

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions



**November 20, 2024**

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[Original]

**Mr. M. LeBlanc** (Belle-Baie-Belledune, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Considering that it is frequent practice to extend question period by 15 minutes, we're happy to grant that, with unanimous consent.

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): Do we have unanimous consent?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): Agreed.

[Translation]

### GOVERNMENT

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Before asking my first question, I want to congratulate a few people.

Congratulations to you, Madam Speaker, to our new Premier, the first female Premier in the history of our province, to her Cabinet, and to the government members. Last but not least, I congratulate my colleagues on our side of the House and the members of the third party.

[Original]

Madam Speaker, I am starting with a procedural question, given my history as a House Leader in this Chamber, a role that I was proud to serve in for six years. During that tenure, we instituted such things as having a legislative calendar, which I recognize was mentioned in the speech from the throne yesterday, giving briefings to the opposition after a bill is introduced in the House, and giving ministers' statements to opposition critics with adequate time before the ministers deliver the statements. I believe that these initiatives made this House function better. Can the Premier inform the House whether this government plans to continue with those items and that approach?

[Translation]

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour for me to be here to answer my first question.

[Original]

Thank you to the leader opposite for the questions. I want to echo your congratulations to all the folks who are newly elected and are here for the first time as well as to everyone

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who has been returned by their constituents to join us in this 61st Legislative Assembly. Congratulations to everyone, and congratulations to you.

I would like to confirm for the member opposite that it is our intent to provide a calendar that gives advance notice of what the sitting dates will be for 2025 and that it is also our intent to provide briefings. As soon as a bill is tabled in the House, briefings will be made available upon request and with urgency so that you are able to get the information that you need. I think that we have also shared that you will be invited to participate in technical briefings and press conferences as well as to get access to that information when media and others...

Oh, I'm running out of time. My apologies.

[*Translation*]

### GOVERNMENT AGENDA

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the government's openness and willingness.

[*Original*]

Madam Speaker, I will now get into some more substantive questions related to the most recent election. As you know, we did go through an election, and the people of New Brunswick decided that they wanted change. That is the very nature of how our democracy works. Madam Speaker, we on this side of the House will certainly respect that.

But that does not diminish the fact that now, as the opposition, we have to hold this government to account, and so I want to start by asking the Premier about her platform commitments. She talked about a costing table for the 2024-25 fiscal year. It says that the expenditures from platform commitments will cost \$79 million for that year. We know now that the second quarter results that were released just a few days ago are going to affect that, so I want to ask the Premier this: How is the fiscal update going to change her approach to the costing of this year's promises?

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, and thank you to the member for the question. If I may, I'm just going to finish my answer to your previous question, because I didn't get around to discussing ministers' statements. We will be sharing the statements of ministers at the opening of the House as opposed to at the moment they're being delivered, so I think that will provide an extra hour or two to review those and to prepare responses.

In terms of the budget, absolutely, we are looking at the figures and looking at the deficit that has been projected after the second quarter. We are looking at our commitments to New Brunswickers in terms of what we're going to invest in during this fiscal year to the



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tune of \$79 million, and we are looking at opportunities for savings, some of which we've already identified. We are getting out of lawsuits that had costly legal bills associated with them, and we are looking at other things so that we can come as close to balance as possible in this fiscal year while still honouring the commitments that we made in our platform.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We know that, in the Liberal platform, there are well in excess of 100 promises to the people of this province. The thing that is important to recognize is that this government also made a commitment to balance the books every year. A note in the Liberal platform—it is in very small print because it is a note—suggests that the former government was too conservative in its numbers, so I would ask the Premier this: How did she arrive at the numbers to indicate that there would be an additional 0.3% of revenue growth? What process or formula did the Premier use to arrive at an additional 0.3% of revenue growth to come up with her projections? Thank you.

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you for the question. I really appreciate that you are aware of our platform and have read it. You've even read the small print.

We used economists' projections. They estimated the government's revenue growth. Several economists said the projections should be higher than those made by the government. So, these are facts that banks and economists published.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the Premier's response. However, what will happen when there isn't a 0.3% increase in revenue?

*[Original]*

What's going to happen if something changes and there isn't an additional 0.3% in revenue growth? How will the government deal with that? Thank you.

