

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



November 28, 2024

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[*Translation*]

TARIFFS

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Good afternoon. Yesterday, I asked the Premier to convene an emergency meeting with the Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers. Can the Premier give us an update on her progress on this file?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much to the member opposite. Yes, we have sent a letter of request to the New England Governors and the Eastern Canadian Premiers for an emergency meeting. We want this meeting to take place as soon as possible. This letter is dated November 27.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the Premier for the response. Has the Premier considered communicating with Governor Mills in Maine, our closest neighbour in the United States?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the member opposite for his question. Yes, our government has already made this call to the Governor of Maine and we are waiting for our schedules to enable us to find time for this meeting.

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

[*Original*]

The reason I ask these questions, Madam Speaker, is because of the importance to both sides, as we've talked about in this House and in the media.

Hitting a little bit closer to home, have we had the opportunity to consider the impacts and what these tariffs could mean to New Brunswickers? I'm thinking specifically of the 4 000 refinery workers who work in my riding. I'm thinking of lobster fishermen who are employed by our seafood industry. I'm thinking about the thousands of New Brunswickers who bring home a paycheque from the forestry industry. What will the economic impact on New Brunswickers be? Has the Premier or perhaps her Minister of Finance and Treasury Board elucidated what that could be so that we could better understand the impact and therefore be better prepared to work with our neighbours south of the border and all the other Premiers in Canada to be able to show what kind of impact this could have? Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the question. I appreciate you

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taking the opportunity to elevate the importance of this issue. The tariffs are really critical to our province and to many of our businesses and the employees of those businesses that you have just described.

We have asked Finance to give us the detailed data in terms of impact. What we know is that \$12 billion worth of goods cross the border between New Brunswick and Maine. We know that we have a trade surplus with the U.S. that represents, I think... Let me get it right. We take in \$8 billion from them, and there's a \$7 billion... About \$15 billion worth of trade goes across between petroleum products, forestry products, and seafood products. Actually, we've reached out to those businesses as well to convene a table with the Canadian manufacturers and exporters to have those conversations about other things we can do to ensure the security of those jobs and the competitiveness of the companies should we not be able to mitigate these tariffs come the end of January. It is worth raising the importance of this issue. As soon as we get the details from Finance on the specific—

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you again, Madam Speaker, through you to the Premier.

[*Original*]

What did she learn from yesterday's meeting with the First Ministers? Obviously, in these kinds of situations, we have our closest neighbour and ally saying things such as: Well, we're going to put tariffs on you, and we're going to make life difficult in sectors right across this country. Oftentimes, it is a bit tempting to say: Well, I'm going to look after my own. Obviously, our Premier and the Premier of each of the provinces are going to want to look after their own interests. What I'm afraid of is that this may sort of devolve into people creating their own deals. This particular province might say: Hey, well, do you know what? If you want to do a 10% tariff, we can handle that, but we can't handle a 25% tariff. I want to make sure the Premier can explain to people what her approach is going to be to make sure that we don't get picked off. This is our largest trading partner. We need it. It needs us. We just need to make sure that we're unified. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the question. It's a serious one. It's one thing for us all to talk about being unified as Team Canada and going down to the U.S. to negotiate with one voice. It's another thing to see in action whether Premiers are taking matters into their own hands at the expense of other parts of our country.

Right now, I will reassure you that the Premiers have been very frank about the unique needs of their provinces and recognizing each other's unique needs. Some of us certainly



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share. Things such as petroleum exports are common between Newfoundland, Alberta, and others. The cultural industries exemptions are important to Quebec and New Brunswick. Many of us have seafood and agriculture issues that are shared with Manitoba and others. We've made sure that we understand each other's interests and that we are all going to advocate together for each other's interests, where they are common and where they are not. We're going to continue building relationships with every Premier in the country and with the federal government to make sure that alignment stays in place throughout these negotiations.

[*Translation*]

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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

[*Original*]

Now, just a little pivot to another topic, I want to move on to the government's target of 30 000 new rental units in the next six years. We understand that one of the major challenges of this goal is the shortage of workforce needed to build these units. The responsibility for this campaign commitment will fall largely on the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. Can she provide an update to this House on what steps she has taken to achieve this commitment? Can she give us any further direction on what we can expect to see in terms of the grant program or how much that may cost as we go forward? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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, for the question. Our government has been working diligently to get the tradespeople who are needed in New Brunswick in place.

