

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



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CONTENTS

EDUCATION

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Hogan

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Hogan

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Hogan

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Hogan

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Hogan

Ms. Holt

YOUTH

Hon. Ms. Green

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

SOCIAL PROGRAMS

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Steeves

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Steeves

Hon. Mr. Steeves

Mr. D'Amours

Hon. Mr. Steeves

Mr. D'Amours

Hon. Mr. Higgs

Mr. D'Amours

Hon. Mr. Higgs

AIR POLLUTION

Mr. Coon

Hon. G. Savoie

Mr. Coon

Hon. G. Savoie

BRIDGES

Mr. C. Chiasson

Hon. Mr. Ames

Hon. Mr. Ames

Hon. Mr. Ames

Mr. C. Chiasson

Hon. R. Savoie

Mr. C. Chiasson

Hon. R. Savoie

ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Austin

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Original]

EDUCATION

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Child and Youth Advocate delivered a report today, *A Policy of Giving Up*, that is a stark call for immediate action to protect vulnerable children in New Brunswick. It calls out the government for essentially breaking its own rules when it comes to providing education to New Brunswick youth. It reflects something that my colleagues and I, and I'm sure all colleagues here, have been hearing from desperate parents and overworked teachers, and that is that we are not providing the education that New Brunswick children are due.

The use of partial days has been increasing, and this has been concerning for years. To start, I'm wondering whether the minister can tell us how he has received the advocate's report. I trust that this isn't news because it has been a problem for ages. He could start us off with a missing data point: How many youth are on partial days in New Brunswick today?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I did receive the Child and Youth Advocate's report. I got it by email this morning, like the rest of you, unless someone got an early copy. I don't know.

Partial days have been a reality in New Brunswick for decades. Not every child is able to attend school full-time. We look at each child individually and develop a plan that is appropriate for that child. In the Anglophone sector, out of a total of 56 000 students in New Brunswick, we have approximately 500 students who are on partial-day plans. I am saying approximately because it can vary day-by-day. I am getting the data from the Francophone side to make sure that we know what that number is.

Any student who is on a partial-day plan should be accompanied by a personalized learning plan, which does not break any New Brunswick law nor does it violate the law of the *Education Act*. Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am disappointed to see that there are figures for the Anglophone sector, but not for the Francophone sector. So there are over 500 students right now who cannot attend school all day every day because the schools have decided that the situation is too difficult to manage and that they don't have the resources, including human resources, the space, or the ability to provide educational services. The government is responsible for providing these services. Can the minister tell us what action he is taking to reduce the number of partial days for students in the education system?

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, the choice or decision to establish a partial-day plan for a student is not made without taking all the circumstances into account. It is not as if someone is going around the school randomly deciding that a student will only come to school for part of the week. The needs of each student are considered. That is done to determine what is best, what is the best future, or what is the best way forward to educate that student. It is different for every student. They are not all the same. The department is looking at what the districts are doing to establish a plan for these students.

[Original]

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

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find it challenging to accept that the best result for a student in New Brunswick is not to be in school and to be at home where they do not have access to services—mental health services, social work services, or educational services. This government has made it clear that it expects to tackle absenteeism because the *Education Act* makes it clear that parents have an obligation to send their kids to school and students have an obligation to be at school. But the government also has an obligation to deliver education to the students in this province. I am wondering whether the minister can tell us how many alternate learning environments or variations of use have been put in place instead of partial days for students in the province.

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, education is different for every child in the province. We do have an inclusive school system. I personally believe strongly in inclusive education. I worked in inclusion and in an inclusionary system since 1985, since the law was brought in in New Brunswick.

At this point, it's impossible for me to say how many students are partially removed from the common learning environment, which is permitted under the policy when it is part of the students' individual plans. Students are placed on individual learning plans, personalized learning plans. Those govern how we work with the students so that they can attend full-time or so that they can be in class as much as possible. This is for their benefit so that they can learn and go forward. To suggest that we don't care about students being in school is just simply incorrect.

Under the Act, parents have the obligation to see that their—

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

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is concerning but not surprising to hear the minister say that it is impossible for him to say how many variations or alternate locations of education are



Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

happening. We know that this government struggles with data, and we see this in the Child and Youth Advocate's report. We see that there is a dramatic lack of data on how we are serving some of the most vulnerable children in New Brunswick. I'm hoping that the minister can give us even one example of an alternate site of learning that is provided in order to prevent a partial day.

