

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



December 7, 2023

CONTENTS

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Holt
Hon. Ms. Green
Ms. Holt
Hon. Ms. Green
Ms. Holt
Hon. Ms. Bockus
Ms. Holt
Hon. Mr. Austin
Hon. Mr. Austin
Ms. Holt
Hon. Ms. Green

RADIATION TECHNOLOGISTS

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

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM

Ms. Landry

Hon. Ms. Johnson

Ms. Landry

Hon. Ms. Johnson

Ms. Landry

Hon. Ms. Johnson

SCHOOLS

Mr. C. Chiasson

Hon. Mr. Ames

Mr. C. Chiasson

Hon. Ms. Johnson

ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Coon

Hon. Mr. Flemming, K.C.

Mr. Coon

Hon. Mr. Crossman

SCHOOLS

Mr. C. Chiasson

Hon. Ms. Johnson

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Higgs

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Original]

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, the people of St. Stephen and folks from all over New Brunswick have been shaking their heads at the responses from two ministers of this government and at the lack of any response at all from one minister to the crisis being experienced in this beautiful community on the edge of our province, or as they like to say, in the middle of everywhere. They really are in the middle of it now.

[Translation]

The finger pointing, lack of responsibility, and lack of compassion from the Minister of Social Development with regard to this important issue is unbelievable. Is this government not focusing on this homelessness crisis with the urgency and seriousness that it requires?

[Original]

So we are left looking to the head of the government for leadership. Mr. Premier, in the face of a lost life and the threat of further lost lives—in the face of tone-deaf, petty, and heartless reactions from your ministers this week—on behalf of the people of New Brunswick, what do you have to say to the people of St. Stephen in response to their call for help?

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 pleased to get up today to talk about the situation in St. Stephen. Let's be clear. This situation is happening not only in St. Stephen but also in Miramichi and many other smaller communities, along with our very large cities.

Our communities are rallying. Our team at Social Development is rallying. Justice and Public Safety is rallying. The Department of Health is rallying. I am pleased to say that we have worked very, very closely during this time, when fingers are being pointed. I can say that fingers are being pointed not only from this side but from everywhere. But the community members have rallied. They have come up with a solution. They have come up with an immediate solution. They have come up with a short-term solution and a long-term solution, Mr. Speaker, and I am going to give them time to work out the last few details. Hopefully, I will be able to speak about exactly what that is tomorrow. Just for the record, the minister—

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

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am disappointed not to hear the Premier speak to the people of

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

St. Stephen, but I will accept that the minister has given the credit to the municipality because it has had to act under desperate circumstances. When the community's calls for help were not answered, it continued to work and make progress.

The failure of this government's response to the homelessness crisis that is being experienced across New Brunswick was brought into very clear focus with the events in St. Stephen. Other communities know what St. Stephen is feeling, and many are now watching in fear that their community may be the next one to experience this terrible outcome.

A few weeks ago, the minister spoke proudly about investments into homelessness and shelters. I believe that it was \$10 million, and she specifically articulated that there was \$1.4 million for new out-of-the-cold shelters and \$1.3 million for pilot hubs to enhance services to the unsheltered. I am hoping that the minister can explain how much of those funds are being directed to St. Stephen.

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 sure that the members opposite can appreciate that things are changing every day in relation to this file and to homelessness. I articulated the amounts that we have spent to date. We are spending what is needed to solve these problems in these communities.

Mr. Speaker, we are working with the community of St. Stephen to come up with solutions that work for St. Stephen. We are contributing what is necessary to put those in place. We are working with other smaller communities. The member opposite is right. Each community is experiencing the homelessness issue differently, and that is why we are working collaboratively with the communities to build community-based, community-led solutions. What works in St. Stephen will be different from what is happening in Miramichi or Moncton. We will spend and contribute as necessary to make sure that we are on the ground and—

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

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that many communities around New Brunswick are asking themselves whether they will have to attempt to call a state of emergency. Will they have to ring the alarm bells to get some response from this government? In the face of getting no response, the community of St. Stephen has continued to deal with this and has found solutions on its own. So I caution the government, which has not described any funds that have been invested, has not been able to communicate in a timely way with the community, and has not helped find a solution here, not to take credit for the hard work that the community is doing.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

But I want to touch base with a different minister, because the people of St. Stephen are clearly very upset with both ministers' responses to this crisis. I am sure that the Minister responsible for Seniors, who is the member for Saint Croix, has gotten the same shocked and angry messages that I have. The mayor and council there are looking for support and partnership, and the citizens are looking for care and communication. They are looking for the member for Saint Croix to describe what she is doing to support her community in its time of need.