Ever since the pandemic, we have had difficulty. Anybody who has bought, sold, or renovated a house knows the difficulty of getting skilled labour.

We have been proactive. We have identified particular skill sets in several areas for which we are willing to provide bursaries, scholarships, and other sources of support. That would include nursing as well. We have identified these areas that we will watch and we will grow. We will be sure that there are enough people in these trades to help us build whatever—

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Certainly, as the minister progresses through this work, I really would like

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to understand what that number will be in terms of the government expenditure in order to provide these bursaries and scholarships for these needed trades.

GOVERNMENT FINANCES

I want to pull back a little bit, because we have seen through the media that Canada is not going to offer compensation to offset provincial revenue losses to match the move on the GST. This means a \$62-million hit to New Brunswick's revenues. The Premier indicated last Friday that she was in conversations with the federal government to ensure that those costs would be covered but it appears that she has failed to do so. So, I will ask again: Is the Premier planning to rebalance the budget for New Brunswickers for this fiscal year, as she committed to in her platform?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the question. Our conversations with Ottawa continue in terms of the HST holiday that it has proposed, both in terms of the technicalities of the program and our agreement with them, as well as our broader relationship and all the ways in which the federal government funds the priorities of the provincial government. I am happy to reiterate our commitment to getting as close to a balanced budget as we can in light of the deficit that we acquired and the hit that it's looking as though we're going to be taking from the federal government.

We also expect to see economic activity increase from that program. We're looking to get a handle on how much it will increase. The projection is 0.8% of GDP at the national level. We want to see what that positive impact is going to look like for New Brunswick. Then we're going to continue to do everything we can to get as close to balance as possible this year. Our commitment to achieving balance in the years beyond that has been stated and made clear in this House many times. Thank you.

[Translation]

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

[Original]

Yes, but just as a juxtaposition with where we're going, we just talked about the threat that tariffs would mean to our province. What I'm really trying to get at is that we have a federal government that has made a decision that is now going to impact the provinces. At the same time, it's asking the provinces to work with it to ensure that we are united and able to withstand the threat that these tariffs pose. In their meeting yesterday, did the Premier take an opportunity to raise this with the Prime Minister, with any of the staff, or with anybody who's connected to it?

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At the end of the day, \$62 million is not something that we can absorb easily. It was unexpected. I appreciate the Premier's willingness to work with the federal government where possible, but we need her to stand up and say: If you're going to do something that impacts New Brunswickers, we, as a government, are going to oppose that.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. I appreciate that you can see the nuance of this because, obviously, our relations with the federal government are key. Those relations have a serious impact on our province, as has been demonstrated, and they also have the ability to support us on some of the particular priorities that we have put forward. We want to manage the relationship in a way that benefits New Brunswickers.

The one good thing about this \$62-million program is that New Brunswickers are going to pay less tax on things that are important to them at a time when they are under a crunch. I don't want to be the one who stands between New Brunswickers and a 15% tax cut in December and January when they could really use that benefit. We're going to find other ways to make it work.

Certainly, the seriousness of the impact of the tariffs on New Brunswick's economy made that the ultimate focus of our meeting yesterday. That's where we focused all our energy, because that impact will be far greater than the \$62 million from the tax holiday. We didn't get distracted from the objective of that meeting.

We were focused on talking about how to prevent the tariffs.

CANADA POST

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, PC): Madam Speaker, I am dismayed at the response of Social Development to the Canada Post strike and its impact on the people waiting for their cheques. On November 20 of this year, following the announcement of Canada Post strike action, postal workers across the country agreed to deliver cheques to our communities as per the socio-economic cheque memorandum of agreement. CUPW has revealed that, despite this commitment, only three provinces accepted, and New Brunswick was not one of them. People were advised on November 27 by the Department of Social Development that, if they did not have direct deposit in place, they must make arrangements to collect their cheques at the regional office. We're talking about serving our vulnerable populations who struggle with transportation and financial insecurity. How could the department ignore this reality?

Hon. Ms. Miles (Hanwell-New Maryland, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, L): Madam Speaker, through you to the member opposite, thank you for the question and thank you for your concern. I feel it as well. The memo that went out advising all staff indicated that, as you

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said, direct deposit was the first option. If folks didn't have that, they could arrange to pick up at the central office. And you're right, transportation is an issue in the province for not only our vulnerable folks but also a lot of other folks. So accommodations will be made in the central office to make sure those cheques can get into the hands of folks who need and deserve them. I've had this conversation with staff. I will take it under advisement, and we will see what more we can do.

