

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



May 7, 2024

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GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, over the past few months, New Brunswickers have been opening their property tax bills and opening their energy bills, and they are stressed out. Families are pinching pennies and making tough decisions every day, and then they open the newspaper and see news of \$800 hotel rooms, \$19 000 in realtor fees, contracts of \$20 000 per month plus expenses to outsiders, and court case after course case. They are asking us: Is this where my tax dollars are going?

To quote the Premier in 2018, “I talk about numbers a lot, because when our tax dollars are wasted, for political reasons, that money is not available for health care, education or social services”. Well, today, we see that this money is not available to be invested in health care, education, and social services and instead it’s being wasted. These past few years, we’ve witnessed the repeated misuse of public funds by a Premier who’s lost touch with the reality of New Brunswickers. Mr. Premier, are these trips, contracts, lawsuits, and expenses your definition of the fiscally responsible use of New Brunswickers’ money?

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

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, it’s an honour to be back in the House speaking to these issues. If you look at our budget and our expenditures, you will see that, in the past six years, we’ve had the largest health care spending budget of all time. There’s no shortage of what we’re spending money on. You could go through every department in that category and see where the money is being placed, but that’s not going to be the answer, as I’ve said all along. That is the only answer that comes from across the hall. But the answer comes from asking how we can manage better and how we deliver better service.

In relation to the expenses, we are certainly looking at our policies there. We are asking: Okay, can we do better? Because we think we can do better in every area in every category in this province.

However, Mr. Speaker, I’d certainly like to draw attention to the Premier’s Office and the role of the principal secretary. The principal secretary is a political position. It’s been there for a long time, and, if I go back to 2017, when the Leader of the Opposition worked in that office, I think there were over six people in a similar category, so I got a real bargain.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since we are talking about the misuse of public funds, let’s talk about the contract to the principal secretary that is a shocking \$20 000 per month. It’s a rate unheard of in the system for someone in that role. But let’s also talk about the expenses. This is somebody who is flying in and out of New Brunswick, and we are paying

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for those flights. He's staying in hotels here in Fredericton, and we are paying for those hotels. Can the Premier tell us what the expense budget is for his principal secretary?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think what we do know about this role is that, at this point, it's a six-month position. It follows the categories that we look at in terms of a principal secretary's salary.

However, Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate the point that I just made. Back in 2017, when the Leader of the Opposition was there in what was known as a chief business partnership—I think the Jobs Board came after that—there were several positions with unidentified actual results. We can go back to director of issues management, senior advisor, director of strategic planning, director of policy and engagement, and the list goes on, one invented title after another.

So, Mr. Outhouse's expenses and salary are very clear, very public, and very transparent, Mr. Speaker. The principal secretary role is one that is traditional in the office, and I'm proud to say that Mr. Outhouse is bringing new thoughts and ideas and is helping us to form the next government. Thank you.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to address the incorrect statements about my work history that the Premier just made. We can sort that out elsewhere.

(Interjections.)

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

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): The Premier likes to talk about New Brunswick first. The Premier loves to emphasize the importance of New Brunswick first as a way forward, and yet we have a critical role in the Premier's Office that couldn't be done by anybody in New Brunswick. He just cited transparency, and I was asking for the expense budget for this principal secretary. I didn't hear that figure, so I'm hoping he can clarify this. To align with your philosophy of New Brunswick first, were any New Brunswickers considered for this role? And what are we paying for Mr. Outhouse's expenses?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition knows full well the expense budgets and the categories for accommodations or so on. It's all part of a package that is very transparent and part of the protocol of government. There isn't anything new there in that regard. It has all been disclosed. I can't quote the exact numbers of what we expect expenses to be, but we have said what the policy is, what we're doing going forward, and that this is a six-month assignment.

Mr. Speaker, looking at qualifications, you know, I think this: That's the idea. I've mentioned this before. Mr. Outhouse has certainly played roles in other governments and, as I said, is

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bringing new ideas, helping us look through how we organize the office, and helping us to look at areas of how we can better at what we do every day.

I know that the Leader of the Opposition and the Liberal Party are often stuck in a rut. They say: If we just spend more, we'll get better. But, Mr. Speaker, I'm telling you that we're looking at ideas and information across the nation so we can be the best that we can be.