Hon. Ms. Bockus (Saint Croix, Minister responsible for Seniors, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond. For many, many, many months, I have been working with my community in St. Stephen, including with the different groups, the council, and the committee that is charged with establishing a homeless shelter.

I have been told that I have been silent on this, or I have heard that I have been silent. I have been focusing my efforts daily, and sometimes two and three times per day, with the government departments in order to get a solution for this. I will continue to do that until we have a solution. I have not forgotten my community, and I will work very, very hard. I will continue to work very hard for the citizens there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give the Minister of Public Safety the opportunity to address the issue more seriously now that he has had a chance to cancel that “frivolous” emergency order. Regardless of the technicalities, the situation remains urgent and dire. The risk of another death in St. Stephen, as well as in Miramichi, Moncton, and many other communities, is real. The safety of our neighbours is at stake.

Growing up, many of us were taught to love thy neighbour. That love should be unconditional. It does not judge whether your neighbour has a roof over their head or not. Housing is a provincial responsibility, as is public safety. Minister, in the face of a lost life and the threat of further lost lives, what do you have to say to the people of St. Stephen in response to their call for help? Please inform this Assembly what action you are taking right now to help ensure another person does not die in St. Stephen.

Hon. Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Minister of Public Safety, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I have said before, any time that you have a death in this situation, it is tragic. It is heartbreaking, regardless of which community it is in. He was a father and a son, and our hearts break for this situation. The Leader of the Opposition, frankly, is trying to simplify a very complex problem that she knows is complex. Every community across Canada is facing this issue. She knows, or she should know if she knows anything about the emergency Act, that a state of emergency adds zero value to solving the homelessness crisis. She should know that.

(Interjections.)

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

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

Hon. Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Minister of Public Safety, PC): So, the reality is that the minister responsible for housing has worked with the community and the groups within the community, and they have come up with a solution, which is going to be announced in the next few days. We are going to solve it without a state of emergency. We will do that in every community to ensure that everybody in this province gets the health care, safety, and shelter that they need. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to clarify this with the minister responsible for housing. I trust that you have spoken with the mayor since yesterday.

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. Yes, I have spoken to the mayor. We had a good conversation, and we are working collaboratively on a solution for the community. As I said, we have a very immediate solution. We have a short-term solution, and we are discussing a much longer-term solution, Mr. Speaker, because at the end of the day, these people need housing. We are working on housing solutions not only for St. Stephen but also for all communities in New Brunswick. I am happy to continue working forward. I will speak more about what the solutions are that we have worked on together.

While I have a couple of seconds left, I would also like to say that we are working with other small communities. If any MLA in here has an issue with homelessness in their community, please come to me so that we can start working collaboratively with the community on solutions. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

RADIATION TECHNOLOGISTS

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to welcome Jennifer Carey of the Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists to the Legislature. She represents a group of radiation therapists at the Saint John Regional Hospital who have written to the Minister of Health expressing concern regarding staffing levels at the Saint John cancer centre. The centre is facing unprecedented shortages. It has seven unfilled positions, representing a third of the workforce. They are five unfilled permanent positions and two unfilled maternity leaves. In the past six months, the centre has lost eight radiation therapists to other jurisdictions. There are currently no casual therapists and no students staying on to fill these positions.

The Minister of Health was alerted to this critical issue in June, but he told the group that there was no opportunity to meet and discuss its concerns. Mr. Speaker, can the minister

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

confirm whether he has met with the group concerning the shortage of radiation therapists at the Saint John Regional Hospital cancer centre? If he has not, why not?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about this subject because it is important, not only in the city of Saint John but also throughout the province. When we talk about shortages of specialists and, whether it is the surgeons or the radiologists or LPNs and nurses, there is a significant amount of work that needs to be done in order to make sure that positions are filled.

I know that the members are here today. We had one meeting, I believe last year, and then additional correspondence this year. That is why we continue to try to recruit.

Now, no matter what comes up, the members opposite seem to take on that cause. I appreciate that, but that is why we work in a collaborative practice or in a collaborative way. The RHAs are charged with the recruitment and retention of the various positions, but we want to look at a province-wide—

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

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to focus on the radiation therapists at the Saint John cancer centre. It is facing a critical shortage. It is not necessarily the same issue that the Dumont hospital is facing at its centre. It is specific to Saint John, and I think that this minister needs to address it.

