

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



December 13, 2024

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[Translation]

CARBON TAX

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

[Original]

To continue with our question about the carbon adjustor, we've established that the current government knew when the bill was introduced in 2022 that passing the 4.5¢ per litre on to retailers would be a hardship for retailers. Many hours were spent debating that bill, including questions from the Premier and the member for Tracadie-Sheila, at which point the Liberals were clearly told about the impact this would have on retailers. There was lots of debate on the bill. In fact, during the committee process, the member for Tracadie-Sheila said, and I quote:

there's obviously an impact on small business.

He went on to say:

I don't want to be here to defend the retailers, but at the same time, I don't want to see them get dinged

The Liberals knew all this information when they made their campaign promise. In my comments yesterday during question period, I said that, either the government members didn't do their work as opposition members, or they never talked to the retailers during the development of their promise. Knowing all this, why did the government make the commitment when its members knew what removing the cost of carbon adjustor would do to small retailers?

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. Memory is a funny thing. Sometimes, you forget a few things. Yesterday, as the member opposite was trying to formulate the concept that this bill was well organized and well planned out by the PC Party a few years ago and that we didn't look at it, somebody sent me an article. I had forgotten about this article. It's from September 18, 2023, and by Jacques Poitras. The headline is "Province doesn't know where extra carbon charge on gas is going". It goes on further.

It's a mystery to N.B. officials whether 'adjustor' ends up with retailers or refinery

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—the former government—

has no idea whether an extra six-to-seven-cent charge on a litre of gasoline is ending up where it's supposed to go.

I guess my memory might be failing, but maybe the member opposite is also forgetting a few things.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): I remember a government that said it was going to keep all its promises, and that didn't last very long, Madam Speaker.

The government is now trying to pivot and say: We didn't know. The reality is that they did know, and they did it anyway, with many opportunities to pull back from this before now. While I give the government credit for changing its position at the eleventh hour, all of this was completely unnecessary. Now, it has dashed the hopes of New Brunswickers when it promised a 4.5¢-per-litre decrease that is not going to materialize.

This is not an example of a government listening. The government members knew all along. Now that they have been caught, they're trying to back away by sending this to law amendments. We in the Legislature are going to spend more time and resources covering ground we already covered two years ago. Why not just pull the bill? Does this government think that spending more time on a bill it has no intention of passing is a good use of time in this Legislature?

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. It's great to have a follow-up question. Sometimes, one minute is just not enough time to get the information out.

That article I mentioned last time was based on a public accounts committee meeting.

At public accounts, we all know that different parties have questions to ask, but, in that specific case on that day, it was a member of the PC government who was asking questions to the officials. We had PC members of the government asking government officials: How does the tax adjustor work? We had members of the PC government asking government officials: Where does the money go? We had government officials telling PC government members: We don't know. How organized were the PCs then? There were no answers to those questions, and we still don't have the answers now. We're going to bring it to committee and keep having that discussion because it wasn't clear then and it isn't clear for a lot of you now.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is clear that the government members are struggling to try to change



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the narrative here because it's very clear that they knew what this would do to retailers. For the sake of politics, they did it anyway. It's clear that, even though they promised that they would use evidence-based decision-making when making this promise, the evidence is that they knew what impact this would have on retailers because the previous government consulted with those retailers. This government had time to consult with retailers before and during the election. Why are they saying that they're only hearing from retailers now?

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. When we went to public accounts, it was clearly indicated by the officials that one of the reasons we didn't have this information was that it's private information. Industry was not saying where the money was going. It didn't want to. The difference was that the government of the time, the Higgs government, said: We're going to put the adjustor on, and we're going to give enough, 6¢ or 7¢, to cover it. Industry didn't feel the need to give the information. We came in and brought Bill 4 forward, and the same industry members now say: We're going to give you the details. We're going to show you exactly how it goes.

Now, I don't need to keep this information all to myself. We can share it. I hear the doubts from my colleagues across the aisle and on this side who are saying: Is it really that bad? Is it really going to hurt that much? Well, everyone is going to have the opportunity to ask their questions in committee. It's coming.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, it's clear. The Liberals are already resorting to trying to look back in history after an election because they are so desperate. They cannot fulfill the earliest and easiest promises that they made. Those promises were very clearly major components of their campaign, and the Liberals are backing away from them already, after they said they would fulfill all their promises. They can try to do a bit of a history check and try to deflect and defuse the situation, but the reality is that, every single time a New Brunswicker goes to fill their tank, there is 4.5¢ per litre that the Liberals said they would remove but are not removing.

