

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

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June 5, 2024

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AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, during his first answer in question period, a very contrite Premier added his disappointment to all of ours with the results of the most recent Auditor General's report and the complete debacle that has happened over these travel nurse contracts. Most of the ministers who were called upon to answer questions followed suit and showed their appreciation for the solid work completed by the Auditor General. So, in the spirit of collaboration that now seems to be on display, can the Premier or his Minister of Health confirm to this House that they will compel Vitalité to deliver the three internal audit reports that it is withholding from the Auditor General so that he may complete his work?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the question here today, and I do appreciate the fact that the member for Fredericton North and the Premier took questions yesterday on my behalf, as I was out again promoting the province and getting things done to improve health care here in New Brunswick.

I'd like to elaborate on that a bit more, but I can tell you this, Mr. Speaker. On Friday, I signed a letter to the Vitalité board asking it—compelling it—to release the information that was missing from the Auditor General's report yesterday.

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): That's excellent. The minister might want to let the Auditor General know that before he gets his lawyers lined up, because he felt that he might have to go to court to get that information. However, I appreciate the answer. This is the second time in a month where this House is spending a lot of time discussing expense claims. First, it was about lavish trips to Europe with little or no justification. In that case, one could argue that there was an epic lack of judgment by the minister but—but—processes and guidelines were technically followed. Now, we have two health authorities and a government department that seems to have an approval system with so many holes that you could drive a Jeep Wrangler through them for a full month. How can this government continue to claim to have effective financial management when there is so clearly a lack of any kind of oversight?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I feel a little bit sorry for the members across the way because they just don't seem to have any concept of how government works. If they ever hope to work in government further, they had better understand the system a little better.

Mr. Speaker, the regional health authorities (RHAs) are charged with the day-to-day operations of delivering clinical health care here in the province. The RHAs are charged with that, and we have Acts such as the RHA Act, the *Auditor General Act*, and various others that help with that whole governance model. So, when it comes to oversight and



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signing contracts, the RHAs have the right to sign those contracts. That is the power vested in them by legislation such as the health care Act.

So, Mr. Speaker, the members across the way need to... I know that they are grasping at straws and trying to point the fingers here today, but they need to understand the operational aspect of it that—

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

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Well, Mr. Speaker, here is what I understand of how government works. There are departments that perform, and they are supposed to follow processes. For example, if you are going to be asked to pay for a claim, you should have proper proof. You can't just use whatever you pick up on the internet and say: Oh, it costs that much; let's get some money for it. Oversight is the last part of this, and there seems to be none of it. Some could argue that with oversight comes responsibility and taking some of it. I'm not seeing anybody from the government side taking any responsibility for the lack of oversight on this gross injustice in spending money for this province. What does the minister have to say about that process on how government works?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): I appreciate the support of the work that we're doing here on this side, Mr. Speaker. I think the members across the way think that we should be counting the thermometers as the day goes on.

The fact is that authority is vested in the RHAs to do a significant amount of work, and that is where the authority lies. We know internal auditing was done where things were not as they expected.

You're right. It is disappointing when we—we—have to ask the Auditor General to go in and do another audit. Again, I mentioned that, on Friday, I sent a letter compelling the RHA to release the information to help get a better picture and, hopefully, to help the opposition have a better understanding of how things work.

But you're right, Mr. Speaker, there are good points that were brought out by the Auditor General, and—

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

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's see another part on how government works. In his report, the AG mentioned that all the contracts signed for Horizon Health Network except one had been reviewed by the Office of the Attorney General prior to signature, yet he found numerous deficiencies and omissions in these contracts. Some of them did not even follow the most basic protocol for standard contracts.

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These are his words. I wonder if the Attorney General could illuminate this House as to what his department does when it reviews contracts.

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Again, if you're in a hole, you should stop digging. The opposition members have certainly dug themselves into a hole.

The Attorney General is not the lawyer for the RHAs. He is not the lawyer for contracts that the RHAs enter into. You should understand that. I think you have some lawyers over there.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Well, let's not do a critique on that.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition also needs to pick a lane. When we're making decisions, the opposition members say we interfere. Then when something like this goes on with a third party, they say that there is no oversight. Pick a lane. Understand how government works. Understand how the authority for RHAs to enter into contracts works, and maybe you'll stop embarrassing yourselves.