When the radiation therapists requested a meeting in June of this year, the minister did not meet with them. One of the main reasons that the centre is losing radiation therapists is that they were not part of the 8% wage increase that the medical science professionals received in their contract. When the rest of the profession received the increase, the radiation therapists did not. This is leading to an inequity in wages for radiation therapists across the Atlantic Provinces. It has been a crisis. They saw British Columbia and Newfoundland having to take drastic measures to ensure that cancer treatments would continue in their provinces.

Given the critical shortage of therapists at the Saint John cancer centre, can the minister tell us his plan to address these immediate staffing needs and ensure the continued delivery of cancer treatment in Saint John?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much. Again, I can assure the member across the way that cancer treatment in Saint John will continue, Mr. Speaker. This is, again, where we work with the RHAs to commission them to work with the recruitment team that has been created in the Department of Health. We have created a human resource department, and it is coordinating that recruitment effort of the RHAs. The RHAs are the ones that sign the contracts.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

When we look at the individuals who are involved, I am more than happy to meet with them as time permits. Bargaining is done in good faith with our Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. Again, the radiation therapists can meet with me. That is fine. But when we look at the shortages in the various positions across the province and when we work with the RHAs to move forward and make sure that the services are available for the people of New Brunswick, that is a province-wide approach. That is why we created the Health System Collaboration Council—

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

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, therapists are leaving to find better opportunities in other jurisdictions in other provinces. Those who are remaining here to work are exhausted and burnt out. In that letter to the minister, they had testimonials.

They said: Losing six employees may not sound large, but our little clinic is hit hard by this loss. This is just the beginning. Cancer is not slowing down. We need to be sure that government is working to ensure the preservation of the quality care that our centre provides. It is in jeopardy daily.

Another wrote: The impact of this shortage has left us feeling physically and mentally exhausted. In the end, it is radiation therapists who have been bearing the burden of overbooking patients, working mandatory overtime, and working through lunches and breaks due to a lack of staff coverage.

Another wrote: Patients will be forced to wait longer to receive their radiation treatments or may even have to be sent to different treatment centres, which is extremely unacceptable.

Can the minister tell us what he is specifically doing to address the situation?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much. Again, Mr. Speaker, I challenge the members opposite to tell us what their plan is going forward because all that they have said here is that they want to go back to the way that it was. That way actually caused some of the challenges that we are facing here today.

The members opposite say that they want to do away with the Collaboration Council, which takes a provincial, overall view of the services that are provided. Then there are also two independent boards for the RHAs which are challenged with the day-to-day operations such as those of the radiology therapists that we are talking about today.

Mr. Speaker, it goes beyond just one department. That is why we continue to work with the Health Human Resources Division that we created, which now has a number of people who are going out to recruit. Not only are we recruiting within Canada and within other jurisdictions, but we have also increased the number of opportunities for people to get

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

educated, whether it is for nurses, doctors, or other areas. We work with PETL. We work with the Department of Finance. One GNB working together to make sure—

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

[Translation]

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM

Ms. Landry (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In September, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development announced an expansion of the program that aims to facilitate access to healthy foods in schools. In 2022-23, a total of 90 schools were targeted, and, with a \$2-million investment, 42 additional schools could benefit from this program in 2023-24. In total, that is about 130 out of the 300 schools in the province.

This is what we would like to know: What is the minister's commitment with regard to expanding the program to the 170 other schools in the province?

[Original]

Hon. Ms. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for the question. This is particularly important to me. As Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, we want to work in conjunction with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to make sure that our children are receiving healthy foods in their schools. We know that students find it difficult to learn on an empty stomach, and that is why we have made a promise to ensure that a food program is available in every school in New Brunswick. The government is investing \$2 million to make good on our promise to make healthy foods available, free of charge, to all public-school students by the end of 2024.

Through an expanded partnership with Food DEPOT Alimentaire, we are going to be supplying healthy foods to 135 schools across seven school districts until March 31, 2024. Government will be working to ensure that healthy foods remain available in schools in April, May, and June. Community partners will be providing health food service to schools not serviced by Food DEPOT Alimentaire, free of charge.

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

[Translation]

Ms. Landry (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): This week, during a presentation by Food for All NB attended by nearly 200 people from around the province, we heard that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development would inject \$300 000 into

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

schools that were not on the original list announced in September. Therefore, we would like to know if these are additional funds. If that is the case, which schools will they be allocated to?

