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## November 27, 2024

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[Translation]

#### **TARIFFS**

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Good morning, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Thank you very much. I would like to start by congratulating Tim Houston on his electoral victory last night. Well done to Premier Houston.

Speaking of an Eastern Canadian Premier, I would like to ask... In my capacity as Leader of the Official Opposition, I would like to call on the Premier to call for an emergency meeting of the Coalition of Northeastern Governors and the Eastern Canadian Premiers in light of the existential threat tariffs could pose not only to New Brunswick but also to New England. Will the Premier commit to showing leadership and calling for this meeting?

[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, and thank you for the support you indicated yesterday for the work New Brunswick is going to have to do to defend our interests in the face of the tariffs the United States is suggesting. I believe there is a meeting of the eastern governors on the calendar, but it might not be as urgent as you're suggesting. I will absolutely take it away and see whether that is a date we can bump up in the interest of dealing with the threat in front of us. Thank you.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. I believe this meeting has to happen within days. Some 92% of New Brunswick's exports go to the United States, specifically that northeastern market, that New England market. We're talking about high-value products such as our petroleum products, our lobster products, our forestry products—everything. We are the province most reliant on exports in the country. Obviously, Ontario has a large export market, but on a per capita basis, we rely on that more than anyone.

I recognize that the Premier said there is going to be a meeting coming up, but I think the approach needs to be one of a bit of conciliation and collaboration. Can the Premier give me any sort of indication of how she will approach that? In the media yesterday, she talked about perhaps some retaliatory tariffs. I think we should start with diplomacy before that, so I would like to get her thoughts on that. Thank you.



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Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Absolutely, the piece the member opposite mentioned is a last resort. The first effort is to make sure we're aligned all across Canada and that we're putting forward a unified front to the United States to make sure they understand how integrated our economies are and how integrated products from New Brunswick are with the economies in Maine and the New England States, as you said. It is something we're taking very seriously. We've already had one first ministers meeting on it. We're having another one today, this time with the Prime Minister.

Outreach has started to specific governors in specific states that are close to New Brunswick's interests and aligned with what we're doing with the federal government. It is something we see as a serious threat. It is something we're taking very seriously. I will let you know as soon as I can get a date on the books for that coalition of Premiers and governors meeting.

#### [Translation]

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

### [Original]

That is much appreciated. Yes, considering the amount of collaboration we can build just by reaching out and working with those New England governors, I think we could really create a narrative where the American president could understand that not only are his moves going to hurt his own people but that they're also going to do so unnecessarily. Yes, he could remove these things, as the Premier indicated in the media yesterday, but unnecessary damage still could be avoided just by reaching out and doing the work the Premier has committed to doing. I am glad to hear about that.

#### **CARBON TAX**

I want to switch to the cost of carbon adjustor. Considering the Premier's belief in evidence-based decision-making, did she consult with the Minister of Agriculture? He was a former member of the EUB. Did she consult with him? He agreed with the approach that was taken by the EUB on the cost of carbon adjustor. Did she consult with him before she came up with her policy?

#### [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. We are looking forward to being able to give New Brunswickers that relief from the cost of gas, as the cost of living is something that is really continuing to challenge people, particularly right now.

Yes, our platform and our commitments were developed in consultation with all of our candidates, with members of our party, with members of the public, and with stakeholders, and we have certainly taken advantage of the expertise of the member and Minister of Natural Resources throughout these discussions. He has great expertise to share, and he has been part of the conversations from the moment of nomination all the way through, and actually even beforehand. Thank you very much for the question.

### [Translation]

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

#### [Original]

Yes, I did misspeak. I meant the Minister of Natural Resources, not the Minister of Agriculture. But considering that the Minister of Natural Resources had a professionally informed decision on the approach of the EUB and how we, as a province, should go forward with the cost of carbon adjustor, has he now changed his mind? Is his position different? What caused that to happen? The Premier has indicated that they had those conversations. So what Liberal criteria is the Minister of Natural Resources using to inform his decision to change his mind on the approach to the cost of carbon adjustor? I'd like to hear from the minister. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Herron** (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to answer this question. This is my first opportunity to congratulate the Leader of the Official Opposition in his new official role. I know that members on this side of the House wish the honourable member many, many, many years in that opposition role.

