

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



November 28, 2023

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[Original]

GOVERNMENT FINANCES

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Mr. Speaker, it is almost the year-end. This is usually the period of the year when we get a truer sense of where the province is headed financially. The Finance Minister gives his Q2 update to see whether his projections are tracking correctly and whether the provincial balance sheet will improve, many community groups and social groups wait to see whether the government will increase funding to help with the many needs of New Brunswickers, and we get a capital budget for the province to address our infrastructure challenges.

Through a series of unexpected surpluses over the past few years, the Premier was offered a golden opportunity to make significant progress on all these fronts, but, instead, he only chose to address the balance sheet. Now that his projections for future surpluses are significantly lower, how does the Premier plan to address social issues and infrastructure needs in the province from now on?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that if the member opposite looked at the numbers in our ordinary budgets over the past five years, he would see that there have been extensive increases beyond what was ever seen with the previous government. But as I have said all along, the idea is to ask how we get better at what we spend money on. The answer is not just to raise tax dollars and spend more money.

This is why we are dealing with issues that make sense for the long term. It is why we looked at reducing the debt. We are paying \$80 million less in interest payments. Mr. Speaker, interest payments are money for nothing. You will see shortly, when the Minister of Finance presents the capital budget, that we are now in a position where we can afford to address the coming needs in our province both on the infrastructure side and on what we are doing on the ordinary budget side.

The time is now to address the inflationary issues that we see coming from federal government policies. We said all along that there are changes that could be made to impact the cost of living in this province overnight, but at this point in time, the federal government has chosen to not make those changes. Mr. Speaker, this is a government that is working for the future.

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Mr. Speaker, the Premier asks how we get better.

How do we get better? We get better by making structural changes. It has to be something of meaning, not just figuring a bit on programs and trying to make them better. The Premier did not want to do it when he had a \$1-billion surplus, and now he says that he cannot do it because he potentially only has a \$34-million surplus. What is the sweet spot? When are we going to see actual transformational change in social issues and in

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infrastructure if that wide margin could not do it? How much is it? Where is the number? Where is the sweet spot? When are we actually going to see some actual change?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to address what the member opposite said about looking at structural changes and making improvements for the long haul. This is why there is a debate on the pension right now. This is a pension that was done back in 2014, and it has worked admirably for the past 10 years. This is a pension that currently has a liability of \$285 million and has only had band-aids put on it over the years. It is a pension that does not have a collective agreement that we are impacting, because the agreement ended June 30, 2022, with some minor extensions that ended in November.

There is no breach of contract. There is no mistrust. There are only the facts, and the fact is that we can fix the plan for \$365 million, or we can continue to put band-aids on it every three or four years and have the pensions be at risk. I choose the former—that we will fix it—because employees deserve to have security in their plan. The 2 500 employees deserve to have a pension plan. So, let's look at what makes sense, let's look at the long term, and let's make generational changes.

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Okay, I guess that the Premier thinks that making transformational change means actually circumventing normal negotiations with our collective bargaining agreements. I do not think that this is very transformational, but we will have the chance to have those discussions soon.

Let's go back to finances, though. Can the Premier give us a sense of what his debt targets are, if, in fact, that is all he wants to focus on? Reducing our provincial debt has benefits, especially when it relates to erasing former budgetary deficits accumulated on the books, but there is an equilibrium that has to be achieved. At some point, other issues in this province have to be addressed. If we had a clear and transparent target for all New Brunswickers to focus on, it would allow for others to anticipate potential changes in government policy and to get ready. Does the Premier have a target? Is there a plan? Where are we going with all this debt reduction when nothing else is being taken care of?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about the Liberal government's debt plan. The book, *Over the Cliff?*—do you remember it? Well, that is where the Liberal government was taking us—directly over the cliff.

Across this country, we have had people talking about the importance of having a program in the province that sees sustainability, that sees tax reductions, and that finds better ways to deliver for taxpayers' dollars. Just spending money is not the answer. So, yes, do we have a debt plan? Do we have a debt-reduction plan? Mr. Speaker, we are meeting the debt-to-GDP ratio. We are meeting it, and we are exceeding expectations because of those years of having revenue that we did not know we would have. Every province had that situation,

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but do you know what? Many just went beyond their situation and ended up saying, well, I have to raise taxes to pay for it. We do not want to be in that situation.