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her response. For some in my riding, getting their cheques means finding a way to get from Juniper to Woodstock or Perth-Andover—that is 71 km or 53 km—and then back home again. Or if they live in Plaster Rock, that means driving 39 km and back. If they're in Nackawic, they have the choice of 64 km to Fredericton or 47 km to Woodstock and back home. As I said, we're talking about serving vulnerable populations who struggle with transportation and financial insecurity. Gas costs money. We all know that, which is why it causes me to shake my head. I hope the minister can explain to those clients what her department was thinking in creating this plan, and I hope they can come up with a more sensitive contingency plan.

Hon. Ms. Miles (Hanwell-New Maryland, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and again, thank you to the member opposite. Transportation, as I said earlier, is a struggle across all communities. It is something that has been ongoing for a very long time, and it is something that needs to be addressed. Folks experience things differently, and we have to make sure we're treating all folks on an individual basis. Everyone's needs look a bit different. As I said earlier, I will go back to our department. We've had this conversation. We'll make sure that those individual needs are met and that no one goes without the cheque they deserve and need, especially during a strike that happened through no fault of their own. Thank you, again.

HIGHWAYS

Ms. Conroy (Miramichi East, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to ask the Minister of Transportation a question on behalf of the motoring public of Miramichi, particularly the people of Miramichi East and Miramichi Bay-Neguac. The previous MLA of Miramichi Bay-Neguac worked very hard on the northern alternate route since the day after he was elected. He worked with the city, he listened to the people, and he understood that the traffic congestion on the King George Highway had to be reduced. Last June, we were very pleased when it was announced that the consultant had been engaged to begin engineering work for the new road. Would the minister please share with the House and the people of Miramichi the results of the engineering and design work?

Hon. C. Chiasson (Grand Falls—Vallée-des-Rivières—Saint-Quentin, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, L): Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Although I don't have the information you're looking for, what I can tell you is that

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promises were made about a northern bypass to help alleviate congestion while the Centennial Bridge was being resurfaced. But what that MLA failed to say was that the northern bypass is a three-year project and the Centennial Bridge project will be completed in that time frame. So, it is kind of making a bit of a moot point to say we're going to make a northern bypass to relieve congestion while the Centennial Bridge is being redone. It would not be completed in time. The Centennial Bridge will be completed before the northern bypass would be. But I'll get you the information on where that project stands, and I'll get back to you with that.

Ms. Conroy (Miramichi East, PC): Thank you to the minister opposite. As we know, the Centennial Bridge is due for a temporary closure soon, so people have a good reason to express their concerns. We'd also like to know when that closure is going to happen.

This past February, the Miramichi city council unanimously voted to reaffirm the city's support for an alternate northern route to be built before the Centennial Bridge closes for extended periods. Madam Speaker, if the government stalls or cancels this work, as it has already done in the past with other projects, it will impact public safety. Everyone in Miramichi knows that whenever the traffic is tied up on the King George Highway, it causes problems for everyone. So, I'm sure other Miramichi colleagues would like to join me in asking this: Where is the file now? Can we see the work being done to the construction as soon as possible? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. C. Chiasson (Grand Falls—Vallée-des-Rivières—Saint-Quentin, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, L): To the member opposite, thank you again for the question. I sympathize with the people. Some traffic congestion will be created next summer when the bridge closes to start the resurfacing of the deck.

There is an alternate route that has been identified. If I'm not mistaken, 11 projects have been completed along that alternate route to try to keep traffic moving as smoothly as possible.

As I stated earlier, the northern bypass is going to be a multi-year project. At this point, I'm not sure that we could even complete a northern bypass by next summer. As a matter of fact, it is going to be very difficult. What we're trying to do is mitigate the traffic that will occur as best we can. People will have to take alternate routes. At this point, that's where that project stands. Again, I'll get back to you with specifics on the actual northern bypass and when it could actually be completed.