Now we're going to move to a deregulated system where that cost is simply going to go straight through to consumers without them even seeing it. They can try to fool this House, Madam Speaker, by talking about previous historical events, but they are not going to fool New Brunswickers at the pump every time they fill their tank. The Liberals didn't remove the 4.5¢ per litre.

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. I don't think there was a question, but that's okay. I'll take another minute. Since we want to talk about the past, let's talk about the future. Since bringing up this bill and sending it to law amendments, I have been

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contacted by a lot of retailers and retail associations. They want to come in, want to present their case, and want to talk to legislators about this carbon tax adjustor.

There is a false narrative here that there was a conflict with these people. They called us when we were looking for solutions. They gave us the information, and we had very productive meetings. I think we'll see that there might be potential to find some better solutions. Maybe it is deregulation. Nobody's sure yet. They're asking questions, and we're asking questions. We need to do the research and get that done, but for now, we're going to go on the carbon tax adjustor and get the information in committee.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. What is clear to New Brunswickers is that the government members should have done this work already. The fact that they are trying to slow this thing down now means that they didn't do the work beforehand. They are responsible for the choices that they made. They said that they were going to pay all nurses a retention bonus. They said that they were going to balance the books in every year of their mandate.

They said that they were going to remove 4.5¢ from the price per litre of gas. They haven't done it. That is the point.

The member opposite can try to obfuscate and skate, saying: Well, you know, we're going to take a look at this; we don't know where we're going to go. The government members said they had answers. People gave them that confidence. So the message here, heading into a season when people are supposed to be feeling good and confident about the things that are going on in their lives, is that we have a government that is teetering and already having to resort to weak tactics. The government members are talking about what the former government did because they can't defend their own decisions. Will they defend—

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. There wasn't a question there within the time, but I'll take the opportunity to highlight how we have delivered on our commitments. On our third day in government, we amended Regulation 84-20. Immediately after that, we brought forward the rent cap legislation that is going to pass today. We put legislation on the floor of this House to remove the 4¢ per litre on gas that the members opposite put on the people of New Brunswick. We heard from the members opposite that they didn't want it to come forward, didn't want it to come forward, and they ragged the puck on the rent cap debate so that we didn't have sufficient time to get it done. What should have happened on January 1 has been pushed out by two months or maybe three while we look at the best way to do this, which could include deregulation. We've also delivered on our commitment to take the tax off multiunit builds. We've delivered on our commitment to show respect to nurses. So this government is delivering on its promises and undoing the harm that the former government did to the people of New Brunswick.

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NURSING HOMES

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the throne speech, we heard about the great things that the government is doing for seniors in our province, and I'm glad we are doing those great things. This past summer alone, I hosted seven Spotlight on Seniors workshops in Carleton-Victoria. These information forums were initiated by the former Minister responsible for Seniors and the current member for Saint Croix.

[Translation]

Our government was the first to recognize the need for a department solely to look after the seniors' file. Under the Conservative government, the remarkable work of Nursing Homes Without Walls was expanded to 20 sites. We increased the Low-Income Seniors' Benefit and the comfort and care allowance for dependants.

[Original]

As of June 20, 2024, there were 1 044 people on the nursing home wait list, and 513 were still waiting in hospitals. I had a call from Sabrina, whose dad is awaiting placement. How long can she expect to wait to have those answers?

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister responsible for Seniors; Minister responsible for Women's Equality, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, I would like to thank the member opposite for the question. This is the very first time I have risen to answer a question. Thank you, everyone, and thank you to the member opposite for the question.

We really care about where our seniors live. More specifically, I'm meeting with seniors throughout the province; we have already started our work. Since the first days of our mandate, we have been meeting with people.

We will certainly be doing more promotion of the Nursing Homes Without Walls initiative. We have highlighted it in our presentations, and we really want to promote this nursing home model everywhere. Our objective is to make sure everyone can continue to live in their home surrounded by people who will take care of them. We really care about this mandate, and we will certainly be moving forward with it. Thank you very much for the question.

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[Original]

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, PC): Thank you for that update. The previous government recognized the immediate need to create 619 new nursing home beds and 400 memory care beds. As of the spring of this year, 407 had been awarded. Can the minister confirm that, under her watch, this government will commit to completing Phase 4 of the plan, which includes Oromocto, Bathurst, Bouctouche, Moncton, Mount St. Joseph Miramichi, and Miramichi? Meanwhile, Sabrina's dad is still waiting.

