

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



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COST OF LIVING

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, more New Brunswickers than ever are struggling to make ends meet. I was speaking to a dad from a family where he and his partner both work good jobs. They have two teenage kids. At the end of the month, he finds himself stretching to cover all his bills.

On September 27, the Minister of Finance said that he would unveil new affordability measures that would likely include tax cuts. These measures were just weeks away, as reported in the *Telegraph-Journal*.

[Translation]

Then the government changed its mind.

[Original]

Last week, as reported by *Global News* and *Acadie Nouvelle*, the Premier said that his cost of living measures were in limbo due to the possibility of an election that he had not decided on. Realizing his mistake, the Premier changed his tune again. This time, he said that he cannot commit to helping New Brunswickers yet because he is not sure of the province's fiscal situation.

Could the member opposite please set the record straight? What affordability measures are you considering? How much do they cost? When can New Brunswickers expect a decision and some relief? Because the dad I spoke with needs it today.

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the affordability measures are something that are before Cabinet. As we know, the Cabinet confidentiality rules are explicit, but, I mean, we discuss a number of different things. We regularly discuss a number of affordability measures, a number of changes, and a number of things that are needed by New Brunswickers. So, yes, those are still in the works. We are still looking at ways, and we are always looking at ways. I could read off my list, but I will not do that. The member from—

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Please. You know what? First of all, how about we go back to what we talked about a little bit last week, which is the federal—your kissing cousins in Ottawa who are. . . I think that is an all right saying—really. They are responsible for the carbon tax. How about reducing that? That would help a lot.

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But, anyway, inflation and rising fuel prices are global issues. They are not just Moncton issues, not just New Brunswick issues, and not just Canadian issues. They are issues for all of us. As a matter of fact, the inflation rate is going down. That is at least some help. We continue to do lots—

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

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): I appreciate that the things that are before Cabinet are confidential. But New Brunswickers are looking for the information that you said was coming. Could you give us a timeline? When can New Brunswickers expect relief measures from your government?

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): You know what? We continue to do a number of things. Just last week, the Low-Income Seniors' Benefit was announced. We have announcements regularly. We have announcements regularly to help with the factors that cause inflation and to help all New Brunswickers. I mean, you know what? The personal income tax reductions that we have talked about have been a help for a number of levels of New Brunswickers. Provincial property tax rates—we are going to be announcing another one this afternoon for property tax, Mr. Speaker. That is coming up shortly. There are a number—

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): When is it coming? This afternoon. It is going to be announced this afternoon when I get to do. . . Whatever it is. It is going to be during the first reading of bills. Okay? So, yes, that is coming up this afternoon. It is another way that we are helping New Brunswickers. This time, it is helping people who are in residences for seniors.

We will talk more, Mr. Speaker. But there are numerous ways that we help New Brunswickers every week and every day. That is what this government does. We do the work, Mr. Speaker.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, I believe that everyone in this House can agree that the best form of health care is preventative. The best way to reduce the strain on our hospitals and ERs is to prevent people from showing up there in the first place.

One of the main reasons that people end up in the hospital at this time of year is RSV. RSV is very common, very severe, and highly contagious. It is a virus that primarily affects younger and older New Brunswickers.

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[Translation]

Last year, we had more cases of RSV than we have in the past 10 years. The New Brunswick Medical Society urged people to get an RSV vaccine.

[Original]

This month, I heard from people across the province and from residents in my riding such as senior Pat Flanagan of East Bathurst. He is on a fixed pension and faced an almost \$300 charge for the vaccine. We can all agree that it costs New Brunswick more to provide care to a patient in the hospital for a day than the cost of this vaccine.

In National Respiratory Therapy Week, could the Premier explain to Pat from East Bathurst the decision not to cover the RSV vaccine for seniors?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is an important file. I do want to congratulate the 21 000 people who have already received their flu vaccination and COVID-19 vaccination. That is good prevention. Mr. Speaker, this government invests over \$20 million in immunization to protect the people in the province—\$20 million.