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you. I appreciate the question. That's why it's always difficult to govern; there are projections, and they don't always become reality in the end.

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[Original]

I'm sure you're familiar with the fact that you make projections and that you can sometimes see the end results differ greatly from what was projected. We are striving for balance, and we have committed to a balanced budget in each of the four years we have the responsibility for it. We are going to be looking at opportunities to save money where we can, but we're also committed to making life more affordable for New Brunswickers and to investing in things like the health care system and the education system, which have really been underinvested in for the last number of years. Striking that balance is going to take work. We're going to be looking for those savings opportunities at every turn to run the most efficient government possible while delivering balance and investing in New Brunswickers' priorities.

While I have 14 seconds left, I'd love to take the opportunity to thank the people of Fredericton South-Silverwood, who gave me the opportunity to be here today. It's an incredible riding, the riding I grew up in. It extends all the way out into beautiful apple orchards and more, and I will talk—

[Translation]

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much again, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Again, going back to the costing table from the Liberal platform, a note was included that said:

*Government has consistently underestimated revenue growth, producing "surprise" surpluses*

That opinion was derived from the *2024-2025 Economic Outlook*. As I'm sure you're aware, the economic outlook is produced by the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. Madam Speaker, these folks are career civil servants who are professionals in accounting practices and principles. My question for the Premier is this: If she is going to commit to evidence-based decision-making across all departments, why is she suggesting in her own platform that the Department of Finance and Treasury Board numbers are incorrect, when these are the people she will look to for her evidence-based decision-making?

[Translation]

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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[Original]

Thank you for the question, and I appreciate the point, because we do have exceptionally hard-working civil servants who have been doing this work for many years and do their best to give the most accurate forecast possible. You are probably familiar with the fact that they look at a range of inputs that come from economists, some who estimate higher, some who estimate lower. They look at the median of those estimates and use that median to make their growth forecast. As we get further through the year, we get more information and we can get closer to a better forecast than can be made on the first day a budget is put together. So we saw those revenue estimates grow, what the third-party economists were projecting.

I would love to give other ministers here the chance to get up and speak. I appreciate your directing questions to me, but I would love for my Minister of Finance to also have the opportunity to rise and answer his first question. You may defer to him for future questions of this nature because he's well equipped to speak to how we've developed revenue projections and how we're going to balance the budget for New Brunswickers.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, I recognize there is a range. However, what I'm trying to get at here is that the government said it's going to use evidence-based decision-making, but it seems as though there's a bit of disconnect, because it's choosing what evidence it wants to follow. That's kind of the point I want to make here. We have a really great team of people in Finance and Treasury Board and across the entire civil service. I believe that they provide excellent service to New Brunswickers, so I just want the government to really clarify whose opinion it's going to follow.

On page 27 of her party's platform, it says:

*A Holt Government will:*

✓ *Commit to evidence-based decision-making across all departments.*

If the evidence proves she cannot keep her 100-plus commitments and balance the budget, which again was one of her commitments, which one of her promises will she abandon?  
Thank you.

[Translation]

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the question. It's an important question because it's what New Brunswickers are asking.

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[Original]

This is what New Brunswickers are asking. We have committed to balancing budgets. We have committed to investing in the things that they care about. Right now, today, we believe we can do both of those things. We can achieve a budget that is going to land as close as possible to zero, a few dollars above or below, because of the plan that we have put in place, our growth estimates, and our moves to make a more efficient civil service and put investments where they belong.

We are absolutely committed to evidence-based policy-making. You might have seen that as one of the first paragraphs in the “How We Will Work” section of the mandate letters that we shared publicly. We will continue to rely on good advice from the civil service and on good advice from folks who are external to government and are close to these things. However, right now, we are committed to meeting all our promises, both investments in the things that New Brunswickers really want to see, such as better schools and teachers in those schools, primary care in communities close to home, and a balanced budget and fiscal responsibility.

[Translation]

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

I hear what the Premier is saying, but I think what we really need is that transparency from the government so that people can understand where exactly the government is getting its numbers. There are going to be times, perhaps, when government doesn't agree with the numbers it is getting from the civil service and wants to use numbers from the private sector. I think that the people of New Brunswick deserve that clarity on how we're going to arrive at the costing of things and how that budget is going to shake out.