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

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): I think it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier says that these travel expenses, the flights and hotels of his principal secretary, are all transparent and we'll just have to see. If we look at the travel expenses of this government, I see an \$8 700 flight to Norway by the Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries. If you google online and find that flight today, you will see it at \$1 500. We see upgrades. We see lavish hotels, such as \$620 per night for five nights at a hotel in Boston. That's \$3 000—more than some New Brunswickers made in a month. While we are charging \$620 for a hotel room, someone else is collecting \$637 per month in the assistance they receive from this government. I would love to know whether the expenses for hotels and flights for Mr. Outhouse are going to be like the \$8 700 flight to Norway or the \$600 hotel room in Boston. Does the Premier think that \$600 hotel nights are a responsible use of taxpayers' dollars?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, this is really interesting in the sense that Mr. Outhouse comes from Ottawa. He doesn't come from overseas or anywhere else. The travel is from the Ottawa area.

Mr. Speaker, I think what we should do is not get to a point where we are trying to say something that doesn't exist. I have already said that this is very transparent. If we want to look at Premier's Office expenses, if we want to analyze that, I would encourage that any day of the week. We can look at our office expenses in any sector and compare them to the previous Liberal government. We could reference money from that part of tourism. There was \$22 000 for a tour in Europe by a member opposite here. What about that, Mr. Speaker? There is all kinds of information, and I am more than prepared to put ourselves up against the spending habits of the former Liberal government, or, for that matter, of any Liberal government.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is so much to talk about in terms of the irresponsible use of public funds at a time when New Brunswickers are struggling. We have a Premier who refuses to take 3¢ or 4¢ off the price of gas. That would help every New Brunswicker today. Instead, he has ministers driving around in Teslas. He has a minister making a trip to the Premier's dinner in Saint John and expensing the cost of that hotel room. Will the Premier commit to repaying those political costs back to New Brunswickers?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure about the Premier's dinner in Saint John. I didn't even stay at

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the hotel. I'm not sure where that information is. Maybe there needs to be a little more research done in that regard.

In relation to expenses, Mr. Speaker, and looking at what they amount to, I've already said that it would be a great comparison. I would welcome anybody to review that in detail. Maybe the Auditor General should have a look at it, or the Comptroller. Get under the hood, because when you get into the office and look, you will see that in the previous... There were a lot of categories where people were hidden in different departments. It was a pretty sad use of money, but a way to hide it. We saw those issues in the previous government.

Mr. Speaker, it's easy to look at. We haven't raised taxes. We've given seniors' benefits. We've allowed people more money to stay home and look after their homes when a spouse has to be in a nursing home. We've had a fuel care program, and that is certainly underway. We have looked at social assistance increases. We have, in every single category, raised the benefits—

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

[*Translation*]

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is difficult to hear the Premier describe investments made in the area of social assistance while a minister receives more for a night's stay in a hotel than someone else receives for an entire month of assistance from this government.

[*Original*]

I want to talk about a specific area of misuse of public funds right now. That is all the money that the Premier has been spending on lawyers and lawsuits to satisfy his so-sue-me approach to legislation, negotiations, and leadership. The government has just launched an advertising campaign against the Anglophone East District Education Council calling for education dollars to be spent in the classroom, not in the courtroom, while, at the same time, it has just hired an external lawyer to advance the dissolution of a publicly elected body in the courts. This is Hypocrisy 101. With 40 to 45 lawyers on the government payroll, why hire outside counsel? Can the Premier tell New Brunswickers why he approved such an expense and how much money this lawyer and this action will cost—

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

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. You know, it really... One needs to look at the *Education Act*. One needs to see that we're following the steps as outlined in the *Education Act*, which is a law. In this particular case in Anglophone East, one needs to look at whether or not the *Education Act* is actually being followed and what is prescribed in that.

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You know, we're going to continue to defend parental rights. I'll defend them today. I'll defend them tomorrow. I'll defend them from this day forward to the next election, through the next election, and after that, because I think parental rights are important, unlike what I heard from the Leader of the Opposition when she said on a podcast that parental rights were bull droppings. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, I think that the question may have been missed by the Minister of Education. Why was the decision taken to not use one of the 42 government lawyers to support this work and instead engage expensive external counsel that will certainly cost more than the \$300 000 that the DEC is trying to work within? Why not use your own lawyers?

