

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



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CONTENTS

TEACHERS

Ms. Holt
Hon. Mr. Hogan
Ms. Holt
Hon. Mr. Hogan
Ms. Holt

ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Mr. Crossman
Ms. Holt
Hon. Mr. Crossman
Ms. Holt
Hon. Mr. Crossman

BRIDGES

Mr. Mallet
Hon. Mr. Higgs
Mr. Mallet
Hon. Mr. Ames

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Thériault
Hon. S. Wilson
Ms. Thériault
Hon. S. Wilson

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

SCHOOLS

Ms. Landry

Hon. Mr. Hogan

Ms. Landry

Hon. Mr. Hogan

Hon. Mr. Hogan

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Ms. Mitton

Hon. Ms. Dunn

Ms. Mitton

Hon. Mr. Fitch

SCHOOLS

Ms. Landry

Hon. Mr. Hogan

HEALTH

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Fitch

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Fitch

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Original]

TEACHERS

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, the Finance Minister laid out long-term initiatives for the education system. We think that progress in the education system has to start with a strong and respectful relationship between the government and its educators and teams. The Premier has a chance to get this next phase of educational work started off on the right foot.

I understand that the Premier is meeting with the President of the New Brunswick Teachers' Association (NBTA) today, this afternoon. Now, this is someone whom the Premier, in a fundraising email, called a big union boss, so we would suggest that a different approach is needed. The NBTA President has requested an apology for the comments that the Premier made disrespecting teachers. Will the Premier show the teachers of this province that he is ready to focus on the classroom by apologizing?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to get up today to talk about education. I consider yesterday somewhat of a milestone. We had our consultations on French immersion. When we had consultations, we realized that the program that we proposed was not in the best interests of the students of the province, so we backed away from that.

Coming out of that, we developed a joint committee to develop short-term and long-term recommendations to improve the Anglophone school system, to look at class composition in the Prime sector and to improve French instruction. This committee was co-chaired by our assistant deputy minister, Dr. Tiffany Bastin, and the Executive Director of the New Brunswick Teachers' Association, Ardith Shirley. They have done a wonderful job. They brought in all the stakeholders in the province, and they have brought forth long-term recommendations. We will now establish the committee that will look at how we are going to implement those, in the beginning and in the long term, by the end of March. Thank you.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, while the list of education initiatives presented yesterday contains some important items, we believe that the crucial first step in addressing the crisis in education in New Brunswick is the retention of our excellent educators and the recruitment of the teachers, psychologists, counselors, and educational assistants that our students deserve.

[Translation]

We need these resources in our education system. When we talk to teachers and the association that represents them, we hear that the retention of staff currently in the system is what they are mostly calling for.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Original]

I think that it is specifically important for the Premier to show that he will make retention and recruitment a priority. The teachers in our province need to hear it, and they need to hear it from him.

[Translation]

So, here is what I want to know: Is the Premier prepared to demonstrate his commitment to the teachers of our province today?

[Original]

Will the Premier show his commitment to New Brunswick's educators today by stating that he will make retention and recruitment a priority?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the committee's recommendations is to look at recruitment and retention, because it is a really important issue.

I am so proud to have been a teacher. I know that the member for Campbellton-Dalhousie is also proud to have been a teacher. He did good work when he was President of the NBTA and Co-President of the NBTF.

It is necessary to start talking about the fact that teaching is not just a job. It is inspiring to change the lives of young people, and the recruitment and retention of the people already in our system are essential. We will be talking to the President of the NBTA about that this afternoon. We are going to continue discussing it.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am disappointed that the Premier cannot rise to show that he is there for the teachers of our province, so I will not try to bang my head against the wall anymore.

ENVIRONMENT

I am going to ask a different question, now on behalf of the people of Beaurivage. This morning, they woke up and saw that nothing has changed in their community.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Original]

They have not seen anything change with Coastal Shell Products, and the deadline has passed. Will the Minister of Environment let us and the people of Beaurivage know what the decision on Coastal Shell Products is and how, with no change in that community—the smell persists, the sound persists—they can continue to let that facility operate?