When I look at... Oops, I'll make sure that I have the right question here. Going back to the costing in the Liberal platform, again, it included that note that said:

*Government has consistently underestimated revenue growth, producing “surprise” surpluses*

When we look at that, Madam Speaker, this is much more complex than that. We have HST revenues that have to be given to us from the federal government. How is this government going to work with the federal government to ensure we get those accurate numbers?

**Hon. Mr. Legacy** (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister responsible for Energy; Minister responsible for the Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, to the Leader of



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the Opposition for asking the question. There are a couple of things I want to clarify. First of all, there was a comment that balancing budgets is a footnote somewhere in the document. Trust me, I do not feel as though that is a footnote. If you look at my mandate letter, you will see that it is very clear and very big. It is an important part of what I have to do. I take it very seriously.

I think what we need to realize is that, yes, there is external data, but our staff also uses that external data to create what we need for reporting. I will echo the sentiments of the Leader of the Opposition. We have excellent staff. Over the past few days, I had chances to converse with them quite a few times, and I have gotten some good information. I think the question that we have to talk about with the revenue and the surpluses is that everybody is... Well, anyway, I will just say that we have excellent data and take our staff considerations...

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much again, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

I appreciate the answer from the minister, but, as always, it's not what you make, it's what you spend. My question was more around trying to understand... Historically, we've had difficulty getting those numbers from the CRA, and that is what... There was a situation where we were 10 years behind. There was an error that was carried through for 10 years, so we had numbers that came in much larger than expected because there was a correction on the federal end. I'm not laying any blame here. I just want to make sure that the government understands that there are other factors that come into play.

Looking at the costing again, the government only gave itself a \$2-million surplus cushion in its first budget, according to its costing. This leaves no room for any unforeseen costs. The Premier announced that she is switching the electricity tax cut to a rebate program. Doing so will require additional time and resources from the civil service. Did the government account for this? Are we headed for a budget deficit, or is the government going to cut another program in order to fund those cuts?

**Hon. Mr. Legacy** (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister responsible for Energy; Minister responsible for the Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, thank you for the question. Back to the previous points about revenue coming in and HST being higher than what was predicted in the previous years, we know that this has happened.

As the previous minister often alluded to, it happened across Canada. The difference, and what we always brought up, is that we were the only province that had large surpluses that

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were just set aside on the debt. Every other province used those surpluses or that extra money to...

I guess I'm the one who was picked for that.

The other provinces used those surpluses to invest in their programs and invest in their population. I guess the question is this: When we do see those chances, how nimble can we be to use the surplus in our programs and boost up what's needed in New Brunswick? Sometimes, there is some uncertainty that comes in. That's what we're trying to get at. That's what we're trying to be ready for. If we have to, and if it's getting tight, we will make moves to cut back on and curtail some of our spending.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

*[Original]*

I apologize. The minister got the buzzer. He got the hook from the emergency alert system.

Yes, that is my point that I'm trying to make. I will say that I'll push back a little bit. When the previous government got surplus revenues, they were invested right back into New Brunswickers, Madam Speaker. The difference for every government is going to be where that money goes. I recognize that. But this government made a commitment and said: We are going to live up to all our commitments, and we're going to balance the budget.

I recognize that the throne speech goes out for a year. It gives a framework for how the government is going to proceed. But we're already seeing that there's an end-loading of the books for this year because the government is going from a tax cut to a rebate system, which is going to put more money on this year's books. I'm trying to understand from the government. In order for it to do that, that means that it's going to run a deficit. It's going to have to make a decision. What is it going to cut back on in order to achieve that balanced budget?