Hon. Mr. Flemming, K.C. (Rothesay, Minister of Justice, Attorney General, PC): One of the things that the Leader of the Opposition is missing here is that, in all of this litigation that she is talking about, the province is the defendant. The province is being sued. We are not suing anybody. We are the defendant.

For too long, there has been a thought in legal communities: Oh, sue the government. It will settle. Well, I will tell you. We don't fold like a cheap tent the way that the Liberals used to on a lot of legal stuff. We stand up for the rights of New Brunswickers. We defend cases, and we do it. The Office of the Attorney General is designed for the regular, repeat business of legal services. When there are exceptional situations that require an advanced amount of work and concentrated amount of effort, it is very common with all governments to go to outside counsel. There is nothing new here other than that we don't fold—

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

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): It is interesting to see, Mr. Speaker, that we have ministers playing the tough guy against a democratically elected body of members of the public who are trying to serve the education system, and we have the government taking a bully attitude to say: Well, first you need to sue us. Oh, now I don't like the fact that you're suing us, so I'm just going to dissolve you and remove your powers even though the people voted to have you in place. That exists in the *Education Act*.

My question remains. How much are we spending on external counsel to try to dissolve the DEC?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to provide a little clarity, I never asked anybody to sue us. I certainly didn't ask the DEC of Anglophone East to pursue a lawsuit and seek an injunction in court about something that hasn't happened yet. It's a little bit strange that this would be happening. However, the DEC has taken a large amount of money that it doesn't have authority to use and used it for something that is not prescribed in the *Education Act*.

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The DEC is a district education council, and it has ordered operational money to be spent on something other than district operations. When talking about who's misusing money, she should point the finger where it belongs. I'm going to stand by parental rights, as I have already said. I'm going to continue to do that.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): There is a trend here, Mr. Speaker, in terms of engaging the legal community to try to justify actions the government has taken that are not constitutional. I'm going to give a separate example because we see a misuse of funds to make up for the Premier's shortcomings over Indigenous Affairs, where two external law firms have been engaged to do the Premier's job of relations with First Nations communities and leaders. In the past, these law firms have billed the province more than \$2 million. I would like to know what the budget is for those services from those law firms this year. Can the Premier confirm that he thinks this is a responsible use of public funds?

Hon. Mr. Flemming, K.C. (Rothesay, Minister of Justice, Attorney General, PC): Again, on the First Nations file, we are defending. First Nations commenced an action whereby they claim an interest in 60% of the province. They are claiming Aboriginal title over Crown title, which would have devastating effects. Would this mean that you pay your property taxes to the Minister of Finance or to First Nations? I don't know, but this is what the claim says. It's what the claim says.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Flemming, K.C. (Rothesay, Minister of Justice, Attorney General, PC): We are going to defend these actions for the people of New Brunswick. We are going to stand up to legal actions that we believe are not in the best interests of the province. We will defend the people of New Brunswick against these kinds of lawsuits for as long as I'm the Attorney General and for as long as this government—

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

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, I believe the member opposite has misunderstood. There are lawyers engaged in daily communications and regular relations separate from the lawsuit with First Nations. Because the Premier and his team have proven that they can't manage those relationships with First Nations, we're now paying external counsel to do that. This is separate from the lawsuit, although it's clear that this minister's attitude is to bully and to come forward as being opposed to negotiating and building relationships.

I'm going to move on because there are more legal costs that the government is incurring, particularly in this case, because of its failure to negotiate at the table. We're now incurring legal costs on Bill 17, and I'm wondering how much that case is forecast to cost the government and whether the Premier feels that's a better use of New Brunswick taxpayers' money than sitting down at the table.