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, PC): Great question, Mr. Speaker. I should remind the party opposite that, under its watch back in 2016, it put \$2.9 million in to set that up where it is today.

As for an update, Coastal Shell Products will not be operating from Christmas until spring. There are about two or three weeks left in the lobster, crab, and shrimp season. It will be extended. It was decided in the summertime to extend it because they want to put things in place. Part of the equipment is in place. It is a three-part project. The second part is in there. The area coalition has taken this to court, so we are waiting for those results to come back. The preliminary results of a pilot confirmed that the proposed solution may be effective. We are waiting for those results to come back to learn more.

The extension is contingent on the company providing the official results of the tests and putting this scrubber and other parts in place. It is important. We have boots on the ground every day to make sure that this is being addressed.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to be sure that I have this straight. We are waiting for the test results. Coastal Shell has implemented only two parts of a three-part solution, but it is permitted to operate today past the deadline, which has been put in place over and over and has been missed over and over for multiple years. We do not have the results. We have not completed the piece, but it continues to be allowed to operate right now.

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe you missed it, but there was \$2.9 million put in place to get this to where it is today. Now, we are wearing this, thank you very much. The judge has not yet made a decision in the court case. We are hoping to see that very soon because he or she could certainly shut the plant down at any time.

In the meantime, we are working with Coastal Shell. It has a plan to reduce the odours. The first part of the plan brought equipment in to reduce the odours inside. That is my belief. Now, we are working on the outside to make sure that there are improvements on that. We do need to work with Coastal Shell. There are two or three weeks left for the lobster season this year, and we need to give them a chance to get their operation in place. This is important. We are taking this very seriously because the residents need to live there as well. It is also for the employment in the area, so it is important to make sure that it is done

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

right. The hours of work have been reduced for the past few months to 8 p.m. to 8 a.m., and trucks cannot be parked—

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

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, with respect, this organization has been saying since 2016 that it has a plan. Those were commitments made to a previous government that were not delivered. This has been happening year after year after year. For the past five years, you have had a chance to address this. The company has not taken any action that has been successful. When is enough, enough?

[Translation]

When will people in Beaurivage have clean air and a calm community, because they cannot go on like this?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, PC): Mr. Speaker, thank you once again for the question. Due to the ongoing court case, the approval to operate will be extended to August 31, 2024, which will give the company lots of time to put this in place. It is my understanding that, since the coalition has taken the company to court, the financing has been held up because, certainly, nobody wants to invest money if the business is going to stop tomorrow. We are giving the company the chance to move ahead.

The improvement includes deadlines for the submission of the pilot project report and the installation of the pollution control equipment. This does take time. There is a plan. This is not something that we can take lightly. We want the problem solved. Mr. Speaker, if the lobster season continued, and the crab and shrimp season, it would be a big problem for about seven other areas of the province because they would be taking on a lot. I mentioned that the hours have been reduced.

Also, Coastal Shell has requested permission to run this pilot program that I mentioned. With the support of the school, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the municipality. . . The mayor and council are involved as well, as well as the local—

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

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Translation]

BRIDGES

Mr. Mallet (Shippagan-Lamèque-Miscou, L): Mr. Speaker, when I asked the Premier a question this week about the infamous bridge between Lamèque and Shippagan, he told me that there would not be any construction until the bridge was really unsafe.

Is the Premier aware that there was a wind storm on Monday that caused high tides and waves that dumped tree trunks and branches on Route 113, close to the government infrastructure? What would happen if the Premier got there with his nice car and a tree trunk hit it, causing significant damage? In such a case, who would have to pay for repairs?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, thanks for the question—maybe. I am not sure what this has to do with the bridge. We have cases all over the province where there are cutbacks for trees and branches growing over trees. This is something that the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure (DTI) looks after throughout the province, or NB Power looks after this if the power lines are in jeopardy. I am not sure how this relates to a bridge.

The point that I made about the bridge was that we did a technical review of it. I think that it is inspected every year or every five years. Whatever the requirement is, that is what DTI would do as a matter of course. DTI ensures that the bridge is safe to operate and operates reliably, safely, and efficiently, with efficiently meaning that it does not break down a lot. It actually runs at over 95% reliability.

