

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions



**December 12, 2023**

### CONTENTS

#### COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Ms. Holt  
Hon. Mr. Higgs  
Ms. Holt  
Hon. Mr. Higgs  
Ms. Holt  
Hon. Mr. Higgs  
Hon. Mr. Higgs  
Ms. Holt  
Hon. Mr. Higgs  
Hon. Mr. Higgs  
Ms. Holt  
Hon. Mr. Higgs  
Hon. Mr. Higgs  
Ms. Holt  
Hon. Mr. Higgs  
Ms. Holt

#### OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Mr. Higgs  
Ms. Holt  
Hon. Mr. Higgs

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

### NURSES

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

### HOUSING

Mr. Losier  
Hon. Ms. Green

### PENSIONS

Mr. K. Arseneau  
Hon. G. Savoie  
Hon. G. Savoie  
Mr. K. Arseneau  
Hon. G. Savoie

### RENTS

Mr. Losier  
Hon. Ms. Green

### PENSIONS

Ms. Holt  
Hon. Mr. Higgs

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

[Original]

### COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, over the weekend, my colleagues and I heard from hundreds of New Brunswickers, or, actually, thousands of New Brunswickers. We can see that here today, because we have a gallery full of people from the firefighters' union, the teachers' union, the Nurses' Union, and the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union. And, obviously, there are the school bus driver and nursing home workers. They are all here because they are deeply concerned about their future and about their pension. We are hearing questions from people at the grocery store, asking: What is going to happen to my pension in the future? Why has the Premier removed the unions' opportunity to negotiate?

I think that everyone here in this House would like to hear from the Premier. Can he answer very clearly and explain why he has stepped away from the table and is now removing the right to negotiation?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Of course, it was our hope too, back in June 2021, that we would have a process moving forward to have a sustainable path for the pension program so that the future pension could be one that is balanced, fair to taxpayers, and fair to employees. This was our goal, and this was what we agreed to in a memorandum of understanding (MOU)—to spend one year making progress and then have a path forward.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of that, there was an extension of another three months, and then another three months. There was no progress of any kind. In fact, our legal folks say: You know, there is nothing to arbitrate. There is nothing to go forward with because there has been zero progress.

Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the national leaders do not want to look after employees here in New Brunswick. We are trying to find a balanced approach for our citizens, our employees, so that taxpayers and employees can fund a plan that is there when they need it, and the plan has been proven to be successful. So, people need to know what that means to them, and we have tried to bring that to the table.

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that it is interesting to hear the Premier mention delays of three months and another three months, because as New Brunswickers, that is something that we feel as we wait for access to primary care and wait for housing to get built. We see that this government's own goals and deadlines, which are stated in the health care plan, get pushed out, and pushed out, and pushed out, year after year, but we are not sitting here legislating the government to meet its own targets that it set.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

If the Premier has failed in his ability to conduct appropriate negotiations, he should take responsibility for that. The best outcome here is to get to the table and find a result, collectively—to negotiate a result that everyone can get behind. You have to ask yourself: With the delays on the government side and with the Premier's inability to change course and inflexibility as to options, why has the Premier failed at concluding constructive negotiation with these unions?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, what we are witnessing here today is the height of hypocrisy. Back in 2014 when the plans were approved, the Liberals running in 2014 ran on: We are going to cancel these pensions if we get elected. The Leader of the Opposition was part of that government team, Mr. Speaker, when they were in power back in 2014-18. Did they do anything to change the pensions that were put in place back in 2014? Not a thing, Mr. Speaker—not a single thing.