[Original]

Hon. Ms. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): For details like that, Mr. Speaker, I am going to revert to the opportunity to take that under advisement and get those details back to you tomorrow.

[Translation]

Ms. Landry (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Mr. Speaker, it is said that more than half of children do not eat breakfast at home before going to school. If the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development can add funds this year, why doesn't it do so for every school in New Brunswick starting this year? Why is he penalizing the communities and people who rallied together to organize fundraisers and activities to make sure that children in need have at least one meal a day? Why can funds not be given to every school starting this year? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

Hon. Ms. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite through the chair, I agree with you. We need to make sure that all our students are getting full bellies and that they are all learning with a full stomach to start each day. I think it is laudable that we have these amazing community groups come in and offer to help with this project. As I have said, the Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries is also willing to help with this. I would love for you to send me the list of community groups who are engaged in that. I think that, with the Minister of Education, we would certainly be willing to help facilitate getting that food into those schools.

SCHOOLS

Mr. C. Chiasson (Victoria-La Vallée, L): Mr. Speaker, the government has indicated that it will start the process of replacing George Street Middle School in the next fiscal year. This school, in the heart of the city, is truly the essence of what a community school is. Students love it, and parents and teachers love it. Young families moving into the downtown area love the idea of their children walking to school. Class visits to this Legislature, TNB, or an art gallery are just a walk away.

My question to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure is this: Has an evaluation been done on the cost of completely refurbishing this beautiful building versus the cost of

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

building a brand-new school or on refurbishing this school and perhaps building a smaller new school?

Hon. Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, it was a pleasure to hear the Minister of Education announce earlier that we are building four brand-new schools this year. There will be major renovations on a couple more schools.

I can certainly give the member opposite some more details and take that under advisement. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. C. Chiasson (Victoria-La Vallée, L): Thank you very much, minister. I look forward to that.

Mr. Speaker, when Moncton High School was replaced with a brand-new school on the outskirts of the city, the morale of students as well as staff suffered. Students were moved from a beautiful historic school with plenty of character in the middle of a vibrant city to a generic, sterile school on the outskirts of the city. Students take pride in their school. Could the minister please inform this House as to whether any survey or study has ever been undertaken to measure the pros and cons of community schools versus schools on the periphery of a city? If so, what were the results?

Hon. Ms. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that we have a beautiful old building in Moncton's city centre. It is a fantastic place, and I appreciate how children and students in schools all over the province have an affinity and affection for the buildings they are in. Quite frankly, I think that, at this time and this juncture in our society and within our province, it is more important that we have spaces and places for our students to have education, and then we can work on the aesthetics.

ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The task force's report on the operations of American Iron & Metal and the September 14 fire contains some extraordinary findings. Testing after the fire found hazardous metals such as lead, which is particularly harmful to children, at levels that exceed human health criteria by up to 18 times the allowable levels and exceed ecological health criteria by over 1 890 times the allowable levels. That fire should never have happened. The company said—promised—that hazardous materials would never be brought onto the site, an assurance that the task force discovered had been unfulfilled. These are hazardous materials that explode and cause fires. Mr. Speaker, why did the Minister of Environment not stop the company from bringing those hazardous materials onto the AIM site when it was clear that that was causing the explosions and the fires? Why did he fail at his job?

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Hon. Mr. Flemming, K.C. (Rothesay, Minister of Justice, Attorney General, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. That is a legitimate question. In the circumstances with respect to AIM, you need to remember that it was on the property of Port Saint John. It was a tenant of Port Saint John. It had an operating permit from Environment, which it applied for. When it applied for that operating permit, it made certain representations and conditions with respect to compliance. It appears clear from the task force report that those representations have not been followed. Accordingly, the government will look at that very seriously with respect to any application that AIM may make. Today, the environmental permit has been withdrawn. The thing about the AIM operation is that it is an ongoing thing. Metal comes in, and metal goes out. Ships get loaded, and ships get unloaded. It is almost what you would describe as a moving target. We are going to deal with that. It is a good question—

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

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, this week, the Minister of Environment decided to give his permission for Coastal Shell Products to continue to operate in Richibucto for another nine months. The air pollution from this plant is causing children in the nearby school to throw up—to vomit. It is that bad. Families cannot use their home ventilation systems, leading to a reduction in their own indoor air quality. This is disgusting. In the old days, political apologists for the industrial air pollution in Saint John used to say “that is just the smell of money” while people’s health was damaged. Is that the way the minister thinks? Does the Minister of Environment think that the puke-inducing stink from Coastal Shell Products is the smell of money? Is that why he gave it permission to keep polluting the lives of people in Richibucto?