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

*[Original]*

Thank you for the question. We're excited to talk about the fact that we're going to be taking 10% off people's electricity bills sooner than the April 1 date that we thought that

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we were going to have to do. New Brunswickers need relief right now. New Brunswickers don't want to have to wait until April 1, when they know that there's going to be another increase in those bills. We were looking to see how early we could put this in place at a time when New Brunswickers' bills are going up because it's getting cold and we're turning up the heat. Everyone is watching those bills increase. We're really proud of the fact that the civil service came up with a solution that could help us deliver that relief to New Brunswickers sooner. That 10% off their power bills is going to hit much sooner than April 1. We look forward to sharing all the details of that, what it's going to cost, and how we're going to cover those costs as we had projected to, from April 1 forward, while still striving to achieve the balance that we want to see for this year.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much again, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Yes, I can certainly appreciate the government's desire to try to move this a little bit more quickly, although, as I said, I believe that there is going to be an end-loading of the books for this year. One thing that this tax rebate does not cover is the fact that there are thousands and thousands of New Brunswickers who rent and who have their electricity included in their bills. They don't pay any electricity bill for their monthly rent. It's already there. This is not going to help them whatsoever. We're talking about an average of \$192 for the average household and a \$90-million expenditure for the province, but there are going to be a lot of people this does not touch. The question that I would like to ask is this: What are the government's plans to help those people? Is it going to go to those particular landlords and force them to take electricity out of the rent or to lower the rent so that these folks get the same benefit as everybody else who has electricity savings? These people don't because electricity is included in their rent. Thank you.

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for flagging this question. You're right that this benefit of the 10% savings that people are going to have on their electricity bills is for people who receive electricity bills. There are some renters who have their electricity included. This is a benefit that will be yielded to the landlords.

This gets at a different challenge that our government has been really focused on. That is this: How do we tackle the housing crisis so that we can build the 30 000 homes that New Brunswick needs and so that we can continue to make life affordable for people who are paying rents that are too high? We're really proud to be tabling legislation today to put a rent cap in place in order to provide some certainty for those renters while also putting initiatives in place that are going to make this the best place to develop new homes. The more new homes and supply we put into the market, the more we can keep the pressure on



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those rent costs down and make sure that New Brunswick is an affordable place to rent because of a rent cap and because of the environment we've created for the creation of more rental supply.

I'm sure my Minister of Housing is looking forward to talking more about that.

[*Translation*]

### HOUSING

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

I appreciate the Premier segueing into housing for me. We know that the federal government has finally given some land from its Land Bank. It's funny that it took a change in government for that to happen. It's not because of a lack of effort from the previous government, and it's not because of a lack of effort by municipalities. We have proof, Madam Speaker, that we had municipalities asking for land from the feds' Land Bank that were denied. We have proof that municipalities and the former Minister of Housing asked together, and they were denied. Also, on top of this, it has taken nine years for the federal government to move on this, and it's not something that's going to help in the short term. We know that the government certainly made a big splash about it, and I can understand that. But, at the end of the day, if we're going to talk about affordability in a housing crisis, we need to understand from this government when the demolition is going to start. When are the doors going to be opened?

**Hon. Mr. Hickey** (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an exciting opportunity to talk about this. The federal government has stepped up with additional surplus land. We're eager to take this on. We're eager to take on new visions for surplus land at every level of government. It's important that we, as the provincial government, reflect on land that has been sitting idle for years. Whether it's in surplus land or in tax-delinquent properties, there are plenty of opportunities for us to look at tackling the housing crisis with the urgency it deserves. That means exploring every avenue we can. Surplus land is an important part of that. We're going to continue to advocate to the federal government so that more can be added to that list, whether it's here in Fredericton with sites such as the experimental farm, in Saint John with the customs building, or in Moncton with the Garrison site. We're going to continue to push for this, and we're also going to reflect on ourselves and look to municipalities for their support as well.

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[*Translation*]

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

That's not what I asked. What I asked was this: When is demolition and door opening going to happen? I asked for a timeline because we have a federal government and federal MPs who not once ever went out publicly to say this: Hey, how come our federal government is not making this land available in New Brunswick? We have a minister who had connections with the MP down in our area—never heard a word. Now he has a responsibility. He has a responsibility to try to make this move.

I can tell you that, at a provincial level, we were doing that work the entire time. We had municipalities doing that work that entire time. There are some politics at play here. It's unfortunate, but it's a reality. It's what happens. All I'm asking of this government is this: Now that this happened, what is your plan to get these doors open so that the land is made available, the demolition of these buildings happens, and the doors start opening? It's going to take years. We have a crisis now.