I know that is an easy thing for the Liberals to do—raise taxes—because that is what they do best: raise taxes, make announcements, and spend money, with no results to go with it. Mr. Speaker, we can talk about results—real results—for this province.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): The member for Shediac Bay-Dieppe. Sorry—Bathurst West-Beresford.

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Okay, thanks. I am still on for a little bit.

Well, I want to thank the Premier, because he actually brings up a point that I have been wondering about for the past few weeks. He loves to talk about former governments, so maybe he could clarify just one point. I was not here at the time, but when he took office, did he not walk into a balanced budget and a surplus? Was that not given to him by the previous government? Could he clarify that point and just put it out to the public right now?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would love to clarify that point. During the election of 2018, the Liberal government promised \$1.6 billion of new spending. We committed somewhere in the range of \$100 million to \$200 million. And do you know what happens with every government that gets elected after the fall of a government? Usually, it tucks everything into the year of the six months that it is actually in the system. So, what happened? There was no way that the previous government could have actually balanced the budget with a \$1.6-billion spending commitment. The only reason that we did it in the first six months of our mandate was that we did not have all of that to throw into the budget. We could do it from the beginning, and we continue to do it because we respect the money that people earn and work hard to earn every single day. In the process, we have reduced taxes all along the way and made it easier for people to look at New Brunswick as a solution. And guess what—they are coming to this province, Mr. Speaker. How exciting is that?

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems that the Premier's new political boy toy, Mr. Outhouse, has got him so tightly wound up on his message that the Premier cannot even say something that is on the public record. He walked in with a surplus given to him by the previous government, and he keeps knocking that fact away. Just say it. It is easy. You can blame when it comes to everything else, so you can certainly give credit once in a while when something was done right. All the hard work was done in that first year, when you walked into it. All you had to do was follow the path. That was all done. Can you at least admit that?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think that we discussed where the path was going—over the cliff. As I

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said, a book was written about it. Following that path, there would have been no future for this province. And if the member opposite would like to look through the numbers and understand how we got there, he would see that there was no balanced budget when we arrived, and there would not have been with the spending that was actually planned. I went through the details of how that actually occurred and how it kept occurring. Together, my colleagues and I balanced what we could spend based on the revenue we had, and we continue to do that to this day.

Now, I have said over and over that it is a foreign concept. But, you know, what I am talking about is not smoke and mirrors. It is real. The results are real, and people talk about that outside the province and inside the province. But do you know what was not real, Mr. Speaker? The actual employment increase that was there. I can understand why the leader is not here today, because talking about the union strikes and talking about—

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Oh, sorry.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): I will have to call you on that.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Talking about the employment record of the previous government, I think that it was 3 000 or 3 500 for new employment figures.

[*Translation*]

NURSING HOMES

Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): I am going to direct my question to someone who is here, the Minister responsible for Seniors.

In committee, it was stated that there is a list of the names of seniors who are in hospital waiting for a nursing home bed. This is not a topic that pleases anyone here. Last year, there were apparently 457 names on the list. In committee, this fall, it was stated—and some of my colleagues were there, too—that the number had risen to over 900 people waiting for a nursing home bed.

There is a staff shortage; people here can attest to that. There is a shortage of staff, and more staff is being sought to accommodate these people. There are over 900 people. Given that there were 457 names on the list last year and that there are over 900 names on it this year, would it be possible to find out how many seniors who are currently in hospital waiting for a nursing home bed are now on the list? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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[Original]

Hon. Ms. Bockus (Saint Croix, Minister responsible for Seniors, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week, I will endeavour to get you an up-to-date list of the number of people waiting to get into a nursing home. But as we have stated before, we cannot put seniors in nursing homes if we do not have the staff to take care of them. Their safety and care are of paramount importance to us. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): Well, what should we do to bring more staff to those places? I think that there are some solutions. Good bargaining, done faithfully, honestly, and with a good heart, is how we should do it.

[Translation]

Now, since I cannot get an answer to my question, I am going to have to pivot, Mr. Speaker.

About three weeks or a month ago, I asked the minister some questions about her discussions with stakeholders. There are two main stakeholders in the province: Cecile Cassista, on the Anglophone side, and, on the Francophone side, Marcel Larocque, who is the president of the Association francophone des aînés du Nouveau-Brunswick. Can I find out if the minister has finally had a chance to speak with these two people? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

Hon. Ms. Bockus (Saint Croix, Minister responsible for Seniors, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have met with Cecile Cassista. I have not yet met with the gentleman, but I will endeavour to do so. We did have a meeting planned, but the weather got in the way. I think a little bit of a traffic accident did as well. I will meet with them. Thank you.

Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): Wow. Wow.

[Translation]

The Minister responsible for Seniors has been in her position for over six months now. One of the two main people representing seniors is Cecile Cassista, who told me yesterday that you spoke to her over the phone. The other person is Marcel Larocque, who has been working in the field for three or four years, okay? So, here is what I would like to know: When are you planning on talking to the people who speak for these two groups that advocate for seniors? They do incredible work, and I can tell you that not everyone can do it. These two people do it with their own money.

So, please, when are you going to speak to Marcel Larocque? You mentioned a six-month delay due to the temperature, but I can tell you that it did not snow much this summer. So,

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when are you going to meet with the president of the Association francophone des aînés du Nouveau-Brunswick to find out what he has to say? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

Hon. Ms. Bockus (Saint Croix, Minister responsible for Seniors, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I did indeed speak with Ms. Cassista yesterday to inform her that Riverview has been accepted as an age-friendly community. I have spoken with her a number of times before. In fact, I went to a seniors' roundtable meeting in Riverview a month and a half ago. I met with a number of seniors there. As soon as I can schedule a meeting with Mr. Larocque, I will do so. Thank you.

FOOD BANKS

Mr. G. Arseneault (Campbellton-Dalhousie, L): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I had the opportunity to attend a fundraising event—a telethon—for the RCVAA, which is the umbrella group for the five food banks in Restigouche. I salute the organizers for a job well done and thank them and all the volunteers who work all year long for food banks across the province.

Now, as you know and as the minister well knows, there have been increased stresses and higher costs for food banks because of increased demand and inflation. I am just wondering whether the minister could advise the House: Has this government increased the base budget for food banks in this province this fiscal year?

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation; Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do very much appreciate the question from the member opposite because we are in a time of high inflation here in the province. We have recognized that affordability is a key issue for New Brunswickers. That is why I was speaking so much last week about the affordability measures that we have put in place that will have an immediate impact for New Brunswickers.

As a part of that, there have also been significant discussions around food banks. They provide a very important service to New Brunswickers. Food banks help New Brunswickers who are struggling and may need assistance to get from one paycheque to the next. We are currently exploring opportunities to partner with them. We have met with several different food bank organizations, looking at options to have more impact province—

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, minister.

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Mr. G. Arseneault (Campbellton-Dalhousie, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the answer is no to whether the government has increased their budgets.

There are more people in the province who suffer from food insecurity. There is no one item that is going to help them, but food banks are part of the plan. If they have not increased the budget this year, I will ask the minister whether they will increase this year.

While you are looking at that, Madam Minister, through the Speaker, maybe you should look at the past. You have been in government. This government has been here for five years. You should look at whether you increased the base budget this year, last year, the year before, or the year before that. I think that you will be disappointed with the turnout. I know that the minister will take that to heart, and I would ask her to look at that and increase the base budget for food banks this year, this fiscal year. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation; Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would love to take that under advisement and bring it back to the House and to look at how the spending related to food banks has changed over time. This is another issue that actually falls across several departments. That is the wonderful thing about One Team One GNB. We are working together. I will get all of the information related to that, bring it back to the House, and share it.

You know, being able to discuss this and talk about what is important to New Brunswickers . . . Even yesterday, we were exploring what we could do to make things better for New Brunswickers going forward. We are in the winter months. We are in a period of high inflation. Every dollar matters, Mr. Speaker, and we realize that. We will continue on. We have our three items of affordability measures that we put in place last week. We continue to explore other options to help New Brunswickers every day because we care about New Brunswickers, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

SMALL MODULAR REACTORS

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, Opportunities NB allocated \$20 million in funding to projects linked to small modular reactors. We know that, last week, the Premier did not want his minister to answer questions on this file. So, this time, can the Minister responsible for Opportunities NB explain to us whether the \$20 million in funding has all been disbursed and tell us what the conditions for the funding were?

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[Original]

Hon. Mr. Turner (Moncton South, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to stand before the House today on my first question, actually, as the Minister responsible for Opportunities New Brunswick and Economic Development and Small Business.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Turner (Moncton South, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business, PC): I want to thank the member opposite. I know that last week, there was some engagement there. Obviously, the question was taken by another minister who is obviously very familiar with the file and today is representing our province in France, in Europe, at a symposium where he is speaking about small modular nuclear reactors because our province is a leader. Our province is a leader not only in Canada and in North America but around the world.