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Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that if there's any particular information or questions about Bill 17, we'll take that under advisement and respond at a later date.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): All right. Let's keep going. Again, Mr. Speaker, the instances of funds being spent on lawyers is long. I'm wondering how much extra money was spent on legal fees for the failed appeal of Dornan's wrongful-dismissal case. These funds could have been used for the retention of health care workers. I'm wondering how much was spent in severance money to the people the Premier has fired at will, and I'm wondering whether the Premier considers the failed appeal and multiple attempts and that severance money to be appropriate uses of public funds.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, we're not here for a good time. We're here for a short time, sometimes, but we're here to get the job done.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): The idea here is to make a lasting difference that actually improves the lives of New Brunswickers. We're having to deal with federal policies that are causing us a whole lot of issues here in this province. We've talked about that.

On the health file, I'm proud to say that we now have two health authorities that are working together for the best interests of health care in this entire province. They have people with business skills and skills of different formats, but what they're looking at is how to get better at what they do each and every day and to deliver better services, whether it's here in Fredericton, in Bathurst, or in Edmundston. Mr. Speaker, the only solution the members opposite have ever had at any time has been about how much money they can spend and to increase taxes to do it. Well, we now have a health system in place that makes me proud to tell people to look at the improvements, because that's where we're going.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It seems convenient that the Premier has forgotten about the \$2 million that he wasted in the health care system by pursuing a personal vendetta against a CEO and about the expense of completely disbanding democratically elected boards that had to be reformed.

I also think that if we are going to talk about health care... The amount this government has invested in health care this year, net new, is \$1.8 million. That sounds a lot like another figure regarding funds this government wasted, which is the \$1.7 million spent by Elections New Brunswick on an election that this Premier couldn't decide on last fall. I am wondering whether that was an appropriate use of funds. When we are only spending \$1.8 million

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more on health care, we have a government throwing \$1.7 million away because the Premier couldn't decide whether to call an election. I will tell you what, this isn't a fun time, but I hope to goodness that it is going to be a short time.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, the situation is rather interesting, isn't it? The Leader of the Opposition can talk about this or that, but let's look at the big picture. Let's look at the population growth that we have never had before. Let's look at the economic investment in this province that we have never had before. Let's look at our situation where we have paid down \$2 billion in debt and have reduced our interest payments by \$75 million per year, which we had never done before.

When you get to nickel-and-diming... Yes, these are significant expenses, but in relation to what we have saved and what we are doing on a \$13-billion budget, which we have never had before either... Health care has gone up \$1 billion in the last six years. The Opposition Leader can talk about the little things, the little issues, and the expenses here and there, but she can't look at the big picture because the big picture is bright for New Brunswick for the first time in a generation.

ROADS

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Mr. Speaker, 955, 935, 970, 940, 933, 16, and 106 are not just random numbers. In my riding, these are routes that members of my community travel daily to get to work, to get to school, and to access health care and more. These numbers bring up feelings of frustration because of the neglect from government after government.

Across my riding and this province, roads and infrastructure are crumbling. Roads have fallen into disrepair, and it affects safety, tourism, economic development, active transportation, and more. My constituents and I have been working to make the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure familiar with these roads and issues. I want to ask the minister about one of those today. Mr. Speaker, is there money in the budget to fix the poor state of Route 955 this year?

Hon. Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The short and easy answer is yes, there is. Actually, I have met with a group of folks down there, along with the member from Tantramar, and we had a great conversation about that road as well as many other roads. We do adhere to the Road Ahead Plan, which is a three-year plan. It is a very transparent plan. Mr. Speaker, there is about \$100 000 that will be spent this year on that road. Thank you very much.



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Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): There is \$100 000 for Route 955. Thank you, minister. I look forward to that work happening.

I also want to talk about culverts and bridges that are falling apart. Route 106 has been closed for over a month due to an extreme weather event, which we are seeing more and more of. Our infrastructure is not ready for climate change extremes that are already here. The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure was warned about this risk by my community and my office last year, and it was monitoring it. It monitored it until it let go, and we have lost the main connection between Sackville and Dorchester.

Mr. Speaker, the closure of Route 106 is not only an inconvenience. It is also going to impact tourism, and I am especially concerned about fire and ambulance response time. When it comes to Route 106, can the minister please tell us how much longer people in my community will be unable to use such an important road?

Hon. Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Safety is obviously the most important thing. Unfortunately, there are some inconveniences around the province. Our infrastructure is aging. We are addressing it. We do look at the Road Ahead Plan. As I said, it is a transparent, three-year plan. Value for money—that is where we put our money.