Having said that, the statutory requirement with regard to the cost of carbon adjustor was the result of changes in the regulatory framework that we have with the federal government and the provinces. Now, regulators are judicial bodies. They don't get to pick and choose which laws they actually adjudicate from, and they don't get to comment on whether a law is good or bad. They actually have a job. At that time, the board used the best available evidence that it had before it. Adjudicators can't comment as such. Elected officials like me certainly can.

I think there's an opportunity for us to have—



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Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Time, minister.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the comments of the Minister of Natural Resources. I certainly have been in opposition before. I've been in government, and I definitely plan on being in government again to make sure that we can look after the interests of New Brunswickers.

But the minister did not answer my question. He was advised by professionals on the best approach. He agreed publicly with that approach, and now, it looks as though he's backtracking. So, from being on the EUB to becoming a new Liberal Cabinet minister, there's been a switch in position. I would like him to be transparent with New Brunswickers and say, from an evidence-based perspective, how he went from agreeing with the EUB's direction to now agreeing with the government's direction. I know that should seem self-explanatory, but I think that it really would be instructive for New Brunswickers to hear from this minister in terms of how that process of facts-based decision-making has now turned into something quite different. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Herron** (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would refer the Leader of the Official Opposition to the decision on Matter 549, on that particular issue. I would encourage him to look at paragraphs 35 and 39 of that decision. At that time, the EUB made it very clear that it was working with the best available evidence it had before it and that it required a review within six months or earlier. We knew that the evidence put before the board at the time was not the most optimal and that a review was needed.

If we were in a nonregulated market, not only would you actually have a chance to compete margins down, you would also actually be able to compete costs down, including the costs of the adjustor. This is an opportunity for New Brunswickers to—

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Time, minister.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The updated review supported that as well, so this doesn't really... It's not coming across very well with what the minister is saying.

#### HOUSING

I want to pivot now to housing collaboration.

Yesterday, the Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation said that, when he was developing his housing plan, he "collaborated" with apartment owners and operators to find balance. I want to ask the minister this: Who did he meet with, and when did he meet with them?



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Hon. Mr. Hickey (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. Throughout the process, we were eager to consult with the New Brunswick Apartment Owners Association (NBAOA), the New Brunswick tenants' association, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), some of our mortgage broker associations, and our real estate association. We made sure that we had a full list of engagement, and our conversation was as it has been in this House. We're making sure we put in place the stability that the housing market needs now while creating the conditions to have the best development market that we can. Thank you.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The minister threw some names out, but he didn't give any dates. I ask the minister to please table the times and the people that he met with as minister to give some transparency to the people of New Brunswick on how these decisions were arrived at.

The minister's plan does not strike the balance that New Brunswickers need, and renters will be the ones suffering. This rent cap will handcuff small-scale investors in the rental market and make it so they aren't able to pay their mortgages. We're hearing from these people already. This will cause large companies to swallow these units, which will lead to a monopoly over our rental market. This is what happens when governments get involved in the free market. We have to ask ourselves this: In two, three, or four years, will this rent cap have made New Brunswickers better off? The answer is no. I ask the minister this: Did he consult with the New Brunswick Apartment Owners Association, and if he did, why is it publicly against this plan?

**Hon. Mr. Hickey** (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I said in my last response, we met with the New Brunswick Apartment Owners Association. We're committed to fostering a solid relationship with stakeholders. It's surprising for some of these stakeholders, given the track record we've had over the past couple of governments. However, we're committed to making sure that we're making decisions outside our offices in Fredericton and in communities that are impacted by these decisions. That's why we made sure that as a first effort in my taking on of this position, we met with as many stakeholders as we could. That's why we included the New Brunswick Apartment Owners Association.