So, if there is any belief here that the Leader of the Opposition or any of the members are going to do anything to jeopardize your pensions for the future, no, they are not. When we fix them for the future, when we have a balanced approach for taxpayers and for employees. . . . When people ask, I am on a pension, so what does that mean to me? Nothing. I have 25 years in, so what does it mean to me? Minor changes, Mr. Speaker, minor changes in contribution and minor changes in what it might take for retirement time. The point is that we have an unfunded liability of \$265 million. It needs to be fixed. Everyone knows that. The opposition—

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

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, the unfunded liability came from this Premier not making the contributions that he should have been making to those pensions. So, he has created this problem, and now he wants to raise his hands and say that he has to legislate to fix it. He just described “minor changes”. The problem is that there is no trust. When I hear “minor changes” from this Premier, I get worried. He is making changes, and we do not have a sense for what those are going to be. People know that they will be negatively impacted because he is not being open and transparent at the table.

You have another chance, with everyone here today, to do the right thing, to go back to the table, to enter into proper negotiations. There are many unions here, more than one, more than just the folks impacted. I am hearing of nursing home workers leaving their jobs because they cannot count on their pensions. I am worried about the teachers and the shortages that we are trying to fill there and the nurses whom we so desperately need. Will you come back to the table?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): In addition to the hypocrisy, Mr. Speaker, we have a situation where we are talking

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

about trust. Mr. Speaker, what employees can trust is that their pensions will be there for them. The new plan can have no outside involvement from government of any kind. You might say, because our province was headed over the cliff to financial bankruptcy when the previous government was in place, back when the Leader of the Opposition was there. . .

(Interjections.)

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

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): You might look at that and say, we are trying to put in a pension plan that will protect itself against future Liberal governments, Mr. Speaker. That is where the province goes over the cliff and they cannot fund it. There were no funding missteps. The actual plan was fully funded, but it will not sustain itself. It will not sustain itself because it does not have the funding formula to make it work. When people get a chance to look at it. . .

By the discussion from the Leader of the Opposition, I would say that she does not understand the pension plan, Mr. Speaker. If she did, she would know that, right now, 80 000 employees in this province have a pension plan that they can count on. Government makes contributions that cannot—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Original*]

There is something that I understand very clearly. When I sign my name to a contract, that means something. When you sign a collective agreement, that is your word to uphold. When you sign a memorandum of agreement, that is a commitment made. I take that stuff seriously, and I think that every person whose signature is on this page takes that seriously. You signed an agreement committing to a process that you have abandoned, and now unions in this province cannot trust that they will be able to negotiate freely and fairly with you. This is not about the sustainability of pensions. This is about a process, and this is about respecting that process and conducting free and fair negotiations, something that you have proven you are unable to do. So, if you are unable to do it, will you get out of the way and let someone else?

(Interjections.)

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

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): So, Mr. Speaker, what the Liberal Party and the Leader of the Opposition have proven is that they are not reliable in what they say that they will do. They say that they will do one thing, and they will do another, as they did in the election before, Mr. Speaker—no changes. They said: We will fix it. We will get rid of it. There were no changes because they knew that it made sense.

Every day, I meet people outside as well who question why we should pay taxpayers' money for a pension plan that is not sustainable, a pension plan that 65% of New Brunswick citizens do not have, Mr. Speaker. This is a balanced approach, and this is not a collective bargaining issue. This is not part of the collective agreement. This was an MOU that we—

(Interjections.)

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): No, I am sorry. It is not, and you should understand that. If you actually look at it, we had an MOU with the purpose to fix the pension plan, but there was no progress—no progress. In fact, they presented a pension plan that was so much more costly to taxpayers. There is a balance, Mr. Speaker, and we are putting the process in place to find the balance.

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): I think that the hypocrisy is interesting. The Premier just said that there was no progress made, but the other side presented an option. Clearly, there was a dialogue happening. There were proposals made from both sides. There were advancements. There were delays on the government's side. There were delays on the other side. But things need to move forward. There was communication as recently as September, and then, in November, all of a sudden, with five days' notice, the Premier decided to change his word and their signature on the collective agreement and the MOA. I do not see how he can go back on his word and create fear and then have good bargaining conditions with any other union in this province.