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): This is a simple question, Mr. Speaker: If the Attorney General is not the lawyer for health care, why is he reviewing the contracts?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): You said Attorney General. This is the Attorney General right here. The Attorney General—

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Yes, the Auditor General is another legislative body.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Again, the opposition members are confusing who does what, who has this role. They don't know.

(Interjections.)

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

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Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): To help you out, because that's my nature, the RHAs have the authority to enter into contracts. They have internal auditors who make sure that... If they find something that is not going right within a contract, they have the authority to audit that.

The Auditor General has the authority to audit anything, and there's an Act that gives him or her the power to do that. It's a very strong and specific Act. The Attorney General, who is sitting to my left, is the lawyer for the government, not the lawyer for—

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

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Mr. Speaker, I'm going to do the Minister of Health a solid. I'm going to send him the section of Auditor General's report that says that the Office of the Attorney General reviewed every contract for the nurses except one. And I asked him yesterday: What the heck does this department do when it's reviewing contracts, since they're that bad? He said: That's an excellent question. I should ask it. I am asking it now, and I can't seem to get an answer. It is in the Auditor General's report that the Office of the Attorney General reviewed every contract except one.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Flemming, K.C. (Rothesay, Minister of Justice, Attorney General, PC): The Office of the Attorney General is legal counsel for government departments, for the Department of Health. Vitalité, Horizon, NB Power, and NB Liquor are individual Crown corporations with boards of directors and their own management, and they engage their own legal counsel.

Any work that the Attorney General's Office would do would be an engagement requested by a government department. In this particular case, if the Department of Health, the appropriate department on this issue, asks the Attorney General's Office to review documents on behalf of the Department of Health, then the Attorney General's Office would be more than happy to do that. When it comes to any requests with respect to the Auditor General, I have taken that under advisement. I am going to look—

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

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apparently, it was done, because the Auditor General said that all the contracts except for one were reviewed. To that point, what I was trying to get at is that the Minister of Social Development and Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation mentioned yesterday that government is already making changes internally, as we speak, highlighting that they are learning from the lessons that the Auditor General had shared. The Auditor General did not have any recommendations for the Office of the Attorney General on how it reviews

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contracts because these were bad contracts. They were awful contracts, and they were reviewed before being signed. So I'm wondering whether the Attorney General has taken any lessons from this. At the moment, is he making any improvements with his department that he can share?

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation; Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there is a strong collaborative relationship between the Auditor General and government departments. This particular... Well, there were several reports that were released yesterday. Each department provided the information requested so that the Office of the Auditor General could do its work and do a full review of the situation. In one case, the office looked at the Housing Corporation, one of my responsibilities, and how the *Housing for All* strategy was put together. There were good lessons in there with respect to how we can provide more information in a way that is collaborative and that the public would like to see. We will take that advice into account.

Social Development reviewed the portion of the report about the financial analysis related to the travel nursing contracts. Again, there is more to digest there, Mr. Speaker, but we're happy to make changes to do a better job for New Brunswickers. We're always looking to improve what we do to support New Brunswick.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We all know what is going on. We all know it. We learned yesterday in the Auditor General's report that this is one of the worst economic scandals in the history of New Brunswick. It all happened under the Premier's nose. The *Globe and Mail* published an article on the subject four months ago. If the Premier had his head in the sand, it's his fault. As usual, he will play the victim and blame others.

This morning I appeal to the members who are leaving. You don't have to bear the burden of responsibility in this issue. Speak out. There is never anything wrong with doing the right thing. History will remember the names that will be associated with the Premier in relation to this economic disaster.

Now my question is for the minister.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Member. Member, through the chair, please. It's not a lecture.

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Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): I apologize.

[*Translation*]

My question to the minister is this: Do you agree with the way the contracts were signed with the Department of Social Development?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this one. I want to take this one because, apparently, the member opposite has a very short memory.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): That's right. Mr. Speaker, when he talks about financial disasters...

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Remember. Remember the Atcon scandal, when the Liberal government—

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Oh yeah, that's right. I was waiting for this. The Liberal government went against the recommendation of staff and gave \$70 million to one of the friends of the Premier, and that ended up in a loss of \$70 million. The staff had said: Don't do it. And the same—

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): That \$70 million is not peanuts, Mr. Speaker. I think that the members opposite need to get a lesson on value. And then there was the Atcon Six who went with the Gallant government. They were responsible for the fast track, which ended up in the Auditor General's Office. They were responsible for the seniors' asset grab, which was—

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

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): Firstly, I would like to tell the minister that this government missed the deadline for taking legal action against Atcon—it missed the deadline. Secondly, if the minister had listened to me yesterday, he would know that, financially speaking, the current scandal is four times worse than the one involving Atcon. So the minister should do his homework.