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): I take offence to that question, Mr. Speaker. I just want that noted.

Yes, that is part of the answer. We take seriously the education of all of our children. We look at each child, what their needs are, where we need to go to meet them with their needs, and how we can educate them from where they are and move them forward to have a quality life in the future. We work with communities to try to make that happen, too.

To suggest that we don't do that is extremely insulting not only to me but also to the hardworking teachers of this province.

There are some alternative learning sites in the province, and Moncton has one. Some of these sites don't have students attending full time for a variety of reasons. There's a whole plethora of reasons students are unable to attend on a full-time basis.

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

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Education were in touch with teachers in this province, he would hear them crying out for this support for them to be able to educate these children. Those teachers are asking for help, people, and spaces so that they can serve those children in the schools of this province, and their requests for resources are continuously denied. I would like to know what this government's plan is to make sure we have the resources to actually deliver education to kids in schools. How are you going to reduce the number of partial days in the year ahead?

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): It's lovely that the Leader of the Opposition wants to know certain things, Mr. Speaker. We work with all the students, and we provide the resources necessary, under the law, when we have a partial-day student. There needs to be a plan that goes along with that, and education needs to be attached to it.

There's stuff I'd like to know. I'd like to know what two schools are missing supplies. I still haven't heard that. I'd like to know why—why—a week and a half ago, at a rally in Woodstock by the Rainbow Crosswalk coalition where teachers were referred to as homophobic, the Leader of the Opposition did not stand up and defend those teachers when she spoke after that person. To suggest we are not doing the best to meet the needs

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

of students and parents in the province is simply incorrect. I'd like to know how she feels about teachers.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, I'll remind the member opposite that if he'd like to be the one asking the questions, he can find himself over on this side of the House in a matter of months.

YOUTH

My next question is for the Minister of Social Development because the government is responsible for a number of youth in this province. It acts as the parent or legal guardian for a number of young people, and I'm wondering whether the minister can tell me how many of the young people in her care are on partial-day plans.

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 don't have that number in front of me. I will take that under advisement and report back.

She is correct. There are a number of youth in this province who are in the care of the minister, and it's a very difficult situation because these children need supports and they need help. I have to say that the team at Social Development, the social workers, the service providers, and the families are all providing services to help these children move forward. I want to say a big thank-you to the team that is helping me, as minister, take care of these youth.

There are plans in place for each one of these children on how we're moving forward with them and providing them with the care they need. I'll report back with the number.

SOCIAL PROGRAMS

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was laughable to hear the Minister of Finance yesterday describing the \$300-benefit program as a success. Add that to the Premier telling New Brunswickers that they should see this as a good news story, all while the newspaper here calls it what it is—a boondoggle. We were told that the government wanted to help 250 000 New Brunswickers with affordability issues, and today, not even a quarter of those people have received help. We were told \$75 million was going to be put toward helping people who are struggling to pay their bills. In the meantime, mounds of bureaucracy, paperwork, scramblings, and hundreds of thousands of dollars have gone into throwing together this bureaucratic boondoggle while New Brunswickers are still struggling with their power bills, grocery bills, and more. I want to know what the government is doing to improve the application process so that more New Brunswickers can access this benefit.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Through the Speaker to the member opposite, yes, we are continuing to work to provide people benefits from the Workers Benefit itself, and we have a video coming out that will help steer people along the way to complete the process. While we are talking about some of the help we provide for New Brunswickers—that being one—we also don't want to forget the Low-Income Seniors' Benefit, which is so instrumental to seniors. It is another \$200 per year, and is now at \$600 total per year.

One of the things that we haven't talked a whole lot about is student financial aid for university students. Do you know what? That has sort of been lost through the cracks, and we want to mention it. The maximum weekly amounts are being increased from \$140 to \$200 for the student loan and from \$130 to \$160 per week for the bursary. That is per week. We made those changes to help university students.

Those are just one or two of the things that we are doing to help New Brunswickers. We will continue with more in the next question, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has a lot of time for his answers, I am going to ask him two questions to see if he can use it to give us answers this time.