Mr. Speaker, if a branch falls down, then that is a whole different issue. I guess we should be cutting branches back. I am sure that DTI will look after that. If there is an area of the highway that the member opposite is concerned about, I am sure that we will look after moving branches and such back from the road.

[Translation]

Mr. Mallet (Shippagan-Lamèque-Miscou, L): Mr. Speaker, I have already brought up the problem of branches being swept onto rocks on the levee, and the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure has not made any adjustment nor removed any branches. Winds gusted to over 100 km/h on Monday. Several thousand litres of salt water again flooded not only Route 113, but also the thousands of vehicles that cross the bridge every day and that have to stop because of the traffic lights. Also, major repairs are under way on the bridge, and the traffic is down to one lane from November 14 to December 19.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Do not forget, either, that the winter is neither docile nor cooperative in the Acadian Peninsula. Isn't this . . .

[Original]

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

Hon. Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Safety is paramount to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, absolutely. We hear the member opposite's concerns.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure is currently doing some emergency concrete repair work to the bridge. All right? The bridge is safe for all members of the traveling public. The work started about two weeks ago, and it should be completed by December 19. On the bridge, there is no full closure associated with this work. The bridge is open to one lane with lights, and those lights work. In the event of an emergency, an ambulance will have complete authority to get across at any given time. Thank you very much.

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Thériault (Caraquet, L): My colleague was talking about driftwood flying on the bridge, but nobody understood.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for Women's Equality. Yesterday, when I asked her questions about Women's Equality, she told me that the changes made were minor and common. However, I remain skeptical.

During this transition, an assistant deputy minister assigned to Women's Equality got lost in the shuffle. Now, there is an assistant deputy minister responsible for Community Care and Women's Equality. So, I am questioning how much importance this government attributes to the feminine and feminist file within government. So, Madam Minister responsible for Women's Equality, I would like to know how this restructuring will affect the relationship with the Pay Equity Bureau and the New Brunswick Women's Council, among others, now that everything comes under Community Care.

[Original]

Hon. S. Wilson (Moncton Southwest, Minister responsible for Women's Equality; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services, PC): Well, thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I am really surprised that the member opposite mentioned pay

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

equity again this morning since we now know that her leader was against it when she was the President of the New Brunswick Business Council.

But with regard to the women's branch, it takes pay equity seriously. It has been doing a lot of work with pay equity. I mean, we, as a government, have done a lot of work with it. I will just describe a few things that we have done, but before I do, I want to tell you that nothing much has changed. We do have a new assistant deputy, but the work used to be. . . The department was with the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture before. It is now kind of connected with the Department of Health, but it is a separate entity. Its budget has not changed. It still has the same budget that it had before, so not much has really changed.

When we talk about pay equity, I want to talk about—

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

[Translation]

Ms. Thériault (Caraquet, L): It is interesting to see that the Minister responsible for Women's Equality suddenly has the urge to talk about pay equity, while every woman on the other side of the House, including her, voted against that yesterday; so, maybe you should have spoken just as enthusiastically yesterday.

So, if nothing has changed, if everything now comes under Community Care, but nothing at all is being changed, Madam Minister, can you commit to confirming that, after the budget is tabled this spring, no cuts will be made to Women's Equality?

[Original]

Hon. S. Wilson (Moncton Southwest, Minister responsible for Women's Equality; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two very important portfolios, being the Minister responsible for Women's Equality and also the Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services. I think that with this change, which is really insignificant, I can work better with them. It is better for me. It is better for the government. Sometimes, we make changes in the government, but it is always to improve things, to increase our ability to deal with different interests.

Yes, I will talk about the budget. It is unchanged.

(Interjections.)

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

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Translation]

SCHOOLS

Ms. Landry (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We received the capital estimates from the Minister of Finance this week. We might have hoped that this government would have made an effort to distribute the investments in the capital estimates equitably among taxpayers in every region of this province, because, yes, Mr. Speaker, the people of my region also pay taxes on their income, their properties, and their purchases. However, no, there was nothing for them, just like last year and the past five years. There was nothing for people in the Madawaska region: no investments in our schools, our hospital, or our nursing homes.