**Hon. Mr. Hickey** (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The member opposite is exactly right. We have a crisis now. It means stepping up and looking at every avenue we can to solve the housing crisis. Surplus land is an important part of that, and that's why we're eager for opportunities for collaboration, as I mentioned in my last answer. The response will be based on collaborating with municipalities that have surplus land, collaborating with our staff and my team at NB Housing to find surplus land here in the province, such as the tax-delinquent properties that are in the hundreds, and pushing for our federal counterparts to continue to add to that list of surplus lands so we can get them into the right hands, develop more, and get more housing on the market so we can have safe, affordable places for every New Brunswicker to call home. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

## HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Hogan** (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

I'm proud to rise today as part of His Majesty's loyal opposition and ask questions on behalf of the people of New Brunswick. I welcome the Minister of Health today for his first question period. Madam Speaker, I understand that only one of us is bound by the Hippocratic oath to do no harm. Today, I, as Health Critic, will commit an oath to the people

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of our province to allow no harm, not so long as it can be prevented with the support of New Brunswickers and my colleagues. My first question to the Minister of Health is this: Will he agree that causing or allowing the erosion of rural health care is harmful to the health of nearly half the people of our province?

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Thank you very much for the question, member for Woodstock-Hartland. First of all, I would like to thank the folks of Saint John Portland-Simonds for electing me to this position. This is my first time rising. I would like to thank my wife and my children. I won't extend my thanks too much further today. I will at another time, but I would like to thank the members of my department, the Department of Health, who have the same concerns as you do, member opposite.

You know, rural health is as important as urban health. We need to support the facilities and the people who work in those communities. As part of our collaborative care clinics, we are going to be working with the people who live in those communities to bring health care professionals to those communities who will stay in those communities.

So, I would agree with your concern. We need to support the facilities that may take on new roles. For example—

**Mr. Hogan** (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's kind of like watching Netflix here when it just ends and I want to hear the next part of how we're going to support our communities.

I thank the minister for his response, Madam Speaker. You know, I visited the Liberal platform to see how serious they are about rural health care, and the word "rural", or anything in relation to that, never appears in their platform. Nearly half of our population lives in rural New Brunswick.

I would like to direct the minister's attention to the Upper River Valley Hospital in Woodstock and the ongoing issues in labour and delivery. I would also like to point out that while this minister was head of Horizon, he tried to permanently close labour and delivery at the Upper River Valley Hospital. I hope that this minister has had a change of heart and will commit today to maintaining and improving the rural health care of New Brunswickers and will look to see what solutions can be found so that the obstetrics department at the Upper River Valley Hospital in Waterville is not closed until the end of January. Will the minister make that—

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Thank you very much, member for Woodstock-Hartland. I have had an opportunity to work in the Upper River Valley Hospital, and I recognize the high-calibre, dedicated, and committed people who work there to support obstetrical care in that community. It pains me that we have not been able to do that consistently.



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We are committed to rural health. If you look at our primary care clinic commitment, it is to rural areas, whether it be Woodstock, Sackville, or St. Stephen.

To your question, this is a service that is provided to your community that we, as a government, do support and will continue to support. I am quite troubled by our inability to find the right manpower, in this case in anesthesiology, in that community. So, we're looking hard. We have had visiting obstetricians come in, but right now our challenge, as it is across the country, is with anesthesia care. We will work hard, as you have suggested—

**Mr. Hogan** (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I recognize the challenge that the minister is talking about. That is the recruitment and the retention of anesthesiologists, in this particular instance. In the minister's mandate letter, I noticed it talks about making sure that all the ORs are being used. Anesthesiologists are certainly really important to making sure that happens.

Anesthesiologists are extremely important to making sure that we can offer labour and delivery and C-sections at that hospital so that young, expecting mothers from Plaster Rock don't have to drive to Fredericton for that.

So I would like to know what the plan is to recruit more anesthesiologists and to stop taking the ones in Waterville and putting them in Fredericton. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Thank you very much. You know, when it comes to the provision of obstetrical care, one would think that it is sometimes a midwife, sometimes a physician, sometimes an obstetrician, and sometimes a family doctor who helps to deliver a baby. But in the instance that it is necessary to perform a Caesarean section in an emergency, or perhaps to perform a planned Caesarean section, we need to have those specialists. They are in short supply.

