swiftly? People need relief now. Thank you.

**Hon. Ms. Green** (Fredericton North, Minister of Service New Brunswick, Minister responsible for Housing, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are experiencing an unprecedented number of people asking for a property assessment review. We are also in a time when we have some issues with Fiona and property damage. Those also require reassessment. We employ a strong team of assessors. These are professional assessors. I am concerned when I hear this negative connotation about the work that they do every day to put the real and true value on people's property and to assess that. When we are speaking negatively about these people over and over and over again, we are making it very difficult for them to do their professional job. We need to be working with them. We need to support them and help them through these unprecedented times. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Bourque** (Kent South, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that is exactly what I am saying. It is not about the people at SNB. It is about this government supporting SNB and giving the people there more resources so that they can do their jobs better.

Another thing is that recently, we found out that this government reduced the assessment of certain sawmills by up to 94% because times are tough in the forest industry. Simultaneously, New Brunswickers' residential assessments have increased in an unprecedented way while they are suffering because of the increases in the cost of living and while many people are still recovering from the impacts of COVID-19. Let me remind everyone—well, everybody knows—how much this government is pulling in in record surpluses. Also, some big companies are getting huge tax breaks with much lower assessments while the ordinary New Brunswick homeowner has no such luck. This looks a lot like a double standard, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain why this is happening and

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

justify to New Brunswickers how big businesses seem to be getting preferential treatment over everyday New Brunswickers? Thank you.

**Hon. Ms. Green** (Fredericton North, Minister of Service New Brunswick, Minister responsible for Housing, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are back at the beginning again. We are mixing together assessments and tax. They are two very different things. The Auditor General made a recommendation to separate assessment services from taxation. I will talk about the assessment side of things because that is what I am responsible for.

In the press, there was some discussion about some pulp mills. Mr. Speaker, in New Brunswick, in our regulations, we have the ability to challenge the assessments on properties. At that point, the property owner can present information, data, and open the books for the province to review the property, the value of the property, and things that you would not normally know unless you were invited in to take a look at specific things about the property. That is taken into consideration during a review of an assessment. This happened in this case, and the assessment changed.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bourque** (Kent South, L): Mr. Speaker, during the entire municipal reform process, how many times did we hear the minister responsible for the reform say loud and clear that its effect on property taxes would be minimal? Yet, a very significant number of people in our province had their property assessments and tax rates increase significantly because of the reform and the amalgamations.

How can the minister look people in the eye and keep up this charade by saying that the impact is minimal? Will the minister finally admit that he misjudged the real impact on property taxes? Alternatively, did he know about it from the start and prefer to hide this valuable information from the public? Even a member of his own caucus has spoken out about the situation publicly. People deserve transparency and the right answers, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister responsible for municipal reform finally tell New Brunswickers the truth? Thank you very much.

**Hon. Mr. Allain** (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not believe you received the memo from your leader. She said that you would be talking about health, affordable housing, energy, the environment, education, and housing. The topic for the past 12 minutes has been a significant budget for New Brunswick. The topic of discussion has been the New Brunswick budget, and there has not yet been a question asked about it. Mr. Speaker, the goal of the local governance reform was to improve and revolutionize the municipal sector. That has been done, it is still being done, and it will continue to be done.



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

[Original]

I am standing here today as a New Brunswicker, and I cannot believe that in 12 minutes of the first QP, the opposition members have not talked about the budget that was released yesterday or have not tried to hold us accountable. Please, do your job. New Brunswickers count on it.

(Interjections.)

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

### EDUCATION

**Mrs. Landry** (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been a loss of trust between New Brunswickers and the Premier over his plan to cancel French immersion. The Premier stubbornly refused to listen to the advice from the Department of Education, and he wrongly portrayed public hearings as shouting sessions. Rightfully, the New Brunswick Teachers' Association is calling for an end to what it calls "political interference in education, which 'breeds long-term instability'". Will the government take the first step to rebuild trust with the educational professionals and New Brunswickers by committing to remove politics from decisions about children's education?

**Hon. Mr. Hogan** (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is really rich to hear the Liberals talk about removing politics from education when they moved the entry point for French immersion from Grade 3 to Grade 1 simply because it was a campaign promise. We would not want to wait and see what the results from that were.