Can the Minister of Education explain to us how the midlife project for Cité des Jeunes A.-M.-Sormany managed to end up in 39th place, while this school was among the department's 10 priority projects a few years ago?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to answer the question from the member for Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston. It is really important to recognize that we have a lot of school infrastructure in this province.

Midlife projects must undoubtedly continue, but we are facing challenges that our province has never seen before. For example, our population has grown significantly. In fact, over the past two and a half years, we have gotten 7 200 more students, while, in the past, we have had to close schools. We had too many schools and had to shut some of them down, but now, we have to think about building new schools. How can enough money be found, even if we have record capital estimates amounting to \$1.2 billion? There will. . .

[Original]

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

[Translation]

Ms. Landry (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Mr. Speaker, there are seven school districts in New Brunswick: three are Francophone, and four are Anglophone. Every year, the school districts submit their school infrastructure priorities. The Francophone nord-ouest school district submitted its list this year, and one of its priorities was the midlife project for Cité des Jeunes A.-M.-Sormany, which was announced in 2018, but was put on ice by this government.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Mr. Minister, can you explain to us how something that has been an annual priority for a school district since 2018 is 39th in a list of 60 projects? Given the \$187 million, Mr. Minister, how do you explain the fact that the Francophone nord-ouest school district received no new projects and no improvements?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development covers the entire province.

(Interjection.)

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Maybe you did not know, but that is the case.

So, with regard to needs in the province, the lists of the various districts are being looked at. By the way, thank you to the member opposite for reviewing the projects of the seven school districts. We receive the school districts' requests, and we look at the province as a whole.

We have a transparent and clear process for determining where we are going to spend money, where money must be spent, and what needs to be done to meet the needs right across the province. What will the greatest needs be? That is our way of. . .

[Original]

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

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Mr. Speaker, we are in the middle of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. Statistics show that intimate partner violence has increased sharply in New Brunswick, starting in 2017. Several years ago, many brave students stood up and raised the alarm about sexual violence on campuses in our province. I thank the survivors and their allies who spoke out for safer campuses.

According to the Roundtable on Campus Sexual Violence report from May 2021, government was to lead the implementation of a plan starting in November 2021, so we should be two years into a three-year plan. Students I have spoken to have not been aware of this work, so I am curious about the status of the plan. Can the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour please table this three-year plan in the House and provide us with an update right now?

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Hon. Ms. Dunn (Saint John Harbour, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister of Indigenous Affairs; Minister responsible for Immigration, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. We take sexual violence very, very seriously, and I can tell you that I meet with the students right across this entire province on a regular basis. This is one of the things that they have actually brought to my attention as something that is a priority for them. Although I actually do not have the report in front of me today, I will ascertain to get that information and come back to the House with it. Thank you.

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to seeing that plan tabled by the minister. We must take sexual violence seriously and invest in prevention and in responding to the needs of survivors. According to the WHO, health workers are often the first, and sometimes the only, point of contact for women experiencing violence. They can provide compassionate care for survivors by offering first-line support, medical examination and treatment, and referrals to other essential services. This requires investing in training and resources to ensure appropriate care.

One of the needs raised to me by students in my riding is access to SANE nurses—Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners. The *Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence in New Brunswick* report called for them to be in every ER. Can the minister tell us how many SANE nurses there are, and where? How many vacancies are there in the province?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will get back to the House on the specific numbers and advise. But we know that we are doing the work to make sure that there is an availability of trained health care workers in the emergency rooms across the province to make sure that if an incident occurs, the individual that comes in will be looked after. I know that the health care workers want to make sure that they are available and that there is the availability to address these difficult situations. For specific numbers in specific areas, I want to make sure that the numbers are accurate, so I will take that under advisement and report back at a later date.

[Translation]

SCHOOLS

Ms. Landry (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Mr. Minister, for the answers. I would say that, even though we look at the entirety of the province, people in the northwestern part of the province also pay taxes. So, why not make investments based on student numbers?