GOVERNMENT FINANCES

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): Madam Speaker, with the federal government's recent announcement of the HST reduction that is to take place starting on December 14, there are significant implications for New Brunswick's economy, consumer spending, and overall fiscal health. This reduction could influence how much money

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residents spend and how much revenue the province will collect. In light of this change, the provincial government will have to consider either adjusting its portion of the HST to align with the federal reduction or offering additional relief to New Brunswickers. Furthermore, given the potential decrease in provincial revenue, what measures are being considered by the Minister of Finance to ensure that essential services such as health care, education, and infrastructure continue to be adequately funded?

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 for the question. I feel as though it has been asked, and we've had this discussion for a little bit. What we're doing is managing our resources. In the discussions last week, the Leader of the Official Opposition brought up the fact that we made promises and commitments during the campaign—you did also—for an HST rebate. On the question of whether he would have kept that rebate if fortunes had been different, his answer was: We would've managed. That is the same answer we're giving. We will manage. Sometimes there are surprises that come up. Sometimes there are planned items. The only thing that I can say and be assured of is that, despite whatever has happened so far, even if it wasn't expected, it is much less than the \$225-million hit on the GST that a 1% rebate on the HST would have had—much less. Thank you.

LAND USE

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The 18 000-ha area of forest and rivers of the former Tracadie firing range has been cited as one of the areas of the province that is richest in archaeological Mi'kmaw sites, totalling 69 in number. While they have been identified, they have never been studied. The Mi'kmaw chiefs who make up the Mi'gmawe'l Tplu'taqnn Incorporated (MTI) have requested that an Indigenous knowledge study be done before any decisions are made about the future use of this land, or, in other words, during a moratorium on further deforestation and development.

Last year, the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and MLA for Tracadie said: There is no doubt about it; we need to put a stop to that development. When will the Minister of Indigenous Affairs initiate the study that has been requested of those sites on the old firing range?

[*Translation*]

Hon. K. Chiasson (Tracadie, Minister of Indigenous Affairs, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise in the House for the first time as Minister of Indigenous Affairs. Thank you very much for the question. Indeed, the military camp file is extremely important for our region. According to a report published this week by VALORÈS, we should be managing the land better.



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I have made myself clear on the subject of the military camp. The previous government went ahead with developing blueberry fields without necessarily doing the right consultation, including with First Nations. Our duty will be to revisit all of that a bit and ensure that the consultation is done well. We must ensure that we have social acceptance for this project. Thank you very much.

[*Original*]

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Madam Speaker, that doesn't quite answer the question about doing the study requested by the Mi'kmaq.

[*Translation*]

The 18 000 ha of the former Tracadie firing range have been used since time immemorial by the Mi'kmaq of the region and by generations of Acadian families. People who live in Esgenoôpetitj, a community located 25 km from the former firing range, and in Tracadie can cooperate to manage the use of these lands sustainably to benefit both of their communities.

To do so, the government must place a moratorium on deforestation and the development of blueberry fields, as the Premier and her Minister of Indigenous Affairs promised before the last election. Will the Premier honour her commitment and put a moratorium in place?

Hon. K. Chiasson (Tracadie, Minister of Indigenous Affairs, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Obviously, during the election campaign, we talked a lot about blueberry fields. What was difficult for us was to find out exactly what had been done before. The previous government wasn't very transparent about what it had done concerning leases and its discussions with First Nations.

Obviously, we must kind of revisit the work done by the former Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries to understand exactly who signed the leases. What exactly is the surface area we are talking about? Did the First Nations show any interest in developing the military camp?

I'm doing this work now with the Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries. We hope to get the good answers and relevant information that the people of my region are expecting. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. New Brunswick's Crime Severity Index is the second-highest east of Manitoba. The previous government—the Progressive Conservative government—made investments in public safety. Can the



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minister explain how he's going to invest in public safety knowing it isn't even in his mandate? Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, Minister of Public Safety, Minister responsible for La Francophonie, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for his question. We take the issue of crime very seriously. Investment in the fight against crime in New Brunswick will not be reduced. I can reassure the member about that.

The member knows full well how the department functions because he was executive assistant for a Minister of Public Safety. He knows these are sensitive issues. It's very important. I can guarantee you one thing: We're not only going to maintain the previous government's investments, but we're also going to be even more proactive. We want to go into communities to do promotion and to caution people. We also want to be sure we have cooperation from citizens because this is a societal project we must all work on together. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Is the minister concerned about the severity index? It is the highest east of Manitoba. I think he should explain how he's going to address it. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, Minister of Public Safety, Minister responsible for La Francophonie, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm trying very hard not to blame the previous government, which was in office for six years, Madam Speaker. That index went up over the past six years. It has never been as high in the history of New Brunswick as it was over the past six years, Madam Speaker.