My question to the Minister of Social Development is this: Does she think it is okay that CHL, the company that was hired, drafted its own contract without any legal review by the government? Does the minister think this is okay for our seniors in nursing homes? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*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. Maybe we can take it down a notch in here. That was pretty dramatic, pretty dramatic. I will continue answering questions about the Auditor General's report and the recommendations that were provided in that report. We've reviewed the recommendations. There's a lot more to digest there, but, as I said yesterday, we are currently looking at ways to improve how we administer contracts, our decision-making, and the financial side of things. Each one of the recommendations for Social Development that is provided in the report is being reviewed so that we can implement change.

Again, I'll say that we are thankful that the Auditor General undertook this review. We're thankful that the Department of Health and the Minister of Health requested that. Each of us need this information to help us do a better job for New Brunswick. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

SENIORS

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, for many seniors, the Higgs government is not doing much to help them cope with the high cost of living. The government excluded them from the list of people entitled to the \$300 benefit, after holding out the hope that they might be eligible. Higher rents are smothering them, but the Higgs government is not doing much.

Could the Premier or the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, in this case, tell us how many seniors are waiting for their \$600 cheque from the Low-Income Seniors' Benefit Supplement and how long they have to wait to get their cheque? Could the Premier or the



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Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, in this case, give me an answer, since this program is administered by the Department of Finance?

[*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 am happy to stand up and talk about the support our government is providing for seniors and the importance that we put on the health and well-being of our seniors. Mr. Speaker, we have made significant changes. We have increased the Low-Income Seniors' Benefit by 50%. The cheque is now \$600. Seniors could apply as of April 1, and when the applications go in, they are processed very quickly. The cheques are sent out to seniors. It is my understanding that the timeline is less than four weeks from getting the application in to getting the cheque out into the hands of seniors. I can take a closer look at that and provide an exact average time frame for those cheques going out. We have also changed the allocation of how much money stays within the home when a senior must go to a nursing home. Those are big changes.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Obviously, this government has no idea what is going on within the government apparatus. Maybe the Premier does not have financial problems with his pay and pension, but how can he explain to these seniors that they now have to wait up to 12 weeks to get this money? They applied on April 5 and were just told last week that they have to wait another four weeks to get a \$600 cheque.

Since we see that government members are unable to provide answers, I am going to give them some choices: Did the Higgs government lose any applications? Is the Higgs government simply incompetent? Is it time to replace the Higgs government? Or, Mr. Speaker, is it all of the above?

This government is quick to spend \$173 million and turn a blind eye, but it is not capable of providing \$600 within a reasonable period of under four weeks to seniors who need it to live, Mr. Speaker. What is this government doing for our seniors? What is it doing?

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): I will remind the members to speak through the chair, please.

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Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? This is rich coming from a group of people who attacked seniors with the seniors' tax grab. Remember the seniors' tax grab? Yes, could you go and buy a McDonald's burger? No, not with them. They were taking every one of your pennies, for Pete's sake.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): They're asset grabbers.

The proposed amendments to the *New Brunswick Income Tax Act* benefit seniors.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): They benefit low-income seniors who are getting another \$200. It's up to \$600 yearly now. That's what this government is doing. It's protecting seniors. There's an estimated \$10 million in additional tax relief to low-income seniors. That's \$10 million saved in tax relief to low-income seniors. That's what this government does. That's what this government does, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it was 11 years ago that a Conservative government overhauled the *Electricity Act* with much ballyhoo. It trumpeted the fact that the Act would ensure that NB Power would henceforth be free from political interference. Those changes didn't anticipate a Premier's interference with the governance of NB Power.

This Premier just appointed his Irving buddies to serve on the boards of both NB Power and its public regulator, the Energy and Utilities Board. The Premier has appointed his energy czar, Wayne Power, to NB Power's board of directors. He was recruited by the Premier to deliver on his energy agenda just a month after Mr. Power retired from a 17-year career with J.D. Irving, the largest power consumer in New Brunswick. Can the Premier tell this House what he asked Mr. Power to deliver for him as an NB Power director?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development; Minister of Indigenous Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for the question because it gives me the opportunity to highlight that Mr. Power, prior to being appointed to the board of NB Power, was a well-known commodity within the Department



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of Energy. For over a year, he filled a role where he was helping us progress and move forward with a significant number of initiatives. He was producing results and was a key person related to the development of the energy plan. He transitioned to a position on the board of NB Power where he'll continue to put that proven track record to work to help improve the utility to the benefit of all New Brunswickers. I think we should celebrate when people of competency are put in positions to make things better for New Brunswickers, Mr. Speaker.