Mr. Speaker, we understand that the minister has his obscure matrix, which gives obscure results that nobody understands. Mr. Minister, we need to understand the data used to come up with this result. Why is it that, with an investment of \$187 million, there are no

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

projects in the northwestern region or in Francophone regions of the province? Can the minister commit to publicly providing all the data used to come up with his list of 60 projects?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I urge the member opposite to come see us at the departmental office at any time. She just has to choose the day she wants to stop by, and she will be able to speak with the members of my team, which will enable her to see how we decide where we have to build schools.

I would also like to talk about École Saint-Henri. I understand that not every region in the province got what it wanted. Each year, we have a certain amount of money at our disposal, so we announced the construction of some schools last year, and we made further announcements this year. We are going to continue to make announcements over the next few years, because of the increase in our student population. Here in New Brunswick, we are lucky to have students who become part of the population of our province every week. Again, I urge the member to come visit us at the departmental office.

[Original]

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

HEALTH

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the final note that the minister ended on. I believe that the Premier confirmed at the meeting of the municipalities last week that this population growth is unplanned and that it has challenged our systems. The system that it has challenged most is the health care system, specifically in this region. The people of Fredericton and the greater capital area have some of the worst access to care in the province. So, I was dismayed to see comments from the Minister of Health about the situation at the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital, where there exists a ready hybrid operating suite. We have a foundation. We have the funds ready to get the equipment into that suite. We were told that the decision was deferred to a collaborative council, but today in the newspaper we have the Minister of Health saying that the science is that the first hybrid OR will go to Saint John, so Fredericton should hold the money, leave that ready room waiting, and wait. Why has the minister overruled the collaboration council?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, there is a lot in that question. I am glad to have it raised here in the House of the people and to answer that because there are so many. . . This is the pathway forward in creating a health care system that addresses all the needs of the province. The members opposite want to revert to a

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

system that did not seem to work as well as the one that we have now. We have the collaboration council that can make decisions based on a province-wide health care system.

The member opposite talks about the waiting room up at the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital. I will tell you this, Mr. Speaker. We have done a significant amount of work here in the Fredericton region to make sure that people have access to health care. If you have things such as UTI or shingles, if you need contraceptive management, if you have contact allergy dermatitis, a cold sore, mild to moderate eczema, certain gastric conditions, impetigo, pink eye, or mild acne, and you are at the emergency room, you are in the wrong place. You can go to—

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

[Translation]

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): That is the problem, Mr. Speaker. The minister says he is addressing this issue, but it is clear that he is not. Every region should have hybrid suites.

[Original]

We are going to see them in Moncton, Saint John, and Fredericton. We understand that Saint John wants one but does not have the space ready to go and does not have the funds ready to go. Here in Fredericton, the room is there and ready, the foundation is there and ready. For what reason are they being told to wait? It is because we are waiting on Saint John, which is not ready to do it. That is not addressing the needs of the population. That sounds like a really strange. . . Well, wait because we have an order of things. We cannot serve the people of Fredericton yet even though the infrastructure is there and ready to go. It does not make any sense as the minister tries to talk about addressing the needs. How he answered the question about the decision when the collaboration council has not met and finalized. . . Really, what is the point of a collaboration council if the minister is going to make the decision and communicate it to the media and not to the physicians who are looking for this?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, that question is like a C-. That is terrible. When you talk about the collaboration council and what it is doing to look at the province-wide health care system that is addressing the needs right across the province. . . That is what that collaboration council is doing. The opposition members want to do away with it. They want to go back to a system that was not getting the job done, that was just answering to the local areas. I have met with the doctors, the Premier has met with the doctors, and my staff has met with the doctors.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

The members opposite are more interested in playing Bingo on the floor of the Legislature than they are in getting the work done. We get the work done. They are more interested in making up nicknames in the backroom than in getting the. . . Hey, there is the wolf, there is the sherpa, there is Marco. Well, that might be real. Well, I will tell you, if they are running out of nicknames, I have got a. . . They like games, so I will give them a game to play. There are Disney characters, there are seven of them, they work in the dark, and the leader is asleep. Figure that one out.

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