Mr. Speaker, we are aware of RSV. We are aware of the results of last year. We do not need to take any lessons from the opposition. We also want to take the advice from the experts. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization has not yet released their recommendations on this particular vaccine. Once we receive these recommendations, we will take that information and we will make a decision moving forward. The last chapter has not been written. In the meantime, we continue to ask people to get their flu vaccinations, to get their COVID-19 vaccinations, to stay home if they are sick, and to take all the other—

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

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I think that Health Canada just approved the RSV vaccine. It is being distributed and paid for in other provinces in Canada. If we look at the number of people that got RSV last year, more than 1 500 New Brunswickers, the cost of that was more than \$1.2 million for hospitals in New Brunswick. With that money, we could have provided vaccines to 4 000 seniors instead of putting that burden on our nurses and doctors. I am hoping that the member opposite can describe why they considered and decided not to fund this vaccine for seniors who are struggling with affordability and are interested in protecting their health, like the advice of the Medical Society.

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, we are aware of Health Canada's decision and approval of the RSV vaccination, but as I mentioned earlier,

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the National Advisory Committee on Immunization also has this in its sight. They are going to make the recommendation in the not too distant future. We will take that plus the advice of our Chief Medical Officer, the staff in Public Health and the RHAs, and the doctors involved in triage in health care. Mr. Speaker, we will look to the medical practitioners to help us make this decision. I look to the medical practitioners and the people from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization who have had years of medical training and experience. I wonder where the member opposite is getting their advice.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, it was the Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health of New Brunswick, Yves Léger, who advised New Brunswickers to get vaccinated because hospitals were experiencing a record number of RSV cases last November. It was putting incredible pressure on our system. I would encourage the member opposite to speak with the Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health of New Brunswick who made this recommendation and to explain to us why the seniors in New Brunswick cannot access this protection.

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are two very distinct questions there. One is whether seniors should get a vaccination for RSV. That is their choice. That is their decision. We encourage it. We also encourage flu immunizations and COVID-19 vaccinations. There is a very long list of vaccinations that the province covers to the tune of \$20 million.

Mr. Speaker, I have talked to Dr. Léger. I have talked to Dr. Russell. I have talked to our Public Health department. We look to the National Advisory Committee on Immunization to make its recommendation. There are many professionals who will make those recommendations. We will take them. It seems as though the members on the opposite side want to get on a topic and ride that for a long time. We continue to promote the safe immunization program here in the province, which people should take advantage of.

[Translation]

HOUSING

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, one of the largest monthly expenses for the majority of New Brunswickers is their rent or mortgage payment. New Brunswickers are looking for affordable housing, and we expect the government to satisfy those needs with concrete measures.

Our team listens to non-profit organizations when they ask for interim funding for affordable housing. We listen to experts when they ask for repairs and upgrades in our public housing network. We listen to municipalities when they ask for legislative changes to help them organize and develop housing units in their communities.

Nova Scotia developed a bold plan, a clear budget, and concrete programs, like incentives for additional housing that make a home more affordable.

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Mr. Premier, do the affordability measures you have planned include a rent cap or programs like the one in Nova Scotia to make housing more affordable?

[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, Mr. Speaker. Was this House asleep in June when we released our Housing Strategy?

There are real measures in our Housing Strategy. There are affordability measures in our strategy. There are dollars behind our strategy. There are 19 different mechanisms that we are putting in place to help with affordability and with housing for New Brunswick.

Have we done everything that could possibly be done around housing? No, Mr. Speaker. That is why when I released the report, I said that we would be looking at key indicators to see whether we are moving the bar related to housing and, at that time, we would make adjustments and changes.

The strategy was released in June, and we are not even four months later. There is a huge amount of work that has gone in. A lot has been put in place. So, Mr. Speaker, give us a little time. Good job, Nova Scotia, for getting yours out, but we have had four months to get ours in place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Losier (Dieppe, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier keeps pounding his chest as though he were Tarzan, claiming that he is responsible for New Brunswick's population growth, New Brunswickers are facing a housing crisis never seen before. So I kindly ask this of the minister responsible for the housing portfolio: Could she give us a brief update, for the four past months, on where this Housing Strategy is right now? Thank you.

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, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for his first question to me as my critic.

As I was talking about when I answered the last question, the Housing Strategy was released at the end of June. It has 19 different programs that we put in place to support housing in New Brunswick.

We also have targets for ourselves, such as having 6 000 builds per year or having a certain number of people in the province who pay less than 30% of their income on housing. Those are key criteria for us that we will be tracking and watching, and if we do not see our numbers in New Brunswick changing, we will be making changes to the *Housing for All* strategy.