Recently, there was a change in the packages that are made available in anesthesiology. We will look at what is necessary to bring anesthetists not only to our urban areas but also to our rural communities such as Woodstock. Thank you very much for the question.

## POWER RATES

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Human Development Council just released its report on energy poverty in New Brunswick. It turns out that we have the highest level of energy poverty in the country, with 36.3% of households spending more than 6% of their household income to heat their homes and apartments. That is nearly twice the national rate. If you look exclusively at low-income households, 81% of them spend more than 6% of their after-tax income on electricity. The 10% rebate announced by this government for everyone, from the poor to the wealthy, is nowhere near sufficient to take the bite out of these power bills for low-income New Brunswickers.



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My question is this: Will the Minister of Finance, who is also the Minister responsible for Energy, implement a supplementary rebate program specifically tailored to vulnerable, low-income households, as recommended by the Human Development Council in its report?

**Hon. Mr. Legacy** (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister responsible for Energy; Minister responsible for the Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the member for Fredericton Lincoln and leader of his party for the question. I understand that there is always going to be the question of whether we can do more. But let's recognize that this is a big step and that we are providing immediate relief. That was a commitment that we made during the campaign. We could have studied and looked, but we are providing immediate relief. We are coming in with some legislation in the next couple of days. I don't know whether it's legislation or a motion, but we will get through the process. I apologize that I'm still not getting all the terms correct.

I guess that the end result is this: No matter what it's called, New Brunswickers are going to see a 10% reduction on their bills. They will see that significant difference right after Christmas, so that is good news no matter how you look at it.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Homeowners can take advantage of various NB Power programs to protect themselves from power bill increases by insulating their walls, basements, and attics and by installing energy-efficient windows. However, most low-income New Brunswickers are tenants who can't do much to protect themselves from power bill increases, since that depends on their landlords.

The Human Development Council recommends the implementation of energy efficiency programs for apartment owners to reduce heat loss and to reduce tenants' power bills.

What does the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Energy intend to do to protect low-income tenants from power bill increases?

**Hon. Mr. Legacy** (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister responsible for Energy; Minister responsible for the Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, thank you for the question. You understand that we have planning to do. We have great plans to deliver. We won't have all the answers now.

The goal is to offer financial assistance to make things more affordable for New Brunswickers immediately. There is still a program for getting efficient heat pumps. There are still legislative and technical problems to going as far as we want. A way to do what we



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want with the energy strategy we will develop over the coming months will need to be found. Thank you.

### ENVIRONMENT

**Ms. Mitton** (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, New Brunswick is a beautiful province with a vast natural landscape. That is one of the reasons people like to live here or visit as tourists. Despite this, New Brunswickers' health is threatened by pollution and environmental toxins.

New Brunswickers deserve to have a clean and healthy environment with clean air and drinking water; pollution and toxins must not make them sick. I have a simple question to ask the Premier. Yes or no, does she support New Brunswickers' right to a clean and healthy environment? If so, will she table a bill to guarantee the right to a healthy environment?

**Hon. Mr. LePage** (Restigouche West, Minister of Environment and Climate Change; Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the member on the other side of the House for the excellent question. If she has read the mandate letters, she knows that it is very clear in them that the Premier has given me the mandate of reviewing the *Clean Air Act* and the *Clean Water Act*. Those are the first two priorities she entrusted me with.

We have been hearing for years that changes are necessary in this regard and, under the skilled direction of my team, we and our partners and stakeholders will ensure these goals are reached as soon as possible to ensure, again, that New Brunswickers can breathe pure, clean air throughout the province. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

**Ms. Mitton** (Tantramar, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to clarify that I'm not only talking about clean air. That is very important, but it just scratches the surface. It's obvious that, under previous Liberal and Conservative governments, New Brunswickers did not have this right to a healthy environment. If we look around the province, we see examples of that. The explosion at the AIM Recycling Saint John facility contaminated the vegetables that people were growing in their backyards. Parlee Beach, for example, has been plagued by E. coli contamination caused by campground development, making the water unsafe to swim in. Need I go on? On top of this, 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.