New Brunswickers were clear that they wanted a rent cap. They gave it this size of a mandate. That's why we're moving forward with it as quickly as we can and why we made sure that consultations took place first.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, then maybe if the minister wants to get out of the boardrooms in Fredericton and out into the communities, he should listen to one of the apartment landlords in his riding who is not going to be able to make his mortgage payments now because of the rent cap that this government put in. What is the minister's solution? We can tell, right now... I mean, the Premier talked about



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having a free-market scenario and how things do better in a free market because it creates competition. We are going to see smaller, mom-and-pop operations, small businesses, being unable to pay their bills. They're going to be gobbled up by larger corporations. Then those larger operations could possibly displace people. Where are they going to go? We don't have the supply, Madam Speaker. There is a lack of supply in this province, and that's why the NBAOA is asking for property tax reform. What is this minister going to do when we see an imbalance in the market caused by the government's rent cap?

**Hon. Mr. Hickey** (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. There is a lack of supply in New Brunswick. Among other provinces, we're seventh in the country when it comes to getting new housing starts built now.

It means creating a more competitive development landscape, and that's why we've acted quickly to eliminate the PST on new multiunit developments. It's why we're taking on property tax reform in order to finally deliver the equity New Brunswickers deserve when it comes to their property taxes. It's why we're rebating 10% on the cost of electricity.

We know that tenants in New Brunswick need stability and that apartment owners, operators, and developers need a competitive market so that they can add supply. They haven't had it for the past six years, and we're ready to make sure they get it.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, the minister can read off his talking points all he wants. The reality is that we know a rent cap is not going to be an incentive to develop. We know a 10% PST cut on new builds is not going to incentivize these landlords, because their ability to have revenues is being curtailed. These are small businesses. They are small businesses that are actually going to provide more supply, because there is a shortage of supply. But they're not going to want to do it in a market where they can't actually get a return on their investment. We're very clearly seeing small operators not being able to pay their bills, and that is directly because of this rent cap. That is going to have an effect on renters. A rent cap makes people want to stay in their homes, but the second they leave, they're going to face a new market level because the new apartment they go to will have that new amount. How is the minister going to deal with this displacement?

**Hon. Mr. Hickey** (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We've talked a lot about stakeholder consultation. If we had a previous government that made sure it consulted with stakeholders, its members would know developers, operators, and landlords have been asking for the removal of the PST on new multiunit builds. On a new building going up in my riding in Saint John at a cost of \$50 million, it means a saving of \$5 million for developers that are seeing more costs and more increases. That's why we need to protect developers and make sure we're also doing the same for operators. That's why we've eliminated 10% on the cost of electricity. It's why we're going after property tax reform to



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ensure we have a balanced approach in dealing with the mom-and-pop operators that the member opposite is talking about. That's what we're after. We'll be consistent with that.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Again, the minister likes to read his talking points. He got a little bit of help from people whispering behind him to keep him going for the entire minute. The reality is that he has not been... After a short period of time, he thinks he has all the answers, and all of a sudden, because of a stroke of a pen, they're going to be able to fix this rental landscape in this province. They're not, Madam Speaker. This 10% on a new build is a help to developers, but it is not the answer. They have far more increasing costs they are trying to deal with. The cost of property taxation, the cost of insurance, the cost of materials, and the cost of labour—everything is going up. As much as they want to say this is going to be a solution, we are saying this is not the solution. It is going to hurt renters in this province in the long run, and we want to be on record saying that. I want to hear the minister get up and defend himself by saying everything is going to be just fine as a result of the rent cap. It's not.

Hon. Mr. Hickey (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I remind the Leader of the Official Opposition that developers are actually saving 15%. Because of this, we've signed on to make sure we get money off the federal government's table and into the pockets of New Brunswickers. We know these partnerships will get more built in New Brunswick. They'll get the developers off the sidelines, developers that sat and waited as we had the seventh most competitive development market in the country. We know what the Conservative housing landscape looks like. The supply is low, and rent increased by 38% over the past six years in New Brunswick. We're here to provide that protection. We're going to do it in a balanced way, and we're going to stick up for New Brunswickers while we do it.