I will ask you one last time. This is the last chance. Will you get back to the table and respect workers' rights in New Brunswick, take away the fear that people are experiencing about the changes that may come, and find a sustainable solution that everyone can agree to in a proper, negotiated fashion? Please?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is truly disappointing that the opposition members did not want to spend any time asking real questions about the pension formula and what it means for individuals. They are not representing the people of the province at all. The employees. . .



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

There was a lot of time for debate here in the House. There was no movement toward committee. They refused to go to committee where all the answers would be given, and all the questions would be asked.  
(Interjections.)

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

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): No, they would rather grandstand. They would rather put on a show than talk about real facts. That is what we have here today, a show. This is more of a show about a program that they know full well needs to happen to protect pensions in this province. Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition does not seem to understand yet that the MOU had expired. It had two extensions, and the plan that was brought forward many, many months ago was totally out of step with a sustainable pension plan that was affordable to taxpayers. I would say that the Leader of the Opposition should talk to a lot of people in the province, a whole lot of people that are paying for the plan, to make it right.

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, there are a whole lot of people in this province who want to know that when the government commits to something, it is going to stick with it. I appreciate that there were delays. We see that every day in our health care system and in our education system. We do not walk away from the health care system when there are delays in receiving service. We do not kick them all out and legislate. We keep at it. That is what you do in a good marriage. That is what you do when you govern the province—you find a way to continue the conversation and define the critical common ground that is the basis for good labour relations in this province.

The Premier has demonstrated an inability to do that. He comes up against solutions that he does not like, and instead of negotiating and engaging, he brings out the hammer, drops legislation, and tells every union in this province that it does not have the right to free and fair bargaining. I do not even know where to go at this point because it is not even about sustainability, it's about free and fair bargaining. How will you continue under this?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition wants to play to the crowd, not to the facts. This is not a breach of a collective agreement. We know that full well. It is very clear. It is not a breach of a collective agreement, yet the message that it is a breach keeps being repeated and repeated and repeated.

Mr. Speaker, this is a process that did not work. It was done in good faith, and we thought that we were going to have a process to fix pensions. There was one delay after another, one extension after another. That MOU has expired. The legislation basically outlines a process so that all members have a chance to look at their plan and determine what it means to them and so that we can fix it going forward. That is what the legislation does.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

It is a process that was supposed to happen under an MOU that was expired, and with no plans. Our legal folks said that there was no progress there. Legal folks for CUPE actually said that we were at an impasse and that there was no progress there. That is the common theme—no progress. Mr. Speaker, we are determined to fix the plans for our employees because they deserve a plan that works.

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): We can agree on something. There is no progress here. There is no progress in the PC Party of New Brunswick.

[Translation]

## OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Speaker, on September 14, 2023, the Premier made a statement on the *Official Languages Act*. He said that this Act is the most important social contract entered into by the people of our province. On November 23, 2023—three weeks ago—we asked in the House for an update on the work of the Secretariat of Official Languages. The Premier answered:

[Original]

*I can take this and get a list of what accomplishments and transmissions it has made to date, what connections it has made in each department, and what it has looked at in each department in asking whether we are following the rules and ensuring that we are serving both official languages*

[Translation]

New Brunswickers look forward to seeing the work of the Secretariat of Official Languages and knowing whether it has conducted reviews and had meetings with ministers. When can New Brunswickers expect to see the Premier meet this commitment? When will the secretariat table a report about the people it has met with, its assessment of services, and its work?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think that the commissioner was certainly accurate in her discussion about the secretariat and what she learned from the secretariat. It is meeting with all departments to ensure that we have consistency throughout government to provide services as required under the *Official Languages Act*. This is a process that has not existed before. The secretariat is a group that is totally dedicated to understanding what every department is doing, anywhere in the province, in order to understand how we could



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

actually get better. That is what the secretariat does. It looks at where the real problems are and how we could fix them, rather than keep talking about the problems as the opposition would continually do. The secretariat looks at how we could actually fix the problems.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the number of complaints, you will see that they have gone down dramatically in the past year. We have asked for details around the complaints so that we can actually zero in on them and fix them. We know that we have had challenges in different areas, particularly in health, but our goal is to provide service as required according to the *Official Languages Act*. I am pleased that we have that ongoing capability within the secretariat. That is why it is there.