My question is this: If this government won't introduce its own bill for a right to a healthy environment, will it support enshrining this right in a bill that the Greens bring to the Legislature? Thank you.



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[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. LePage** (Restigouche West, Minister of Environment and Climate Change; Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think our mandate letters indicate clearly and precisely what we must do over the coming months and the coming year. I am proud to hear that the member on the other side of the House wants to cooperate with us to come up with better solutions as quickly as possible.

This reflects an open-mindedness that we want to demonstrate and that I want to demonstrate as the Minister of Environment and Climate Change: working with all stakeholders. If that means working with you, an opposition party, then you will be welcome at the table.

That said, you are absolutely right. We have missed the boat on several environmental files over the past six years. I am committing myself today to working tirelessly to ensure that here, in New Brunswick, we live as healthily as possible starting today. Thank you.

[*Original*]

### EDUCATION

**Mr. Lee** (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Madam Speaker, thank you very much for this opportunity. Congratulations on your new appointment. I am proud to address this Assembly as a member of His Majesty's loyal opposition and as the MLA representing the riding of Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville. This is my first question period.

In a recent mandate letter from the Premier to the Minister of Education, one of the measurable outcomes that was stated was the "Improved Retention of Teachers and Staff". More specifically, that outcome speaks of a commitment to "Improve working conditions for all education professionals."

As a former educator who has spent over two decades in a variety of classroom settings and schools working with a variety of professionals and individuals, my question to the honourable minister is simply this: How does your department constitute and define better working conditions? What strategies and plans are in place to allow the proposed "support and wellness" to come to fruition?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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[Original]

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am thrilled to be standing before you with the privilege of answering this very important question. Yes, a big part of my mandate is to retain and recruit teachers. Yes, we absolutely need to think about the working conditions that our teachers are living in and working in every day. What I would like to do is to flip. We need to focus on retention first. When we focus on retention, we make sure that we have happy teachers in our classrooms. That becomes a really powerful tool for recruitment. That's how we're going to start this big project that we are going to be working really hard on over the next four years. Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

**Mr. Lee** (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the minister's response. Thank you again for the opportunity. In keeping with the measurable outcome of improved retention for teachers and staff, another strategy stated by the government was "financial support for those entering education professions" in order to ensure recruitment of new talent. Since New Brunswick teachers signed a collective agreement back in September 2023, my question for the honourable minister is simply this: Is she able to clarify what the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development means with respect to financial support? What new talents qualify to be the recipients of such support? Madam Speaker, it takes a village to raise a child.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for that very important question. I will say that one thing that's really important is to show our respect as we encourage new teachers to enter the profession and show our respect to current teachers who are now in the profession. I will allow our Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour to respond to the rest of that question.

## SCHOOLS

**Mr. Oliver** (Kings Centre, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm looking forward to working with the government as it attempts to fulfill its promises. I want to tell the Premier that I share her impatience for getting things done, but I know that the students and parents in Norton are also impatiently waiting for their school to reopen. As they wait for renovations to their school, students are now being bused to Sussex, which adds time to their day. Initially, they were advised that they would be back in the Norton school for the start of the second term, which is in January. They are now being told that they won't be back until next fall. Could the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure advise why that framework has changed and commit that the work will be done and that the school will



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reopen, as it is an integral part of the community? Please, Mr. Minister, let the students know what their government is doing for them.

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much to the member for Kings Centre for the question. I want to take the opportunity to stand and recognize the participation in this question period. I very much appreciate that the questions your team has asked have come from mandate letters that we've made transparent from our platform. I appreciate that you're doing the great work of accountability. You looked at what we've said and what we've committed to and asked clear questions about those statements and commitments. I want to recognize that and the work that you've done and to congratulate my team for its first question period under challenging circumstances.

*[Translation]*

I don't want to miss this opportunity to answer specific questions, either.

*[Original]*

The families and the students in Norton have to be frustrated and wondering what is going on. They've seen time delays. They've seen changes shift. We want to make sure that we can be really clear with the families that are impacted by the school in Norton. We will take that under advisement and get you a really specific answer to that question from the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

*[Translation]*

I thank everyone for their participation in question period today. I appreciate it.

*[Original]*

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): The time for oral questions has expired.

*[Translation]*

Question period is over.