We have been working on this for a number of years. We are seeing tremendous results from a number of different companies that we are working with. NB Power is one of them, obviously. We just keep working and working and working because we can see the results—

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, minister.

[Translation]

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, the minister is saying that this is his first opportunity to answer questions, but he had the chance to do so last week. Yet, he did not answer questions. He has been Minister responsible for Opportunities NB for six months now. He knew the questions I asked last week, but he is still not able to give us answers today. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker: He spent six months doing nothing. He had the chance to go get information to answer questions, but he is not even able to do so today.

The question is clear, Mr. Speaker: Was the \$20 million in funding disbursed, yes or no? Also, were the conditions met, yes or no? Were the private sector investments that were supposed to be made in fact made, yes or no? Mr. Speaker, these are straightforward questions, so we should get straightforward answers from the minister.

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[Original]

Hon. Mr. Turner (Moncton South, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business, PC): You know, Mr. Speaker, it is interesting. Yes, I have been a minister not for six months but for five months, but who is counting? The reality is that the first question that popped up was actually today. It is pretty hard to stand up and answer questions when they do not come your way, okay.

SMRs present economic development possibilities such as supply chain opportunities for small and medium-size enterprises, new export prospects, and substantial private capital investments. That is what SMRs are doing for our province.

While I have the floor, I would also like to talk about how, a few times today, I heard about the year 2018 and the significance of 2018. That was obviously when this government came to power.

Opportunities New Brunswick has played an important role in a number of areas since 2018, and I would like to highlight them. I have a few moments left, and I know that the other side is very interested in knowing about what Opportunities New Brunswick has succeeded in since 2018.

Productivity in the province is up by 4% since 2018.

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

[Translation]

OPPORTUNITIES NEW BRUNSWICK

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the minister either does not understand the questions at all or is completely disconnected from his department. I think it is time he went back to read up on Opportunities NB files. Again, Mr. Speaker, I asked straightforward questions; it is difficult to get answers. Government members are completely unable to provide adequate answers. Yet the Premier has said in the past that clear questions would get clear answers. I asked straightforward questions, but the minister is unable to answer. Mr. Speaker, last year, Opportunities NB only funded 15 projects in the entire province—15 small projects. Can the minister now explain to us what projects . . .

[Original]

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Members, I would like to hear the question, please.

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[Translation]

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some government members are getting lively. Can the Minister responsible for Opportunities NB explain to us how many projects he intends to fund in 2023? Is he going to increase the number of projects compared to the 15 that were funded last year, which is a number that did not help the business community in New Brunswick?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Turner (Moncton South, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, I would like to discuss the SMR situation in our province. An SMR industry will lead to economic benefits for New Brunswick through a big increase in jobs, a growth in federal and provincial tax revenues, an increase in foreign investment, and, exactly, a greater export revenue, among other benefits. ONB is helping to develop a robust SMR supply chain in New Brunswick and has been very engaged in that effort. ONB is supporting the development of an SMR supply chain by working with partners, including two technology partners, NB Power, the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, and the Organization of Canadian Nuclear Industries, among others.

I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the other things that Opportunities New Brunswick is doing and has been doing since 2018. Unemployment is down by 11% compared to November 2018, a rate—

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, minister.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. K. Arseneau (Kent North, G): Mr. Speaker, this morning, we learned of the Premier using his trademark my way or the highway approach once again as he issued an ultimatum to the unions representing school bus drivers and school custodians. If they do not accept his imposed changes to their pension plan, then he will ram legislation through this House to get the changes that he wants in contempt of a signed collective agreement. This is a growing trend for the Premier with his pet projects. He did not like the fracking moratorium, so he circumvented the process to create an exception. He did not like the former Education Minister's approach to French immersion reform. Well, "data my Assembly", I will find a new minister. Why has the Premier misled these workers, and what is a contract even worth if he cannot keep his word?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, once again, it would be nice if the member opposite got the facts straight, even for once. This is the point that I made earlier: On November 13, 2021, there was a memorandum of agreement that was agreed on with CUPE 2745 to negotiate the terms and

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conditions of a new pension plan by June 30, 2022—June 30, 2022—over a year and a half away. We have gone beyond that. On February 25, 2022, there was a MOA with CUPE 1253 to negotiate the terms and conditions of a new pension plan by August 31, 2022. Some extensions were made to it that ended in November 2022. So we are well over a year beyond with no progress—no progress on pensions that have a liability as low as 60% unfunded. There is a liability to the taxpayers of \$285 million, and what we are saying is that we can fix all of this and have a pension plan that is sustainable and is agreed on with the taxpayers and—

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you.