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I could give you an update on all 19 programs, but in one minute, that is extremely difficult. But as you are my critic, I would be happy to offer to sit down with you separately to give you an update on all 19. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Losier (Dieppe, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On page 14 of *NB Housing Strategy: Housing for All*, there is a measure called “Rent Bank”. Recently, in the media—I am not going to say CBC—it was reported that the timeline is no longer fixed; it is moving. Madam Minister, can you explain to New Brunswickers why this measure has not already been established? Also, can you tell us when it will be established?

[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, Mr. Speaker. I would be happy to talk about the Rent Bank.

So, the Housing Strategy was released at the end of June. At that time, our target date for having the Rent Bank up and running was January 1, 2024, in about three months’ time. Since that happened, our team has been working with stakeholders, researchers, and other jurisdictions that have rent banks in place. We are learning from what they have done right and what they have done wrong so that we do not do the wrong things other jurisdictions have done.

We are on track for our timeline in January, and I can say that when I was questioned, I had to go back and make sure that I had not committed to something else. I did not, Mr. Speaker. I committed to the beginning of January, and we are on track to do that. In fact, we are pushing the team to see whether we can get it out a little bit earlier than the beginning of January. But there are a number of stakeholders and not-for-profits that are involved in this, and we need to get all the information and do the very best job in rolling it out, because it is important for New Brunswickers.

Mr. Losier (Dieppe, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Thank you, Madam Minister.

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[Original]

As you can imagine, there are very high hopes for this Rent Bank. Other provinces have done it within months. I know that it is complicated here in New Brunswick, because everything must go through one office, unlike in other provinces.

What is plan B? That is what we need to know today. What is plan B for the New Brunswickers who must choose between paying for their groceries, their medication, and their rent? There must be a plan B to help these people. Can you explain that to us right now?

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): Mr. Speaker, we have talked to other jurisdictions that have put rent banks in place. There was one jurisdiction that did it in a very quick timeline, and that was Manitoba. They did it very fast. But they learned a lot of lessons when they rolled it out, and there are a lot of things that they recommended we not do. We are learning from their mistakes and are not repeating them. We are working with jurisdictions in Ontario and in British Columbia. None of them have rolled out a rent bank that quickly, so it was one rent bank.

Mr. Speaker, we are on track. We are working with the stakeholders, we are working with the not-for-profits, and we have a plan to move forward. We do not need a plan B. We have the funds set aside, we have the team working on it, and we have a very good plan to get this in place, so a plan B is not required. We understand the importance of a rent bank for New Brunswickers. We are going to put it in place, and we are going to put it in place for January 1. Thank you.

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister mentioned, the Housing Strategy came out in June. In the Housing Strategy, it was announced that there was \$500 million in “new and previously committed funding” allocated for three years. There has been a lot of speculation on exactly what is new, what was already committed, how many are refurbished programs, and how many keep coming up on a certain minister’s lists every time he speaks. I wonder whether the minister could clarify. In June, at that time, how much new money were we talking about over the next three years?

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, we had a funding spend around housing of half a billion dollars. It sounds even better when you say half a billion dollars. That is a big amount of money, and it is because this government takes the housing crisis extremely seriously. We do talk about all the success we have had with bringing new New Brunswickers into the province, but we are now also having the

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wonderful and hard problems that are associated with our growing population and our growing economy as well as having the cost of living problems.

The member opposite asked for a breakdown of the budget. I am not going to go line by line on the 19 different items we have in the Housing Strategy. I will do the same thing as I did with my critic from the opposite side. I am happy to sit down and talk to you about that. I am not going through dollars line by line to say what is going to which fund and what is new or old. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Okay, let's call it half a billion, if we can, instead of \$500 million. Here is what I find interesting. If we remember the budget exercise this spring, there was a lot of discussion about the fact that the housing plan was coming after the budget. So where was the money going to come from? The answer that we always received was, We will have the money available when it is necessary, when the plan comes out. Yet I look at the Q1 update from the Minister of Finance, and there is absolutely no mention of housing at all, except for one little line saying that "housing pressures persist". There is nothing on housing in the Q1, so I am kind of wondering, breakdown or not: Where is the money coming from?

I am looking at the update, and if I look at the capital budgets, I see that Social Development is still on plan. In operational budgets, it actually projects that we are going to have less than planned. So where is this money coming from? Have you actually talked to your colleague? Did you guys have the talk about the fact that this government does not spend money? Or are these just paper announcements?