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Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have still more instances of the misuse of public funds based on the Premier's ideologically driven, on-the-fly policy making. This time, it is the charter challenge to Policy 713 that is in the courts. It is taking up many resources of the civil servants and of the lawyers that are being engaged to take this on, when the Premier could simply refer this to the Court of Appeal and ask for a ruling on whether this policy violates the *Charter of Rights*. That would eliminate two separate lawsuits, the one against the DEC and the one from the CCLA. It is a real opportunity to save taxpayer money and save resources, so I wonder why he hasn't done this. Is it not in the Premier's political interest? I would like to know why the Premier feels that dragging out this case is a responsible use of public funds.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, we believe fundamentally in the rights of the parent. We believe fundamentally that the most support a child ever gets is in growing up with their parents being responsible for them in their youth and as they move forward. We believe that a policy that says parents are to be excluded is not in the best interests of the child. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Across this country, we have seen overwhelming interest from parents who want to know what their kids are doing. It is unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition doesn't share that view. But, Mr. Speaker, our very foundations, our very



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principles in society, are strong families, strong support for kids, and a strong commitment to their well-being. No one has the continuity that parents have in that regard.

We want to work with the authorities. We don't want to put teachers in difficult positions. We want to be sure that we look after those who are most vulnerable but that we do not—

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

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): I really wonder what has happened in the past two years. The Premier has now decided that his ideas are more important than the fundamental rights of New Brunswickers and Canadians and that his ideas overrule the need to be responsible with taxpayer dollars, something that he used to hold as paramount but seems irrelevant now. When we have ministers spending \$600 per night in Boston, does the Premier think that it is a responsible use of funds? Does the Premier condone his ministers' behaviour in spending these exorbitant amounts of money at a time when New Brunswickers are struggling?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think that I've been very clear that we will look at this policy and will understand whether it is appropriate. There are no rules that were broken, but I think that it warrants an evaluation, and we have committed to doing that. But I can understand why the Leader of the Opposition wants to keep going after this. It is because she can't really go after the big issues. She can't really go after the items that are making a difference here in this province.

To say that the rights of parents is an individual wish of mine, seeing what is going on across this country... I will tell you, let's just rethink that policy. What that says to me is that we're bringing Trudeau life, Trudeau philosophies, right here to New Brunswick, Mr. Speaker. That is what the Leader of the Opposition is presenting: a Liberal federal government that is enforcing policies that it would put forward against the people of this province. Mr. Speaker, I believe in parents, and I believe in the rights of parents. I believe that there is a way forward to represent that, and we will stand strong on that.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, the contrast could not be more clear. We have ministers who have no respect for the taxpayer dollar and who are billing upgraded flights and expensive hotels. We have a Premier saying that it is nickel-and-dimeing New Brunswickers who are trying to find the nickels and dimes to pay their power bill because this government refuses to make it less expensive.

Our team is out on the ground, talking to educators and health care workers every day, and they tell us that they are starving for the resources and the teammates they need to do their job. When we could be investing in the retention of those health care professionals and in the school psychologists and guidance counsellors and educators we need, we are instead spending money on lawyers. We are spending money on wrongful dismissal claims. We are spending money on outsiders in Alberta and Ottawa who give political advice to the



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Premier. We are spending ridiculous amounts of money on travel that is delivering no benefits to New Brunswickers. I ask this: Is this reasonable? When will the Premier—

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

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition ignores the facts. Look at nurses. I think that we have 1 600 in training right now.

We're hiring more nurses than are retiring, Mr. Speaker. We're getting rid of the travel nurses in Horizon within the next few months, and we'll work on that in Vitalité over the next while.

Going back to the time of the Leader of the Opposition, the reality was that we gave \$8 million to two universities to increase the number of seats for nursing students. We knew that was a problem in 2014. It wasn't any secret. Guess what happened throughout the four years that this Leader of the Opposition was in government. Not one new nursing seat was created, but every university took the \$8 million. That's not a result for taxpayer money. Mr. Speaker, look at the big picture. We've given \$400 million to the Enhanced Energy Savings Program to reduce energy consumption and to meet our environmental targets. That is a huge program that's still underway for every citizen making under \$70 000. The results matter.

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