[Translation]

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are waiting for news. The Premier brags about creating the Secretariat of Official Languages and the work it does, but we would like to see the work. When will the secretariat table a report to explain its work to us? Which departments has it met with? At the same time, can the Premier tell us why this secretariat responsible for promoting the *Official Languages Act*, which is our province's most important social contract, does not answer to a deputy minister?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think, again, that the commissioner pointed out that she had been asking for a secretariat role for some time. With the secretariat, the goal is not to have a 10-year review but an ongoing review, where there is a continual evaluation of where we are and where we are not providing service and where we need to get better because of the criticality of service. Then, we can focus our energy on where it makes the most sense.

The report will come some time in the new year. I do not have an exact date or what the secretariat has actually done at this point, Mr. Speaker, but our intent is to provide that information. We are proud of what it does and what it is doing in the system.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work with the departments. We will continue to understand their opportunities. We will continue to get better at delivering service, but it is not going to be something that you talk about every 10 years. That is the purpose of having a secretariat. It is something that you evaluate on a daily, monthly, and weekly basis. The point is this: How do we fix the ongoing issues? Where are our shortcomings? How do we get better at fixing the root cause of why we are not able to provide a bilingual service where we are obligated to do so?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

### NURSES

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, the New Brunswick Nurses' Union is calling on the government to commit to ending the use of travel nurses by the end of 2025. This government, made up of the self-described "good fiscal managers", has spent \$57 million in the past five months on travel nurses while neglecting the needs of our own human health resources currently in the system. This is leading to low morale among health care workers.

In the same time frame, we have lost 387 of our own registered nurses because the government is ignoring the key element of retention in the Health Human Resource Strategy. Across the health sector, our health care workers are leaving for better pay and better working conditions in other provinces. At the same time, this government is paying three to four times more for travel nurses than our own nurses. The government could have settled this months ago with a retention bonus in the budget and by truly improving the working conditions for nurses.

When will the minister get serious about retaining our valuable nursing workforce and stop shoveling money out the door to travel nurses?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I did an interview on CBC the other day, and I talked about that balance between making sure that the patients are cared for and that there are hands on deck to make sure that the RNs who live and work here in the province have enough help on the wards in order to provide the patient care that is needed. That was what the union also said. It said: We need help on the wards, we need help in the emergency rooms, and we need help across the system.

So, the RHAs, which are charged with making sure that the human resources are there and available when the patients need them, use a tool called travel nurses. That is not unique to New Brunswick. That is right across the jurisdictions. Nova Scotia uses them, as well as Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Quebec, and Ontario. Mr. Speaker, you can go right across, and that is what is being used. But we have done fantastically in recruitment. We have done fantastically in making sure that there are internationally trained nurses here as well, and I have more examples of how we are doing well in—

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

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, we are losing valuable nursing resources because of this government's ignorance of the critical issue of retention. All the minister talks about are recruitment and the overseas trips that he is taking while the nursing staff and the health care workers that we already have in this province are leaving. They are making very minimal net gains, and that is not going to cut it, Mr. Speaker.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

Another area of concern is the exodus of family doctors that we are seeing in this province. Again, this government is ignoring the solution that is in front of it to settle this issue, and that is to move toward collaborative care clinics. Instead, it is moving people from one wait list to another, and it has only found a permanent home for 2 000 New Brunswickers who were looking for a family doctor. Instead of spending their energy on NB Health Link, a temporary solution, why do the government members not put their energy and resources toward establishing true family medicine collaborative clinics all across the province for all New Brunswickers?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, I find it amusing that the member opposite is using a shotgun approach and saying that we have to do all of this at one point in time, but when we make advancements, such as the fact that there are 610 permanent registered nurses, licensed practitioners, and personal support workers, resulting in a net gain of 318 permanent—permanent—employees within Vitalité and Horizon, he calls them minimal. He is minimizing the fact that there are people willing and ready to go to work here in the province to help the people who are already in place and to help the patients who are looking for care. He minimizes them. He calls them a band-aid.