Given that there will be a significant surplus in the budget for the New Brunswick Workers Benefit, which amounts to \$300, can the minister promise me that his government will not end the program before all applications have been received? Furthermore, can he explain to us why 30% of the applications have not been processed yet? Thank you.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite. Let me get this straight. You want us to stop a program that provides New Brunswickers with \$300 tax-free. That is \$300 tax-free, and you want us to stop that program. No, we can't stop that program because we are committed to helping out New Brunswickers. We are helping out New Brunswickers—

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Members, through the chair, please.

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): We are helping out New Brunswickers. That is what we do, Mr. Speaker. That is just one aspect

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

of it. There is the Low-Income Seniors' Benefit, as I talked about. I talked about postsecondary education. Another way we are helping families is with childcare.

Do you know what? We are doing the job. We are getting money out to the people in an affordable fashion. We are doing it in a way that the government of New Brunswick and the people of New Brunswick can afford. It's a \$300 benefit. It's good until the end of June. For now, folks, it is good until the end of June. Maybe we can extend it. We will look into that, absolutely. It is \$300, it is tax-free, and it is from your government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, we understand now why so few people applied for the \$300 from the New Brunswick Workers Benefit. A person who filled out the paper form, attached copies of the required documents from Revenue Canada, and used the address indicated on the French section of the website just didn't send the application to the right place.

The government only discovered that this week, but the wrong information had been on the government website since February 27 and was only changed today. Now, three months later, can the Premier confirm how many applications have been lost? As well, what action do the Conservatives plan to take to resolve this unacceptable situation?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Mr. Speaker, thank you, once again, for the question from the member opposite. Over 88 000 applications had been received as of three days ago, May 27. That includes applications online and filed by paper. The money is getting out. As of the same date, more than 63 000 applications had been approved for a total of almost \$19 million going out to New Brunswickers.

It is \$300, tax-free. You can have it. If you haven't already collected it, folks, go online. We are going to make it even easier for you to find a way through this application process. The application period, for now, remains open until June 13. It is money that your government is giving you, people. It is tax-free.

[*Translation*]

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, instead of finding the envelopes, the government is telling people to reapply online, so that the mistake doesn't happen again. The paper form shows the address, date of birth, and social insurance number of the applicant. In addition, the spouse's date of birth, social insurance number, and Revenue Canada information are included.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Mr. Speaker, where is this personal and confidential information that risks being revealed to ill-intentioned people?

Has the Conservative government advised the Access to Information and Privacy Commissioner of this security breach involving an unknown number of New Brunswickers? Where are the envelopes that were lost because you put the wrong address on the French version of the website? Where are the envelopes and these people's personal information?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, this program was put in place to address those who needed the money, the working-class people who travel to and from work every day, because of the Liberal carbon tax, the high cost of fuel, and the high cost of living. It was a way to focus the efforts on the affordability issues that have been created by the federal government and adopted by the official opposition and the Green Party. We're pretty excited about axing the tax, and we can't wait until that becomes a reality. It won't become a reality from the group that I'm looking at, Mr. Speaker.

The point about affordability is that because of CRA rules... I know the opposition would say: Well, it doesn't matter who gets it; just send it out there. Well, Mr. Speaker, we wanted to help those who needed it. We have done it on both spectrums, and we wanted to do it in that middle, working-class spectrum. It is surprising that more people haven't been applying. It isn't that difficult. There is a number to call if there's a problem with the form or if there's an issue. It's a pretty straightforward process, Mr. Speaker. We expected more applications, and we're surprised that there haven't been more.

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, the government put the wrong address on the French version of the website—the wrong address. People have provided their social insurance numbers. The applicants have provided their social insurance numbers, and they're lost. Their spouses have provided their social insurance numbers, and those are lost. The applicants have provided their dates of birth, and their spouses have provided their dates of birth. This is personal information, along with documents from the Canada Revenue Agency. They sent their applications to the wrong address because this government didn't take responsibility. I want to know specifically who on that side will take responsibility for this mess. Is it the Premier, or is it the entire government that created a real mess for New Brunswickers?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I know it's hard to make up issues in a province with a booming economy, a population explosion, a record number of investments, record job growth, and all that. It's hard to find problems. It's hard for the opposition to find something that it can really latch onto because it can't latch onto anything with real significance.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Mr. Speaker, there is a phone number. It's 1 888 799-7962 if anyone wants to talk about their particular situation. I'll repeat that. That's 1 888 799-7962. You may want to take that number and refer it to the person, if you have that person's name. You don't have the school names, so maybe you don't have this number.