I know that the consultations were quite emotional. We went around and consulted with New Brunswickers. It was important to hear from New Brunswickers. We put a proposed framework forward. We wanted to get feedback on it. That is another thing that is probably novel. We listened to New Brunswickers, we heard what they had to say, and we decided not to move forward with the framework that we had. It was not primarily because of emotional people at these consultations. We are continuing to look at how we are going to improve our education system, especially French immersion and especially the issue of streaming. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Landry** (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier just said that the government is focusing on students. Will the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development listen to the comments that were made so convincingly during the public consultations on French immersion?

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

An overwhelming majority of teachers, parents, and experts have given concrete examples of measures and investments needed to improve all students' results, but there are no such investments in the budget tabled yesterday. So, can the minister tell us how many new educational support resources, including educational assistants, speech-language pathologists, psychologists, and other professional supports, will be added to classrooms to support learning in the coming year?

**Hon. Mr. Hogan** (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As was announced in the budget tabled yesterday, we will continue investing in education in New Brunswick because it is important to develop and maintain high-quality education in our province. We will make investments, because we have seen the number of students in New Brunswick increase by 5 000, and that growth will continue. People want to come here to New Brunswick because our province is getting things done in the economic world and making the best choices possible. In addition, New Brunswick is the best Canadian province to live in.

When it comes to education, we will invest \$110 million in new schools. As our plan indicates, \$64.2 million will be used to plan and build eight new schools. All these schools for the development...

[Original]

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

## SCHOOLS

**Mrs. Landry** (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I repeat what the Premier said—the focus here is on students. But this government seems to have tremendous difficulty in actually building schools. For example, people living in the South End of Saint John have been waiting for years for a promised school. Stakeholders are also calling for midlife upgrades to high schools such as Cité des Jeunes in Edmundston, W.-Arthur-Losier in Tracadie, and Louis-J.-Robichaud in Shediac.

What approach is the minister taking to deliver on not only the design but also the actual building of schools, such as the one for the South End of Saint John, and the upgrades for schools in other communities around the province?

**Hon. Mr. Hogan** (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. As the member well knows, the specifics will come out in estimates in terms of where we are going to spend exact dollars, how many new employees that will be, and what that looks like in terms of midlife upgrades for schools. We have already put out a capital list, and we are going to invest an additional \$110 million in capital construction projects and improvements in our schools, as the member well knows.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

We are going to look at developing the plan for three new schools in the province—one in Saint John, one in Shediac Cape, and another one in Campbellton. So, \$46 million will go toward continuing improvements, such as midlife upgrades and ventilation upgrades, and for new equipment in our schools. This budget sees that we are going to continue to invest in our infrastructure and in our people.

[Translation]

### SPECIAL CARE HOMES

**Mr. Gauvin** (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Something happened in Neguac in January. Everyone is aware of what happened. People were displaced, and others could have been displaced. It created a lot of anxiety. To be fair, I must say that members from both sides of the House went to see what was going on there. I know the member for that region is aware of the anxiety it created in his community.

That being said, yesterday, we read the budget and listened to the budget speech. I had discussions with the minister about what happened in Neguac. Even if some of these seniors managed to get a place to stay in Neguac—that is the ideal, and that is what we want—the anxiety that was created did not go away.

Mr. Speaker, in the discussions I had with the minister, it was stated that the problem has to be resolved. That being said, to avoid a recurrence... We were lucky that someone intervened; we were lucky. Does the government plan on doing something so that this does not happen to seniors again? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

**Hon. Mrs. Shephard** (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Social Development, Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, PC): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate this question because I am going to tell you that while they were on the lawn outside playing politics, we were inside taking care of business. You know, the department is a regulating body, and we rely on the private sector to help us deliver services to the people of New Brunswick and services to our most vulnerable. I absolutely agree that we need to have a system whereby we can perhaps intervene sooner. We are working on that to bring it forward with the senior care plan and with new legislation in the senior care Act. I would be happy to brief the member opposite on what we are doing.

You know, Mr. Speaker, if we had not done anything, if we had not done anything and those special care homes closed because of poor management in operations, the members opposite would be screaming about that. We took action as needed, and we protected those individuals.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

[Translation]

**Mr. Gauvin** (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, my question was in no way an attack. I even said that members from both sides of the House went to Neguac to see what happened. They realized that there was a situation to resolve. We talked with people. We did not attack anyone. We did not scream at anyone. We just want to resolve the situation.