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the question from across the way. As the member knows, there is a process in place. There was a pilot in place as well to reduce the emissions and the odours there. During the court injunction . . . By the way, the other day, the judge sided with Coastal Shell that it was not substantiated. However, the plant will not be opened up between mid-December and spring because it is not lobster, crab, or shrimp season. Anyway, it is working at mitigation. It is putting \$1 million or \$2 million into this to make a difference by next summer. I hope that will take place and reduce the problems in the area. We do take this seriously.

If you remember correctly—again, I have to bring it up here—it was the Liberal government in 2016 that invested \$2.9 million to put the plant where it is today. Again, we are wearing it. Again, we are wearing it.

Location, location, location. For each of these things that you see today, I really do not believe that they are now what they were meant to be at that time. Thank you.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

SCHOOLS

Mr. C. Chiasson (Victoria-La Vallée, L): Yes, it certainly was not meant to be today, what it was supposed to be then. You need to address it going forward.

Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, yes, Moncton High School has now been completely refurbished. Yes, we do need spaces for children. The old Moncton High School has been completely refurbished or completely remediated and could become a school again, a beautiful school. I understand. Yes, there are maintenance deficits that exist in some of our schools. It does make sense to tear some down and to build new ones, but in other cases, it might make sense to refurbish an existing school and perhaps enlarge it or to build a complementary smaller school. Can the minister please inform this House if there was every any consideration given to this idea? Were evaluations done in the case of each new school that is being built or is planned to be built? Or is it just easier to throw taxpayers' money at a new build?

Hon. Ms. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Well, I am not, in fact, the Minister of Education, though this week I certainly feel like it. So, I would not have been privy to the discussions that would have gone into those examinations, but I am certain that they would have been thorough. I will take that under advisement and get that information for you.

I also want to draw attention to the fact that there are six major capital projects going on in 2024-25. We have a new kindergarten to Grade 12 school going up in Dieppe. We have a construction of a replacement school for Salisbury Elementary School. We have a replacement school for George Street Middle School. We have additions to Tabusintac Community School. We have an upgrade to École Saint-Henri in Moncton, and we have new schools to replace Forest Hill Elementary School and Liverpool Street Elementary School in Fredericton. These projects respond to the population growth and overcrowding in our schools and to the aging infrastructures and the need for upgrades and improvements required in others.

It is a very good and aggressive capital budget for the province that we are investing in our education and in our children. This will be more construction of large commercial buildings than we have seen in recent years. We need to be fiscally responsible and that means using—

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

(Interjections.)

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

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to underline the urgency of the issue that my colleague described at the Saint John Regional Hospital in terms of the cancer therapy, the critical cancer therapy, that is provided by these radiation therapists. I think that there are many of us in the room who understand the time-sensitive nature of receiving the kind of radiation therapy that you need when you need it.

We are hearing from oncologists who are referring patients for services, but their patients cannot get it in the timely manner that these cancer treatments demand. This is serious. This is another matter of life and death. There is a critical shortage, and it will be impacting the lives of New Brunswickers who cannot get critical radiation therapy. I am hoping that the minister will commit to having a meeting with this group this year—in the weeks that are left—and to tabling a specific action plan to increase the numbers of radiation therapists that are providing this critical, critical health service to New Brunswickers and to the people in the Saint John—

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

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that we have to recognize that we are challenged today in our province and throughout the country. We see this in the health care system. It requires thinking differently about how health care works. For us in New Brunswick, it requires taking advantage of the opportunity of having two dynamic health care systems that can collaborate and deliver the best health care anywhere in the province. While there may be an immediate problem in Saint John—I will not deny that or question that—the point is that you need to look across the province and say: How do we solve issues collectively?

I agree, totally. You should not delay any sort of oncology treatment or testing for any sort of condition. But we need to look broader than any one community or any one hospital. Look across our province and ask: How good can we be? That is why the Collaboration Council is in place. That is why the minister refers to it. It is looking at the broader picture, not site by site, Mr. Speaker. It is looking at how good we can be as a province and how good we can be when working together. The issue here is that the members of the opposition need to think differently about health care.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Question period is over.