(Interjections.)

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

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, I went and met with some of the internationally trained nurses who are going to make a career here in New Brunswick. They have chosen New Brunswick. They have chosen our health care system.

(Interjections.)

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

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): They have made sure that. . . Again, we are doing the work to help those who are in place now—

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

[Translation]

## HOUSING

**Mr. Losier** (Dieppe, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In her December 7 update, the Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation indicated that \$150 million of the total of \$500 million in the budget was invested in *Housing for All* strategy initiatives during the first six months.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

In this update, since the minister neglected to mention that \$29 million of the \$33 million allocated for capital construction will not be spent this year, could she tell us exactly where the \$150 million has been invested in the first six months?

[Original]

**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 believe that he said that I said \$500 million was spent in the first six months, and that is not accurate. Our update said that \$150 million was spent in the first six months, and it was spent in a number of different ways, including preparing for our builds that are going to be occurring in the spring. We have 100 builds planned for the spring. It was spent getting prepared for the Rent Bank. It was spent increasing what we are paying toward private developers and not-for-profits to build affordable housing. It was spent to increase accessible units so that we can have more accessible units in the province. It was spent to provide money toward builds by Habitat for Humanity.

So, there are a number of different ways that the \$150 million was spent, and it was all toward the goal of housing for all in New Brunswick. We are committed to it, and we are working toward it. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

## PENSIONS

**Mr. K. Arseneau** (Kent North, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday, the government chose to end debate on Bill 17 and send its members home early for the weekend.

Apparently, the government lawyer and actuary were even there, from Halifax, because the Premier wanted to meet in committee. However, the same Premier and his team voted against the option to send the bill to the Standing Committee on Law Amendments earlier in the week. Mr. Speaker, the Premier wants to throw up a smokescreen. He wants to pick the facts that will be revealed. He has already made up his mind. So, if the Premier is serious and wants to go to committee with this bill, will he allow all parties to invite people to appear before the committee so that we hear all points of view?

[Original]

**Hon. G. Savoie** (Saint John East, Minister of Local Government; Minister responsible for La Francophonie, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I find it interesting, considering how we have gone through this process on Bill 17, to be consistently hearing the opposition members talk about everything but the bill. They have made it a point to make personal attacks. They have made it a point to talk about everything around it, but they have not talked about the bill itself. Sure, they are using the tools that they have

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

available to them. They are rehashing, proposing amendments, and doing things over and over again, but the reality is this.

(Interjections.)

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

**Hon. G. Savoie** (Saint John East, Minister of Local Government; Minister responsible for La Francophonie, PC): On Friday, I stood up in this House and offered this by saying: Hey, let's go to the committee. If we have unanimous consent, let's move to the committee. We will move to the committee.

It is often said by the members of the opposition that the committee is where we get our best work done. Then I hear the comments from the Leader of the Green Party saying: Well, the committee is a waste of time. This is an affront to democracy. How can he talk about an affront to democracy and say that the committee is a waste of time when we are offering to try to move this thing in a direction that it needs to take?

**Mr. K. Arseneau** (Kent North, G): Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that I was very clear. I talked on the bill. The bill is garbage. Throw it out. We all know that the Premier does not like this process that he cannot control. The Premier wants us to go to the committee so that he can spew his one-sided propaganda. He does not want us to hear that the proposed pension plan is a win-win for both pensioners and taxpayers.

This should be done at the table. But if he wants to go to the committee, we want to hear both sides. The Premier cannot cherry-pick the facts on this one, choosing the facts that he wants to have thrown out and choosing the facts that he wants people to hear. One last time, if the Premier wants to go to the committee, will he allow all the parties to invite witnesses to the committee so that we can hear all sides?