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 got the member's little quip about only half a million dollars. That is extremely incorrect. Hundreds of millions of dollars were newly put toward this. I will explain the process. We worked as one government in putting together everything around the Housing Strategy. It required seven different departments to be involved because each one of us has a role to play in housing in New Brunswick. The departments sat down and decided what the important topics were that we needed to cover, what we could roll out quickly, and what would have the most meaning for New Brunswickers. We did that.

Then we had to calculate all the finances around that to see what was required, what New Brunswickers needed, and what the financial impact would be going down the road. All this information was put together. We took this and the Housing Strategy to the Cabinet. First, we went to the Treasury Board for approval for the spending, then we went to the Cabinet and got approval for the spending. So, Mr. Speaker, it is all in—

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

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BEVERAGE CONTAINERS

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Mr. Speaker, when we were last here in the House in June, I asked the Minister of Environment if he would confirm the rumours that I have heard that the Beverage Containers Program would be ending. He did not answer my question, but his office did write to tell me that there are no anticipated closures of redemption centres.

Well, last week, he finally confirmed that the Beverage Containers Program will end on April 1. He is also canceling the licenses of the redemption centres across the province. These centres are small businesses that employ people in rural communities in my riding and across the province. Does the Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business think that it is acceptable that the Minister of Environment is canceling the licenses of these small businesses all around the province?

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, PC): Thank you for the question from across the way. The changes are coming. There are no plans to close any redemption centres, only to improve them. It is up to each person who applies to these. This is strictly regulatory. We are not hiring and firing people. The changes that are coming up are long overdue and will improve the redemption centres, hopefully, all across the province in each and every location. It is important to get your returnables back each and every day. It is taking a long while to get there. There are no plans to cut anyone at any time, but to improve it, to improve them like other places across Canada, where you can drop off your returnables 24-7, hopefully, in the near future, and have the money put in your bank account when it is appropriate. But it takes time to get that in place. Hopefully, we will see that improve the drop-off and redemption centres. Thank you.

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would appreciate it if the Minister of Environment could explain to us why the *Beverage Containers Act* is being repealed and what that exactly means for these 78 redemption centres. I am also wondering about the Environmental Trust Fund because the *Beverage Containers Act* provides funding for the Environmental Trust Fund through this program. It creates jobs that support important environmental work in communities all over New Brunswick. Environmental nonprofits rely on the Environmental Trust Fund. There is a concern that by eliminating the Beverage Containers Program and the deposit on returnables, the minister may be ending the one stable source of funding for the Environmental Trust Fund. So, can the minister please explain to us where a permanent source of funding will be coming from and how this works with the repeal of the *Beverage Containers Act*?

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the honourable member in the opposition for the question. As the Minister of Environment, I am prepared to commit to New Brunswickers that the accumulated surplus of \$41 million in the ETF, the Environmental Trust Fund, will be sufficient to continue investing in priority areas in the

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next few years. The department is accepting applications now for November 1 to 30. We are hoping for some changes there as well. The Auditor General wanted to have some changes take place. Maybe year over year, maybe over longer terms, or maybe at different times of the year, you could apply for that. These New Brunswick municipalities, community groups, First Nations, nonprofit organizations, and institutions can further apply for that.

Where is the money coming from? It will be there in the future. I cannot give you the exact breakdown right now, but General Revenue should be able to take care of most of that. It is our plan to have the money in place to continue with the good projects that are taking place all across the province. Thank you.

HOUSING

Mr. J. LeBlanc (Shediac—Beaubassin—Cap-Pelé, L): Mr. Speaker, we have heard over and over from the municipalities that they need financial supports to do their part in helping their community members have the housing that they need. In your Housing Strategy, you specifically mention a Housing Working Capital Fund for municipalities and not-for-profit organizations to cover upfront predevelopment investments such as feasibility studies and business plans. Time is ticking, and people are struggling. The question: Where are you in establishing this fund? Thank you.

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, Mr. Speaker. I think that you guys missed an announcement. We had our very first community access the fund to use it for feasibility studies in engineering. There may be a reason the member back here is cheering. It is because his community of Nackawic was the first community to apply for those funds. Now, they were well down the road, so they already had plans in place, had located the land, and knew what needed to be done related to feasibility and engineering. They worked with our partners at the Regional Development Corporation, applied for the fund, and got approved for the fund, and I think that about a week and a half ago, the announcement actually occurred. So, the fund is up and running.