Mr. K. Arseneau (Kent North, G): Talk about getting the facts straight. They have offered a solution, and this Premier has kept silent about it. Now, he is forcing them to choose a poison pill. How can this caucus support a Premier who cannot keep a deal? The deal was to bargain in good faith. There has not been any good faith. How many times will they let him get away with it?

This way of functioning is creating a very dangerous precedent on the core roots of collective bargaining, workers' rights, and the integrity of the *Industrial Relations Act*. These Conservatives have been ripping up social contract after social contract. I wonder who is next.

As someone involved in unions before being elected, the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour knows the importance of signed agreements. Will she stand in this House today and commit to not bringing legislation forward to circumvent negotiated collective agreements?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think I need to correct another faux pas that the member opposite has put forward, or I at least need to make corrections on what was proposed by CUPE. In relation to the proposal that was made, it was a CAAT program for Ontario. To put our funds into that program . . . We would not want to go to an Ontario program versus a New Brunswick program, but let's take that aside. In order to do that, it would cause New Brunswick taxpayers just short of \$1 billion. To transfer the funds, it would be just short of \$1 billion. It is not fair to taxpayers and employees because it has a 70-30 relation in terms of funding. It is not fair to the taxpayers either.

What we are proposing is a fair solution to taxpayers and employees. It is a balanced approach. I would like the member opposite to really understand the facts and the agreement. There is no breach, and there is no lack of trust. There is only misinformation that is being put forward, Mr. Speaker.

(Interjections.)

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Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Members in the gallery.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Sergeant.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Sergeant.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Members, I would ask you not to participate.

HOUSING

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past few weeks, we have heard the Premier talk in the media about jurisdictional creep. It is related to the fact that the federal government is sometimes negotiating with cities to try to get much-needed funds to cities for housing. Lord knows that we have a crisis in housing in this province. Worrying about whose responsibility it is or who is going to get the credit is really not important. We heard on the weekend that the Premier is going to backtrack on those comments and that he will not interfere with the federal government involving itself with housing in municipalities.

Can the Premier clarify whether he will backtrack on those comments and let the federal government do its job?

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation; Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am glad to have the opportunity to stand up and discuss this because housing is a significant problem in all of Canada, not only in New Brunswick, and it really requires an all-hands-on-deck approach to find a solution. We need the federal government rowing with us. We need the provincial government, we need our municipalities, we need our regional governments, and we need all the stakeholders and developers involved as well.

It is true that the federal government is working and negotiating directly with municipalities all over Canada. I know that it is because the federal government is trying to solve the housing crisis the best way it can. I also know that when you put more than one body or group together to solve a problem, it is much more powerful. I have had discussions with the housing ministers long before the Premier was in the press with this about how it is important that we work together.

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Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I will admit that it was the first time I had heard the term “jurisdictional creep”. Funny enough, I heard it again almost in the same week when we visited with the eight cities of New Brunswick. The cities were explaining the format of the regional service commissions. They are on the board, and they should be deciding the mandate of those regional service commissions.

However, what in fact happens is that all their funding comes from the province. They are tied into very strict criteria that the province dictates. Essentially, the cities are saying: The regional service commissions work for the province. They do not work for us.

Now, if that is not a case in point of jurisdictional creep, I have not seen one. I wonder. Is the Premier going to fix that issue also? He seems to have backtracked on the other.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question. The member is correct. We met with the eight cities, and they had this very complaint. The minister was with me as well, and we said: Okay, we need to fix that. We agree. There needs to be control so that you can understand the priorities in the region.

We compared this, actually. I directly compared this to what we are seeing from Ottawa and in the province. You are absolutely correct. This is a policy that needs to be fixed so that the municipalities are part of the whole regional process, understand the priorities, and play a role. It is no different than what we have with the municipalities throughout the province playing a role in working with the federal government.

The scenario is very similar, or exactly the same. That is what we are asking for. The whole concept of jurisdictional creep came out of the Council of the Federation (COF) meeting. Except for Quebec’s, all the premiers across the country were having this problem. They wanted to have direct connections following the federal-provincial-municipal protocols that exist. We should all be on the same page here, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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