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 so much for the question. As my colleague said, we are so grateful to now have this department that recognizes seniors. We are grateful for the work that we are doing and grateful for the work that folks in the nursing home sector are doing. To the question from the member opposite, this is a priority for us, and it is something that we are going to look at moving forward.

We're going to look at how we can best work with nursing homes in all sectors, including long-term care and in Horizon and Vitalité, to determine the best process and the best strategy moving forward in order to support all of our seniors. We want seniors to be able to stay at home or be able to go to recognized spaces where folks are dignified and get the respect that they deserve and where families know their loved ones will be respected. Thank you.

COURTS

Mr. Weir (Riverview, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Justice. It concerns the need for efficiency and for creating an effective court system while respecting the right to a speedy trial. The previous government worked to fill vacancies in our judiciary system and the Crown Prosecutors Office. In the spring of 2024, working with various departments, MADD Canada, stakeholders, the opposition, and this minister, the previous government brought forward immediate roadside suspension, which is an administrative punishment for impaired driving offences. This option is now available to police in New Brunswick for impaired driving offences. In part, this was introduced to help alleviate some of the pressures on our court system. Does the minister support this new option, or will he change it?

[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 very much for the question. I'm going to answer one part of the question, which is really important. We're talking here about impaired driving.

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The new measure is good news for everyone. My colleague from Moncton Centre had proposed amendments to the bill that was tabled by the former Minister of Public Safety. This will go into effect on January 1. The result of this measure is very simple: It gets impaired drivers off the roads. The process will be much faster.

At the same time, it will relieve congestion in the courts, as they are spending a lot of time on these cases. This time could be spent on other files. This kind of measure has been proven to work in British Columbia and Manitoba. It will work in New Brunswick.

Also, since the holidays are upon us, I'm taking the opportunity to say to you: If you have a drink, make sure you don't drive. Again, thank you for the question. Thank you for doing this work. We're keeping up the good work. That's all. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Mr. Weir (Riverview, PC): Thank you for the response. Thank you, Madam Speaker. With our courts still struggling with the caseloads of judges and with the very real concern this brings to the Jordan rule, other efficiencies should be considered. To facilitate a more efficient use of judges' time, would the minister consider moving our traffic court to the evening and having it be adjudicated by officers other than judges, as is done in some other jurisdictions? These officers would take the form of adjudicators or something such as special masters in family court. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services; L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for this question. First, with respect to this new impaired driving legislation, that's going to take a huge chunk of cases out of the court system. It's going to have an immediate roadside suspension component, meaning that all those cases will not have to go through court. That will free up a lot of time.

There are a couple of initiatives brought forward by the previous government that we continue to work on. The first concerns hearing officers, who have been in place since December 1, for child protection matters. It's a new adjudication process that we fully support. We're continuing to implement that. That's going to free up the time of three judges in the Court of King's Bench. The other one concerns justices of the peace for the Provincial Court. We're going to bring those on really quickly. The legislation was passed in the last session. We're looking to hire those. That's going to bring bail hearings out of the Provincial Court and to the justices of the peace. Again, that will free up court time. We're going to continue looking at other initiatives that we can implement to increase access to justice in a more efficient matter.

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FARMING

Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know why the feelings of the Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries were hurt yesterday. It's because he hasn't been asked any questions, so I thought maybe I should give him one today as a Christmas gift.

The role that our farmers play is so critical to the health and wellness of New Brunswickers. They grow our food and strengthen our economy. Being from the dairy capital of the Maritimes, I look forward to ensuring that the hard-working people of the agricultural community in my riding and across the province are not forgotten. The previous Minister of Agriculture negotiated an AgriRecovery package for farmers with the federal government.

This funding was put in place to assist with losses incurred during the period of excessive moisture, yes, in the 2023 season. With the 2024 harvest now over, farmers are waiting for this money. Their applications have been submitted, but they are waiting for these dollars. Can the minister please provide an update on this file?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Finnigan (Kent North, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you also to my colleague in the opposition for her question. I want to assure the House that I'm not going to give a course on tomatoes today. We're going to move on to another file.

Obviously, because the 2023 harvest was quite difficult for potato producers in the northern part of the province, AgriRecovery was established. Letters were sent out, and we're still waiting for farmers to submit their applications to us. I think \$25 million is available under this initiative. We will be pleased to help farmers, because the year in question was very difficult for them. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the minister for his response. I was most fascinated by his lessons on tomatoes yesterday.