As it relates to the appointment of Mr. Logan to the EUB, not two or three days ago, we were being criticized for not having people on the board. Then we move forward with putting people in place to make sure that we can process what needs to be done there, and we're criticized for that. I'm not sure what will make the member opposite happy.

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

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): I'll be happy when I'm Premier of this province, Mr. Speaker.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, the same month that John Logan retired from Irving Oil after a 30-year career—

(Interjections.)

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

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): The Premier brought him into his office to provide strategic advice on energy-related files. Now the Premier has appointed Mr. Logan as a commissioner on the Energy and Utilities Board. Mr. Speaker, this role is a little like being a judge, passing a verdict on NB Power's capital investments, power rate designs, and rate applications. Now we have one Irving buddy on the board of NB Power and a second Irving buddy on the board of the EUB, which regulates NB Power, supposedly in the public interest. Both of these gentlemen worked closely with the Premier on shaping his preferred energy policy, powered by fracked gas and atomic power. How does the Premier not see the conflict of interest that he has created with these latest partisan appointments?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development; Minister of Indigenous Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, enough is enough. If the member opposite ever had a hope of thinking that he could be the Premier of the province, it would require him having the facts straight. There's nothing that could be further from the actual rollout of what took place here. The member opposite is trying to create a situation that would have us believe that the Premier hand-picked and appointed these people to these boards. That is not the case.



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This is legislated. As it relates to the process of putting people on the EUB, I do not know as the minister and the Premier doesn't know as the Premier. There is an outside talent sourcing company that goes through a process with several different sub-sessions of vetting. The NB Power board puts together a series of interviews and then comes to us to approve what it has done. If you're going to talk about how people are put in place, it's important to talk factually about how it's done. It is not done in a backroom. It is done through a clear process that we articulate and then affirm as Cabinet so that it can be transparent for the people of New Brunswick.

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, these partisan appointments benefit the Premier of the day and government after government, but not New Brunswickers. Important positions, such as the commissioner of a quasi-judicial institution such as the EUB, need to be non-partisan and seen to be non-partisan.

People are losing faith in public institutions. When that happens, public trust in our democratic process is undermined. This is serious. For a Premier, appointing his buddies to important governance bodies such as NB Power's board of directors or public regulatory boards such as the EUB may help his personal agenda, but it betrays the interests of New Brunswickers. I'm asking the Premier to rescind his latest partisan appointments and end the practice altogether. Will he do it?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think the minister has outlined how the process actually works very well. I would encourage the Leader of the Green Party to actually look at the skills and capabilities of these individuals who are on these boards. Look at their experience. Look at the value they can bring to major, major projects that are going to be underway within NB Power— projects it's never seen before. The refurbishment of the Mactaquac Dam is a project that goes back 50 years. It is now looking at being refurbished. The SMR file has seen a major change. There is a whole blueprint. As the minister outlined, Mr. Power put the blueprint together and worked with others to create a road map. These are people who have been involved in industry, big projects, and big decisions. We're putting the right skill sets in to get the jobs done.

Mr. Speaker, on the very issue of moving the health care file, the people who are on the health care boards now are starting to manage health care—something that's never been done. We have a situation where we've always said: Put more money in, and it'll get better. The Liberals' only philosophy is: Put more money in, and it'll get better. Manage it, and it'll get really—

(Interjections.)

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



GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Mr. Speaker, timing, timing. When Nova Scotia introduced its nurse retention program, there was quite a lot of heated debate in the House. The Premier would not commit funds to this strategy. He had lots of comments about the fact that you can't just throw money at a problem to fix it. Well, from this side of the House, it sure looks as though these guys are throwing a ton of money at this problem. I don't see a lot of ownership being taken. Does this Premier still stand by the words that he just said? Does he feel like getting up again to let us know how he is better steward of the public purse than us poor Liberals? I don't feel as though we have any lessons to learn from this bunch.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, history proves that members opposite have a lot of lessons to learn from this bunch. There has never been a Liberal in recent times who had a balanced budget, let alone six. The federal government is an absolute disaster in the economic field. This is a model of what's next for New Brunswick, which we cannot allow to happen. If you look at the big picture, you see that New Brunswick has never been stronger—never. The clown over there could go on. That's what he does. He demonstrates and acts dramatically.