In fact, if we do not resolve this situation, what happened in Neguac could happen again elsewhere. This is not a matter of playing politics. We have to try to do our job to find a solution here. The question was in no way an attack. If people think that there is an attack in this question, which was about protecting seniors, I think they should readjust their priorities, because we are talking about people who are in the third act of their lives, Mr. Speaker. We owe them respect. All I am asking is this: Can we expect this problem to be resolved during the current session? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

**Hon. Mrs. Shephard** (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Social Development, Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, PC): Mr. Speaker, they organized a political rally on the front lawn. Let's be clear about who was playing politics.

We took a situation in hand. I want to commend the Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation for being the voice of reason in his community. We understand the vulnerability that this showed us. We know that we have dealt with these issues before, and we are working on a long-term senior care plan and legislation for long-term care that will benefit the people of this province. I would welcome any input from the member opposite. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gauvin** (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): Listen, Mr. Speaker, I did not organize a rally. I do not even know what lawn she is talking about. Mr. Speaker, what I want to know... What we want to know is if the situation will be resolved during this session. Madam Minister, we have had conversations. If you want ideas to solve the problem, we will give you some.

[Original]

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

[Translation]

**Mr. Gauvin** (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): Again, I remind people that what happened in Neguac is not fiction. What happened in Neguac could happen elsewhere, and that is not fiction

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

either. The question is very simple. We speak for the people—for the most vulnerable—in New Brunswick, Mr. Speaker. The question is simple: During this session, will we be able to come to a solution to solve this problem so that nobody else in New Brunswick has to suffer like the people in Neguac did? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

*[Original]*

**Hon. Mrs. Shephard** (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Social Development, Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, PC): I love the passion, Mr. Speaker. It is the same passion that drove them to bring people from all over northern New Brunswick to rally on the lawns of special care homes, really escalating the emotion in the area.

We understand that this is very personal. We understand that the care of our seniors, the care of those who are disabled, and the care of those who need to be in long-term care is our responsibility. Mr. Speaker, we are developing the senior care plan. We are developing the senior care legislation so that we can protect and give the best service possible to those who rely on us. I am very happy to be in this position at this time because I am looking forward to bringing forward legislation. I am looking forward to implementing those long-term solutions that can give the people of New Brunswick the security that they deserve.

*[Translation]*

## HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even though the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board stated yesterday that improving access to primary health care is essential, his budget does not contain many details. Many New Brunswickers do not have a health care provider, and some of those who do have a hard time getting a timely appointment.

Emergency physicians and family physicians are calling for emergency care clinics to be created in our hospitals to relieve the overwhelming pressure on our emergency rooms. My question for the Minister of Health is simple. Is there funding in this budget to implement emergency care in our regional hospitals?

*[Original]*

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I think that the members of the Green Party should be congratulating the Minister of Finance and the Premier for this budget. Once again, they want to get right to the details of health care, and I am fine with that. I will pass on their congratulations to the Finance Minister and the Premier.



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

The short answer to that is yes, but since I have another 40 seconds, I want to elaborate a little bit. You know, Mr. Speaker, the results are clear. We have seen a 31.5% decrease in the number of people waiting for a primary care provider. That is about 18 000 to 20 000 people. The number fluctuates on a day-to-day basis, with new people coming in and various changes in the medical profession.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at that 10.6% increase in health care funding over last year's budget, we know that a substantial amount of that is going to primary care access, which is part of our health care plan. It is one of the five pillars.

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

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, New Brunswickers are looking for permanent health care providers. Liberals and Conservatives have been taking turns singing the praises of collaborative health care teams since 2002—2002—yet neither has done anything substantive to transition primary health care services to the collaborative care model.

This budget should achieve that, but the question is, does it? Collaborative health care teams would significantly expand the number of people who have a health care provider but require an investment of money in those primary health care providers. To achieve this, nurse practitioners need a different funding model so that they can be reimbursed directly in order to be part of a collaborative care team. Can the Minister of Health confirm that this budget will provide the means for nurse practitioners to build a health care system for their services for the first time?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a message for the Green Party from the Premier and the Minister of Finance: Thank you very much for your support of the budget.