Mr. Speaker, the issue here in relation to this affordability measure is this: Aren't we surprised that more people haven't needed it? Yes, we are. With all the discussions about affordability and all the concerns about inflation and the high cost of living, we are surprised. We're seeing that, okay, it's there. We've advertised. We've put it all out there.

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

AIR POLLUTION

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When New Brunswickers find themselves facing illness or potential ill health from environmental harms, they are shocked to discover that there isn't a right to a healthy environment. The bill I tabled nearly seven months ago, Bill 19, *An Act Respecting the Right to a Healthy Environment*, will recognize the substantive human right to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment. Mr. Speaker, it will be debated on the next opposition day at second reading.

The weight of the scientific evidence suggests that exposure to certain air pollutants and pesticides may increase the incidence of neurological disorders such as ALS and MS. Research carried out by New Brunswick researchers in New Brunswick has shown an increased clustering and prevalence of cases in communities that are subject to fine particulate pollution. Is the Minister of Environment tightening the *Clean Air Act* regulations to reduce the incidence of MS and ALS in our province?

Hon. G. Savoie (Saint John East, Minister of Local Government; Minister of Environment and Climate Change; Minister responsible for La Francophonie, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member opposite. It's always interesting. I always want to make sure I'm taking the time, especially for the member opposite, the Leader of the Green Party, because I have to ask everybody who is watching whom they have more faith and trust in when it comes to environmental knowledge.

Is it the people who are masters in their field, who have doctorates, master's degrees, and all kinds of valid education, and who do this work every single day, or is it someone who takes a point and makes it the entire reason and purpose for everything that happens on earth every single heartbeat of every single day? I can tell you very clearly that my department works every single day to protect the environmental interests of the people in this province so that we can live and work in a clean environment.

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



Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer underlines the need for this House to adopt a bill to oblige the government to protect people's rights to a healthy environment with a special emphasis on children and vulnerable populations. This will provide citizens with the legal tools to act if the government fails them, as it is. This will guarantee access to environmental information. This will give citizens the right to a judicial review to challenge government decisions, and it will provide citizens with the right to initiate investigations of suspected violations of environmental laws.

Mr. Speaker, people with Ph.D.s and MDs are doing the research in this province. New Brunswickers who are in New Brunswick and who have the expertise have identified four ALS hotspot regions in New Brunswick that are associated with an environmental influence on ALS. Others have found a 1.5-fold increase in MS prevalence in hotspots for every increase of 1 µg per cubic metre in fine particulate pollution in the province. What does the Minister of Environment—

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

Hon. G. Savoie (Saint John East, Minister of Local Government; Minister of Environment and Climate Change; Minister responsible for La Francophonie, PC): Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be interested to know whether the Leader of the Green Party, because this is all about website clicks... Everything is put on the party's website to show everything it is doing every day. I wonder whether the member opposite will take other people's responses to his questions so that everybody can see the whole story and so that everybody can understand that we have dozens and dozens and dozens of very highly qualified and trained people who work every single day for the benefit of New Brunswickers.

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that this government, with the Minister of Natural Resources, has done more to protect our environment than anything that we have had come before. On top of that, we have *Our Pathway Towards Decarbonization and Climate Resilience*. We are moving in a responsible way to ensure that our environment is going to be kept safe. I have to say this. He wants to try to separate things, but we have an entire globe. Why don't we talk to China about the coal-fired plants that it's putting up every single—

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

BRIDGES

Mr. C. Chiasson (Victoria-La Vallée, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The challenge is actually not in finding something to go on but in choosing what to go on. There's so much.

I'm hearing rumblings that there may be safety concerns with the Centennial Bridge deck. We all know the deck replacement was supposed to start this summer, but the Higgs government, despite a \$27-million loss against it for causing unnecessary delays, has



Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

decided, yet again, to delay the closure for another year. I guess government members feel the chaos that the bridge closure would cause may hurt their chances in the upcoming election. Can the minister of DTI please confirm the deck replacement will go ahead in the summer of 2025?