I want to talk about the reality of managing services better. We can all talk about the situation and how we can spend more money, but we know now, as demonstrated by the AG report once again, that people in management in the field need to be accountable for the work they do. We need to hold them accountable. A job of the government is holding people accountable to do better work. The AG has provided a road map. We will hold those individuals accountable to deliver—

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Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Mr. Speaker, it just feels as though the Premier and I are on the same wavelength. The Premier has another favourite saying that he loves to repeat to whoever wants to hear it: Don't waste a good crisis. Here we are in the midst of a big one. We have a real crisis of confidence in how our systems work and in the processes designed to keep order and oversight to ensure it all works. Yet all of a sudden, we have a Premier who points a subtle finger at the fact that we have two health authorities. Maybe all the best practices would be better shared if that were not the case.

I'd like to see the Premier commit today to not using the findings of this report as a platform to achieve his ultimate goal of combining the health authorities. Will the Premier take that off the table today?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, once again, we see the Liberals carry on and say: Keep doing the same

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thing over and over again, and we'll just get better. That's all they know. Spend taxpayer dollars to buy a vote. We'll see it in this election. Just throw money at the wall.

Well, I've charged the health authorities, and I've charged the two boards to get better at what they do. They have a structure now that they can actually work together under. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition and any opposition member whether they think our two health authorities should be competing with each other or working together to provide the best health care for every citizen of this province. What is the answer to that question? You don't need to combine the boards to achieve that. You just need to have the boards working together.

Mr. Speaker, let me ask that question once again. Do the members opposite think that both health authorities should work together for the greater good of all New Brunswickers, or should they work totally independently and compete with each other? Our structure has a collaborative process to help get things better for every New Brunswicker. Thank you.

HOSPITALS

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Mr. Speaker, I didn't expect to have one last question, so I am going to let the Premier end on that aspect because we are kind of getting a real feeling of where this is going. I am going to ask one final question, related to my area, to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

I am going to remind him that, in 2020, this building, the hospital building, was supposed to have been completed. We were supposed to have moved into the new section. That was pushed back to June 2021, then December 2021, then June 2022, then December, and so on and so on. Again, the keys were supposed to have been transferred to Vitalité on June 1 of this year. I have it on good authority from officials of the department that the key has not been received yet. What is going on?

That hospital is in a terrible situation, and it is not moving forward. You guys can't get it done. What is going on, minister? Get it done.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting how the member opposite has shifted gears now because the members opposite don't want to answer the real questions about whether or not we can get a better health care system by working together. They won't recognize the value of a collaboration board that understands the strategic issues all around this province and how we can utilize our entire resource. There are 22 hospitals in the mix to help get better service, no matter where it is, for every New Brunswicker.



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I am proud of making a change in the system that is going to have a longevity of response and a longevity of improvement for every citizen. While they may want to shift gears, there are important changes that have to be made. Doing nothing differently gets nothing more accomplished.

We have a path we are on. We have a path not only here but also in the province—economically, on the population side, on the housing structure, and on dealing with affordability. Once the federal government is changed, we will have an affordability that works for all Canadians. We have a path forward, and New Brunswick feels it.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): Members, question period is over.

During question period, the Premier used a term that was directed at one of the members on the opposite side. I will have to ask him to withdraw that remark.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Withdrawn.

YOUTH

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. In question period on Tuesday, we were talking about partial-day education plans. I took a question under advisement from the Leader of the Official Opposition. She asked me how many children under the care of the minister are in partial-day education plans. The answer to that is 92 children. That represents about 6.8% of the children in care. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister is saying there are 92 children on individualized learning plans in the province. Can the government tell us what it is doing to give services to these children? Are they being sent home for partial days? What is government doing to improve the conditions within the school system to allow children to fully immerse themselves in the school system instead of being sent home on partial days and that kind of thing? Can the minister elaborate on what the government is doing to improve services for those children in order to give them a truly immersive school environment?

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, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. We take our role and responsibility in these children's lives incredibly seriously. Our social workers work very, very closely with these children. They are also advocates for these children and are working very closely with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) to ensure that these partial-day plans



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are minimized and that we can make changes to get them back into the education system. Our department is working closely with these children, our social workers are engaged with them, and we are engaged with our partners at EECD to do the very best we can for the children we are responsible for. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