Specifically, when we talk about primary health care here in New Brunswick, the additional funding includes \$39.2 million, which will support improved access to primary care and primary health. That is an important part. I cannot wait until estimates because we are going to drill down deeper, and I will not be cut off after 60 seconds. Time flies when you are having fun and have good news to tell.

The good news is that there is \$10.4 million for primary health care transformation, which includes increasing the number of doctors who are working in teams. This does not mean just sharing accommodations, buildings, or office space. This means collaborative practice, collaborative care, owning patients, and having them be owned by that clinic so that they have a home and have access to health care.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

### MIDWIFERY

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, let's continue to talk about collaboration because that is continually held up as part of the solution to our health care crisis. This past month I have been meeting a lot of health care professionals around the province, including midwives. Horizon Health established the midwifery clinic in Fredericton back in 2015 as a pilot project to provide prenatal and postnatal care and to deliver babies.

Midwives need to be accessible across this province by now, but the Department of Health has yet to move beyond this single pilot project in Fredericton. An assessment of the midwifery clinic pilot was conducted last summer. It was supposed to be released in the fall. It was not. Integrating midwives into our health care system throughout the province, particularly in rural areas, would have tremendous benefits. Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell us whether this budget includes funding to expand midwifery services beyond the one clinic in Fredericton, particularly to those regions that have lost access to labour and delivery services?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do look forward to my estimates as we drill down. Again, one of the reasons that we do pilot projects is to make sure that there are no unnecessary consequences. That is the reason that we have opened the eye clinic in Bathurst—to reduce wait lines and wait times for eye cataract surgery. In that region, the wait list has been reduced by about 60%, I believe, if I look at my notes. We have had such success there that we have opened a clinic in Miramichi.

We have more good news to tell when it comes to the health care budget here in New Brunswick. Each piece of news could have a separate event or ribbon cutting. When we look at all aspects of this collaborative care, we see that we are not focused just on the physicians. This could include nurse practitioners. It could include a number of other allied health professionals.

### CLIMATE CHANGE

**Ms. Mitton** (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Mr. Speaker, the latest report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was released this week. It warns us that this is our last chance to take urgent action on climate change before it is too late to meet the target of 1.5°C of warming. For some people, the expression "1.5 to stay alive" is a reality. It is life or death. This is an emergency.

Yesterday, students and community members led by STU Sustainability came to the Legislature and called on us to move faster and do more to address the climate crisis. I know that there have been climate strikes across the province, including in my riding of

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

Memramcook-Tantramar. My question today is to the Premier. Will he support my motion for the Legislative Assembly to declare a climate emergency?

**Hon. Mr. Crossman** (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, PC): Thank you very much for the question from the member opposite. There is a lot of thought, but it is certainly urgent, for sure. We agree one hundred percent about the urgency of climate change going forward. Regarding the fund and the conversation at hand today, we will be talking more about it later for sure.

I want you to know that these things do not go unnoticed or undecided. It is done by a number of departments. Regarding the Climate Change Fund Advisory Board, it includes the deputy ministers of Environment and Climate Change, Transportation and Infrastructure, Natural Resources and Energy Development, and Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries; the CEOs of Service New Brunswick and Opportunities New Brunswick; and the presidents of RDC and NB Power. Everybody is involved in making decisions either today or moving ahead. It is not stand-alone. We are working together to make things better. Certainly...

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

## COST OF LIVING

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to take a quick moment to recognize the member for Hampton. It is great to see him in his chair. It is great to see him on his feet today as well. I know that he had suffered a major health incident and had major surgery. He is back today, and it is nice to see him back.

I want to finish off here today talking about the budget. We have a few minutes. They seem to want to talk about the budget. What is lacking in this budget is any indication that this government is there for struggling New Brunswickers who are facing an increased cost of living. We know that property taxes, which we talked about earlier, are skyrocketing once again. We know that electricity rates will be raised very soon. The Premier said April 1. We have not even received a decision yet—only a partial one. Mr. Speaker, there is no indication in this budget that this government is doing anything to help struggling families—blue-collar, working families. What is this government's plan to help New Brunswickers with the rising cost of living?

**Hon. Mr. Steeves** (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Thank you for the question. It is nice to be able to come here the day after the budget and actually answer questions after 25 minutes. We are talking about the most vulnerable in our society. Absolutely, we have done that all along.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

They talk about Groundhog Day, complaining that it is the same budget that we have had before. You know what? Yes, you should hope that it is the same budget because that budget was successful and so was the one before that and the one before that and the one before that. You should hope that these budgets continue. You should hope that we have a surplus every year going forward. You should hope that we grow our population here in New Brunswick. You should hope for more income tax cuts and property tax cuts. Yes. You know what? It was great before, so let's do it again. Let's do it again.