However, as I said, what we can do to help New Brunswickers is to go see them in the communities. I already have meetings scheduled with people everywhere. My colleague from Shediac—Cap-Acadie and I are arranging meetings. Some meetings will be in Fredericton, and others will take place elsewhere in the province. Do you know why, Madam Speaker? For the first time in a long time, we have a government that represents every region of New Brunswick. We will go see people. If the member isn't happy, he can come to my office and I will show him the plan. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. This government didn't talk. We invested money, real money. How much money are they going to invest in public safety? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, Minister of Public Safety, Minister responsible for La Francophonie, L): Madam Speaker, I'm working very hard again. This afternoon, the official opposition will introduce a motion about SCAN, the investigative unit responsible for enforcing the *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act*.

I want to make sure everyone here really understands what it's about. In 2019, while in office, the Conservative government cut the funding for SCAN by 75%, Madam Speaker. Now, the Conservatives are introducing a motion and trying to convince people they succeeded in solving the issue of crime.

We are certainly intrigued. I said we will continue to invest, and our department is committed to doing that. What's more, communities will also be invited to get involved. The Conservative government witnessed an historic rise in crime during the past six years. It will not be easy to solve the issue of crime. I'm not trying to convince you that I have a magic wand. It will not be easy. We all need to work together on this societal project. To get there, various New Brunswick communities need to be visited to promote this. That's what we will do.

Again, if the member opposite has good ideas, he can come see me. I'm open to having a meeting. He knows where the department office is, because he has already worked there. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Last Saturday, on the front page of the *Daily Gleaner*, there was a photo of a young mother or a future mother with the title "Scary and stressful". That's how future mothers are feeling about the closure of the obstetrics department at the Upper River Valley Hospital.

If the Minister of Health doesn't act, the situation will remain scary and stressful until the end of January. What will the minister do to reassure these young mothers about the future? What has he done since I asked him the question last week? And what does he plan on doing to solve this problem before the end of January?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, thank you very much for the question. Yes, this has been a perpetual problem. The obstetrics services had to be closed in the Upper River Valley Hospital in many instances before we took over government. Instances continue to happen, and that is very distressing to me. I saw that picture in the paper. I've spoken to women who have had to drive to other

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areas. It's a very important issue. I work very closely with the RHAs that govern this area. In fact, I have friends who are obstetricians who are going up there to help.

Right now, as you know, there is a shortage of anesthesiologists. We are working hard to provide incentives for anesthesiologists to come and work in that community. We have the rest of the team there except for that one player right now. We are working very closely with our RHA to get those people to serve that community. It has had that need for a long time. Thank you.

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Question period has expired. I recognize the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour on a follow-up answer.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

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 very much. I am pleased to rise and provide a response to a question from the member for Tantramar that I took under advisement yesterday, a question on the topic of sick leave. Her question was specifically about guaranteed unpaid sick leave. Under the current legislation, New Brunswick workers are guaranteed five days of job protection.

Madam Speaker, as Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, I will always be open to improving the *Employment Standards Act*. Any changes will be evidence-based and will follow consultation. As minister, it's my responsibility to strike a balance between New Brunswick workers and employers, which means considering both sides.

With respect to unpaid sick leave, the federal government has extended employment insurance (EI) eligibility for sickness benefits to 26 weeks.

The department is exploring changes that would align better with this change and with how we can better protect workers with critical illnesses. I do believe that there is an opportunity to make changes related to job protection during critical illness. This is something that we are considering. If the evidence is clear that it is the best move, then we will be moving in that direction. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Translation]

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the minister for her answer. What I said yesterday was that financial stress is a heavy burden to bear when we're also suffering from an illness. A person's income shouldn't determine their state of health, but it does. It's a key social determinant of health.



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I am not the only one to request this change. The Canadian Cancer Society has asked the provincial government to extend protected job leave to 26 weeks to align with what's happening at the federal level.

Therefore, I'm asking the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour how long New Brunswickers will have to wait before getting this job protection when they are 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 for the question, member opposite. As soon as possible. Thank you.