Hon. Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A bridge is a bridge is a bridge until it's no longer a bridge. We'll make sure there's a bridge there. There'll always be a bridge there.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): And a safe bridge. People will be able to travel across the bridge to get from one side of the river to the other side of the river. There won't be any problems getting across the river.

Yes, after conversations with the municipalities and locals, it was deemed that this summer would not a good time of the year to close the bridge. So, that's exactly what we did. The bridge is not closed. We listened to the people. I don't know what else to say other than: Where is the source? What's he talking about?

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Safety? You know, Mr. Speaker... Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. C. Chiasson (Victoria-La Vallée, L): That's a great answer. Mr. Speaker, the northern bypass alternate route has long been proposed as a means to relieve traffic congestion in Miramichi, especially during the two construction seasons that the Centennial Bridge will be closed for the long overdue deck replacement. Now, we know that one of the first things Premier Higgs did after becoming Premier was cancel the northern bypass project. Can the minister please confirm that the Premier has had a change of heart and that the design work has been completed for this project? Can he please confirm the projected start date of this project?

Hon. R. Savoie (Miramichi Bay-Neguac, Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to take this question. We are concerned about the bridge closure, and that is a fact. It is a fact. We are also concerned about the safety of the people in Miramichi and the people of the entire province who travel through that area. We are also concerned about what could happen after the bridge closes. But we are presently talking with the city of Miramichi and all the parties involved to see if we can alleviate the traffic concerns during the closure. There is a discussion about that. We will be maintaining the discussions, and we absolutely hope to have a solution to this in the near future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Mr. C. Chiasson (Victoria-La Vallée, L): Mr. Speaker, the original bypass plan calls for 11 km of road, 3 overpasses, and a bridge. A project of this magnitude, if started today, would not be completed before next year's construction season. Can the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure please confirm that the Centennial Bridge will undergo deck replacement next summer, despite the fact that the northern bypass, even if started today, will not be completed?

Hon. R. Savoie (Miramichi Bay-Neguac, Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I will say that everything that is happening with the bridge will be taken into consideration. We are concerned about the safety of the people of Miramichi and the surrounding area and of all the people in the province who travel through Miramichi. I will state it again. The bridge is not going to be closed this year for safety concerns. We are also looking at alternative ways to alleviate the traffic concerns during the closure of the bridge, should it happen. It is now under discussion. We are presently in discussion with the municipality and other stakeholders to see how we can alleviate that. We hope to be in a position to deliver some answers to this in the near future.

ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important that we learn from the past, and the residents of Lewisville and Moncton are certainly counting on the government to do so. Ever since the AIM fire in Saint John, the people of Toombs Street and Palisade Drive in the community of Lewisville have been living in a growing state of fear. Activity at the AIM scrapyards has increased dramatically, with the noise, the smell, the vibrations, the pollution, and the size of the scrap piles. Residents are worried about runoff into the brook that is less than 30 m from AIM's overflowing operations. Residents are worried about the air that they are breathing and the soil where they want to plant a garden, and they are worried that an explosion and fire like the residents of Saint John experienced might happen to them.

Can the Minister of Public Safety assure the people of Lewisville that the water has been tested, that the air has been tested, that the soil has been tested, and that they are safe?

Hon. Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Minister of Public Safety, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to start by talking about the terrible incident that happened in Saint John and the quick work of the task force that worked in Saint John to come to the conclusions and recommendations about how we can prevent that from happening again. They did swift work, and my department and I did swift work in revoking that license in Saint John.

Since that date, I can tell you that, in a matter of two weeks, our team inspected every single salvage dealer in this province. We made sure that everybody was in compliance, and the ones that were not were issued notices to be in compliance.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

In relation specifically to Toombs Street in Moncton, last week, on Friday, I sent a letter to inform that salvage dealer that it is now on notice. I want the residents of Toombs Street to know that we take this very seriously. We have absolutely heard their concerns. We have outlined to AIM the issues that we found at that site. I have no problem, if it does not comply—

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Thank you, minister. Question period is over.