You know what? When he hits at the vulnerable populations, let's talk about the \$5.9 million in additional funding to support clients through social assistance reforms. Let's talk about social assistance rates, which are up by 7.3%.

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, this budget is uninspiring. They say that it is almost the same budget year after year. They have done nothing in, what, five budgets now. There is nothing to hang their hats on. They have been able to pay down the debt on the backs of the federal health transfers and on revenues that they have no control over. Apparently, they do not know how to calculate or even project them.

We know that 400 000 households are going to see increased electricity bills. We know that 115 000 of those households are suffering in energy poverty. Those households are going to have to make tough decisions. Small businesses are seeing their taxes going up. This government wants to put up the small business tax at the same time. Those businesses are going to have to pay more, Mr. Speaker. What is this government doing to help them? They are going to stand up. The Finance Minister is very excited, as it is his time to shine. What are they doing? Experts and stakeholders are asking for more, but this government continues to lowball the revenues, saying: We cannot do anything more. We are doing enough. What are they doing for the people who are suffering?

**Hon. Mr. Steeves** (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): What are we doing? What are we doing? Well, we are cutting taxes. We are cutting taxes. We are growing the population. We are lowering the debt and the amount of money that it will cost to service the debt. We are helping out students with an increase to student loans and bursaries, \$7.6 million. We are taking the student loan interest rate down to zero. We did that. You know what? These are the examples of what we are doing.

What are we going to do? We are going to have \$12.6 million to support work that is outlined in the *2018–2023 Nursing Home Plan*, which includes adding to the supply of nursing home beds in the province. What are we going to do? We are going to have another couple of million dollars to provide resources needed to help seniors remain in their homes longer with our Nursing Home Without Walls program. You know what? We would do a whole lot more if the feds stopped dicking around with the carbon tax. We would have another \$300 million to spend then.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

(Interjections.)

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

### TAXATION

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, what I want to know from this minister... This minister seems to think that it is funny when we are talking about the needs of New Brunswickers here. It is not funny. It is not funny at all. People are struggling. People are struggling to make ends meet. Small businesses are struggling as well. They are going to see electricity rates go up. They are seeing property taxes go up. Now the minister is saying that their small business tax is going to have to go up as well while the government is lowering the corporate tax for large corporations.

Can the minister explain the rationale behind lowering the business tax for large corporations while saying to small businesses that we need them to pay more? He is saying, You are going to pay more for your property tax, and you are going to pay more for your electricity rates.

(Interjections.)

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

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Can the minister explain the reasoning behind increasing the tax for small businesses?

**Hon. Mr. Steeves** (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): I will take this opportunity to explain that, absolutely. What we are talking about are small businesses. Small businesses are capped at a tax rate of 2.5% until they hit \$500 000. We are talking about taking that up to \$1 million because what we are doing now is encouraging people to stay small. We do not want them to stay small. We want businesses to thrive here in New Brunswick and to become big businesses.

That is what we are talking about, but it is in the talking stage right now. You know what? We are chatting about it, and we will decide whether the value is worth it or not. Meanwhile, we continue to increase the GDP. We continue to cut the net debt-to-GDP ratio. Right now, it is at 25.1%, and it is going to be at 24.9% by the end of the year. That is the lowest ratio east of Saskatchewan—east of Saskatchewan. That is the lowest net debt-to-GDP ratio east of Saskatchewan.

We continue with funding for policing. We continue with funding for mental health and addictions. There are another 50 beds added to mental health and addictions care because those people need our help desperately.



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

[Translation]

### ELECTIONS

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will end on a very easy, yet very important question. While the debate on the budget continues this week and next week, some seats here remain vacant. Some parts of the province are not represented; meanwhile, this government has tabled a budget that ignores the needs of New Brunswickers while some of them do not have a representative here to stand up for them.

So, the Restigouche-Chaleur, Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, and Dieppe ridings are not represented here. Can the Premier tell us when he will set dates for by-elections?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Those dates will be brought out this week. Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Mr. Oliver): The time for question period has expired.