#### **SNOW REMOVAL**

**Mr. Oliver** (Kings Centre, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, the countdown is on. Our first big snowstorm is coming very shortly. People in my riding have dug out their shovels, have their snowblowers ready, and have put up their snow fences. My point is this: People are ready, or they're getting ready.

Today, I would like to ask the minister of DTI whether his department is ready and the department's assets are available and ready to go to work for New Brunswickers. It seems as though every year, with the first snowfall, we find out there's broken equipment, a shortage of manpower, or both. Can the minister rise and assure the people of New Brunswick that his department is ready and able to combat whatever weather comes along?



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Hon. C. Chiasson (Grand Falls—Vallée-des-Rivières—Saint-Quentin, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, L): First off, I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question. Listen, winter is something that comes every year. It never comes as a surprise to DTI. I can assure the member opposite that DTI is as ready as it has ever been to handle the winter storms that are going to come. We know that there are going to be issues with equipment. We know that there are going to be issues with manpower. We're working on solving all those issues. We know that there's always a need to have spare drivers and spare equipment. We're working toward having those. But it's not the first time. As they would say, it's not our first rodeo. DTI is as ready as it's ever been. I can assure the member opposite that it will do as good a job as it has always done.

#### **EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS**

**Ms. Mitton** (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, when people are sick or their kids are unwell, they are having to choose between their health and a paycheque as they decide whether they can pay their bills and afford food. This harms their well-being and helps viruses spread. We can do better. Every worker deserves paid sick days, and they're long overdue.

The Leader of the Green Party tabled a paid sick leave bill that was studied in committee and by government before the election. The next step is for the Holt government to bring forward legislation to guarantee paid sick days for all New Brunswick workers. This is important policy for workers and also for public health, as it would reduce the strain on our health care system if people didn't spread their illnesses while at work. Will the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour bring forward a bill to amend the *Employment Standards Act* to guarantee all New Brunswick workers the right to paid sick leave?

**Hon. Ms. Townsend** (Rothesay, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister responsible for the Research and Productivity Council; Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you very much for the question, member opposite. I know that this has been an issue and a particular issue for your party, that it has been studied, and that there has been a report tabled. I have not had the chance to read the report in full, but I understand that, in the end, there was no consensus as to how to deal with sick leave. We do understand that it's an issue, and we're prepared to discuss it to see whether there are some compromises that can be made. It is an awful situation. However, other provinces have not mandated sick leave. We would be setting a precedent, so we would need to fully understand how we should implement this and what we should implement. Thank you very much.

**Ms. Mitton** (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, I am surprised to hear that the minister is a bit unsure about what her government wants to do about paid sick leave for New Brunswick workers. In June, when the previous government finally released its report on the Green Party Leader's paid sick leave bill, the Liberal critic at the time said that, if the



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Liberals won the election, they would put some form of paid sick leave into law, although they hadn't yet decided on the right number of days. This has already been studied by a legislative committee and through government stakeholder consultations. Though there wasn't consensus on every detail, it was clear that there was a need for paid sick leave. There are other provinces that have mandated paid sick leave. Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, and Quebec already have paid sick leave. Once again, will the minister commit to giving all New Brunswick workers access to paid sick leave?

**Hon. Ms. Townsend** (Rothesay, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister responsible for the Research and Productivity Council; Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, member opposite. You have mentioned the only three provinces that have paid sick leave. No other province has it. However, as I indicated, we would be happy to discuss the appropriate methodology with you and see whether there is a way forward on this very serious issue. Thank you.

**Ms. Mitton** (Tantramar, G): I would be glad to discuss this with the minister and to make sure that paid sick leave is brought in for New Brunswick workers.

I am going to move on to unpaid sick leave.

### [Translation]

Madam Speaker, getting sick mustn't lead to losing everything. Financial stress is a heavy burden to bear in addition to being sick. In 2022, the federal government extended eligibility for Employment Insurance sickness benefits to 26 weeks. However, New Brunswick workers only have the right to five unpaid leave days with job protection. Leave with job protection must be extended to 26 weeks. Will the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour implement this job protection for workers who get sick?