**Hon. G. Savoie** (Saint John East, Minister of Local Government; Minister responsible for La Francophonie, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, this is an opportunity to do a little bit of posturing here in the House. We know that we have a full gallery, so this is all about trying to score political points. It is not about whether or not there will be any benefit to doing a particular thing. It is all about the performance. That is clear.

Let's look at the fact that we brought this piece of legislation in as an effort to try to move along a process so that we could fix the pensions. That was the intent here. The opposition has their tools. That is fair ball. They are allowed to use them, and I do not begrudge them one little bit. But they cannot escape from the fact that when this is brought to the committee, they will have an opportunity to ask questions. We will have an opportunity to answer them. The last time that I checked, we were the ones who had a majority, and we, as the government, have a responsibility to manage things through this House in the best



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

interests of New Brunswickers. So, at the end of the day, this is all about us being able to move business through the House and—

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

## RENTS

**Mr. Losier** (Dieppe, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make it clear that I said \$150 million in the first six months.

I want to take a quick second to comment on the progress report that the minister was so proud of on Thursday. I hope that it did not take six months to build. For a split second, I thought that she had hired my 16-year-old son to prepare that report. Again, I apologize to my son. It would have been a lot better.

There are approximately 24 000 renters in this province who are paying 30% or more of their income, which brings them to the brink of financial crisis. That is 24 000. Last week, I applauded the minister for establishing the Rent Bank. Now, could the minister explain, with a \$3-million budget over a two-year period and the thousands of renters who are struggling to make ends meet, how she came up with the number of \$2 700 eligible?

**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 think it is interesting that the member opposite would say that we are doing nothing for New Brunswickers and that we are doing nothing for renters. There are two programs to speak about. There is the Direct to Tenant Rental Benefit that begins in January. That is a \$22-million program that will help people who are paying more than 40% toward their rent.

The member opposite also brought up the Rent Bank, Mr. Speaker, which is an incredible program for New Brunswickers. It is incredible that our team was able to pull it off two or three weeks earlier than they thought they could so that we can have this program in place before the holiday season. Even better, the Rent Bank is a grant. We have changed it to a grant because we know that New Brunswickers are hurting, and we are going to help New Brunswickers through that Rent Bank. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

## PENSIONS

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that what we have here is a clear failure. It was a failure back in 2021 to conclude a successful collective agreement that did not need an add-on MOA, but an MOA was put in place that people signed their names to and made a

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

commitment to. Through the last two years, there has been a failure to have a productive relationship and to have constructive conversations to move those negotiations forward. There have been delays, but now the Premier has lost his patience. He has decided that he no longer wants to follow the process that he signed on to, and he is going to bring legislation to this House where we have had another failure.

Our team proposed this: Let's take that to the law amendments committee. Let's take the opportunity to hear from all sides. The government was not interested. We proposed other amendments that the government members voted down. At the last minute, with egg on their faces, they said, oh, we will allow for the committee. They realized that New Brunswickers are disappointed in their failure to negotiate fairly with the unions and the workers of this province. Will the Premier—

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

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Bill Oliver): Order. Members, order.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is truly sad that the Leader of the Opposition does not want these employees to have a sustainable plan and to join 80 000 other citizens in this province who have just that. It is truly sad that she wants to talk about everything but the details around the pension plan. It is truly sad that we spent two years without any meaningful discussion about what it means to the employees who are here in the Chamber today or to any employees, because that is what the whole process is about. It is about understanding what it means to you.

So, 80 000 people cannot be wrong—80 000 people. Ten years later, the plan has been up and running, through a pandemic, solid, and it has been paying out more than it would have otherwise. It says a whole lot, Mr. Speaker. It says: You know, we should have learned something—that we can protect pensions. You can be sure that it is there, and the government is responsible for funding the plan and for making sure that it is not in jeopardy.

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