I hope. . . We are working with not-for-profits and communities that are already seen as being very versed in this, and we are excited to be accepting applications and providing funding for those communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. J. LeBlanc (Shediac—Beaubassin—Cap-Pelé, L): Mr. Speaker, GNB surplus properties have been there, unused, for years. In June, you committed to making an inventory of surplus properties that are appropriate for housing in order to transfer them to the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, which would then assign them as being better suited for affordable housing development by municipalities and not-for-profits. How many properties have been identified so far, and what is the next step? Thank you.

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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, Mr. Speaker. This is kind of fun to get all the questions today, so thank you, members opposite.

Yes, surplus property—a pet peeve of mine. I was Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, and there is quite a system there to get properties released. But the good news is that it has been all hands on deck on properties as well. The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure has led the charge related to the surplus properties. We are working closely with Finance and Treasury Board and other individuals within the provincial government.

We have looked at thousands of properties. Currently, we have found 60 to 70 that have an opportunity for affordable housing for us, and we are working those 60 to 70 properties through the system. We have actually also identified some properties within the New Brunswick Housing Corporation that we were unaware of that may have an opportunity for housing as well. So, it is all hands on deck. We are moving forward. If we need to make legislative changes to make it happen even faster, we are committed to doing that, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel like I want to take a turn asking the member opposite a question too because she is having a great day. One of the other areas of housing that is a deep concern for us is New Brunswick's public housing. There are people in those homes that know that their neighbours' homes and the empty spaces beside them need repairs. They need upgrading. We have public stock that has been neglected for years and years. I am hoping that the minister can tell us about the plans to make sure that New Brunswickers who are living in social housing today have access to safe and appropriate properties and that they might be getting the right to bring their issues with their tenancy to the Residential Tenancies Tribunal. Minister?

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. New Brunswick does have, I think, a significant public housing stock. There has been some concern in the past about whether we are doing the repairs and rehabilitation that are required on that housing stock. I am very pleased that, last year, this government invested funds to immediately go in and fix 110 units. All that work has been completed.

The question of the Leader of the Opposition is actually extremely timely, Mr. Speaker, because we are in the capital budgeting process right now. I have sat down with my teams at Social Development and at Housing, and we have started to talk about the need for improvement on the capital side of things in both departments. One of the discussion items has certainly been repair and rehabilitation of our own units. That discussion is happening.

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We have not submitted our capital budget, but it is certainly on our radar. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Holt (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The cost of living is clearly an issue for New Brunswickers today. The Minister of Health, the Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, and the member for Southwest Miramichi-Bay du Vin have said so. I think we can all agree that we hear people talk about the cost of living every day.

[Original]

We are hearing that New Brunswickers are struggling with the cost of living, and they want to see action—not plans, not actions that may come if an election might come, not actions that we are going to do but maybe we are not sure if we can afford to do and we are going to put things out.

The member opposite has the ability to make a fundamental input cheaper for New Brunswickers. He has the ability to lower the price of gas by directing the EUB today to take 4¢ off, which would make a meaningful difference for the rural New Brunswickers in Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore who need to drive quite a long distance just to access health care. Will the Premier take that 4¢ off gas today?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think that the member opposite knows full well how the EUB works. It is the same kind of process that Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland went through in putting this clean fuel tax on, another tax from the federal government, Mr. Speaker.

I think that there has been some good discussion. Last week, we talked about how we would take the whole carbon tax, look at changing that by working with the MPs—the Liberal MPs—and go after the federal government to make changes to that. I mean, the Leader of the Green Party came up today and tried to pin the carbon tax all on me, Mr. Speaker. I do not think that is going to stick.

So the carbon tax is clearly not working. It is clearly an imposition, particularly on rural residents and particularly in Atlantic Canada. I think that we could all agree on that, so let's just axe the tax, Mr. Speaker. I think that I have heard that somewhere else. Let's get rid of that thing, and let's get rid of those costs on transportation, fuels, and everything that goes with it. It is not working. It is causing unnecessary affordability challenges in every part of our province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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Mr. Speaker (Hon. Bill Oliver): The time for question period has expired.