#### [Original]

**Hon. Ms. Townsend** (Rothesay, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister responsible for the Research and Productivity Council; Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act,* L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm sorry, I did not... I'm a unilingual Anglophone, for which I apologize. I didn't understand the question. Would it be amenable to the member opposite if I took that under advisement and provided an answer? Thank you.

#### **SNOW REMOVAL**

**Mr. Oliver** (Kings Centre, PC): Thank you, again, Madam Speaker. I do thank the minister for his response to my last question, although I'm not quite sure that it's reassuring to the people of New Brunswick. As I mentioned, people are either ready or getting ready for the



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winter. They depend on DTI to clear away the snow and keep the roads salted and sanded. On the matter of sand, there have been many discussions about having public sand available at the depots for citizens to access for their driveways and walkways.

Madam Speaker, I know that many people in my riding depend on this sand, and I suspect that many of my colleagues will agree. Their constituents depend on this sand for safety. Will the minister guarantee New Brunswickers that this practice of supplying sand will continue?

**Hon. C. Chiasson** (Grand Falls—Vallée-des-Rivières—Saint-Quentin, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, L): Certainly, sand and salt are important to create the traction that we need when we are in our vehicles or on foot. Obviously, the safety of the travelling public is of the utmost importance. As it pertains to private use of sand and salt, I'm not sure what the policy is or was, so I will look into that and get back to the member opposite with an answer.

#### **DAYCARE**

**Mr. Lee** (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today as the representative for Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville. The federal government permitted a modification to the Canada – New Brunswick Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement that permits more latitude to fund hundreds of additional spaces in for-profit childcare centres. This is a great opportunity because it will allow families and parents to continue to return to the workforce. The funding for these spots has been allocated, but not all the spots have been created.

My question is for the honourable Minister of Education. Is the call for proposals from parties interested in creating childcare centres and expanding existing ones still open? What is the government going to do to help create and facilitate these spaces? Logistically, what is the time frame the government is giving itself when it comes to assessing those applications? What specific factors are considered when reviewing a proposal? We need more spaces, and we need places for our children to go.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

Yes, we know that we have a lot of families who are waiting for spots in early childhood development and daycare spaces. We know that there are spaces that need to be built to welcome these children. We also have a lot of spaces that are already open and functioning and waiting for some financial support. So, yes, the answer is absolutely yes. We are going to be looking at how we will be able to use those funds to support families adequately and to make sure that daycare spaces are affordable for them.

In terms of a timeline, we've been meeting with a lot of operators, looking to see how we can make this happen for New Brunswick families. That is happening right now. The work



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is happening now. We are looking to get more funding available for spaces, in collaboration, with the funds that are available from the federal government.

**Mr. Lee** (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Many working families in New Brunswick are completely dependent on daycares, and many are using their own sick time to care for their children. Parents who are constituents of mine and one who is a teacher of several specialties have recently gone through a difficult time finding daycare for their child. They were proactive in using the portal, but there was a consensus that it wasn't always so helpful. Madam Speaker, my question to the honourable Minister of Education is this: With such an emphasis placed on teacher retention and recruitment but with a focus on daycare, what strategies are in place to help teachers who are parents with their daycare concerns? For some, better working conditions and reducing turnover rates has a direct correlation to safe and reliable daycare for their children.

#### [Translation]

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

### [Original]

Thank you for the question. Absolutely, yes, a big part of the lives of parents who are also professionals is finding appropriate daycare for their children. As we work hard to make spaces available for all families, part of that is also for teachers. We are working really hard at making this happen. I fully understand the frustration of what it looks like when you get up and get ready to go to work and, all of a sudden, you've got a child who is sick. It kind of throws a wrench into your whole day. We're very aware that this is an issue. We're working toward making daycare affordable and available for teachers and all professionals who need care for their children.

Specifically to teachers—

Oh, time. Okay, thank you.

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Oral questions have ended. We will continue.