Farmers need to know what's coming, and they need effective communication from this new minister because agriculture hasn't exactly been on the radar with previous Liberal governments. We remember when the people of our agricultural community came to this Legislature under a former Liberal government for which the Premier worked. Those farmers were thrown out when they came looking for some answers, so I will do my best to ask questions for them. We know farmers faced extremely challenging growing conditions

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a couple of years back, as the minister referred to. Back to this AgriRecovery package, does the minister have any data to share on the 2024 growing season?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Finnigan (Kent North, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't yet have the data, but from what I hear from producers, last season was pretty good.

As for listening to producers, the mandate letter that the Premier gave me asks us to be on the ground. I'm more comfortable on the ground than here in the House. I like to go meet producers. I will listen to our Premier's good advice; I will be on the ground and I will get my boots dirty. I will have dirt under my nails, because that's how I'm most comfortable. So, to answer your question, I want to say that I will certainly listen to producers. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HEALTH CARE

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

[*Original*]

I have a question for the Minister of Health. When he was running, I'm quite sure the Minister of Health didn't understand that not all nurses were going to get a \$10 000 bonus, as was stated in the campaign, however. In New Brunswick, we're still missing specialists. The Upper River Valley Hospital labour and delivery unit is still scheduled to be closed until the end of January. I brought this up a couple of weeks ago. I still haven't heard any news on what's being done, on what plans are in place to recruit more specialists, and on not closing labour and delivery at the Upper River Valley Hospital until the end of January. I would like to know what the minister has been doing since I first brought it up. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Thank you very much for the question, member opposite. We have been working on this file collectively with the CEO of Horizon and specialist groups. In fact, one of the members opposite gave me a name out of the blue. This is somebody who might be willing to do anaesthesia in the Upper River Valley. This is sort of a local person.

We continue to look for those folks. Part of the difficulty is that we sometimes have a shortage of nurses, sometimes have a shortage of obstetricians, and sometimes have a shortage of anesthesiologists. It's hard to fill all those roles at the same time. Right now, we find ourselves in the position where our weak link is anesthesiology. We continue to look hard for anesthesiologists. Once we acquire one, you folks and the community will be the first to know. We haven't succeeded thus far. When we do, if we do, we will let you and others



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know, because it's in our citizens' best interests and pregnant women's best interests to have services provided in time at their place of—

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, it is in expecting mothers' best interest to know what is going to happen and to have a labour and delivery unit available an hour closer to where they live, as opposed to having to travel all the way to Fredericton, especially given the weather from yesterday with the power outages, the trees down, and the difficulties that weather creates. We are in the winter season, so that makes it more difficult.

There doesn't seem to be much succession planning happening when I see a surgeon who does vascular surgery at the DECH retiring with nobody to replace him. I want to know what the minister is doing to create succession plans to replace the specialists, family doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals in our province. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Thank you very much. Those are very appropriate questions. In fact, it is worse than what you are describing when we don't allow for women to deliver at the Upper River Valley Hospital. We have First Nations that depend on this resource. To say they can all go to the DECH is an even harder burden for First Nations, so we are very concerned about that.

We have had difficulties recruiting for vascular surgery in Fredericton for a long time. We have had a doctor working in a solo practice there for many years. We have tried to work with him. As was discussed earlier, we have tried to enhance the surgical facilities at the DECH so that more people will want to go there and do vascular surgery. Getting specialists to some of our regional hospitals continues to be a perpetual problem.

Your point is well taken. We continue to work with the community at the Chalmers hospital in Fredericton and in the Upper River Valley to get specialists to come to these communities. Our local people do a good job at recruiting as well. Thank you.

NURSES

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. As we are all aware, health care is in crisis right across this country. New Brunswick is certainly no different. We know the Premier's retention bonus plan to show appreciation to nurses is certainly well deserved. Nurses work very hard across New Brunswick. The problem with the plan... In the campaign, we heard from the Premier that it was going to be for all nurses. Then we went from all nurses to some nurses. Then, I think, we went back to most nurses. Yesterday, I heard the Premier say nurses in nursing homes would now be part of that retention bonus.

We really need some clarity around this, Madam Speaker. I am thinking about nonprofit nursing homes and private nursing homes that are not necessarily part of Horizon or

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Vitalité. Can the Premier please clarify whether we are back to all nurses or some nurses or whether we are willy-nilly with who gets what? Can she please clarify whether “all nurses” means all nurses including nurses in nursing homes?

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. I am pleased to hear you reiterate our shared views that nurses are doing critical work and that we need to retain them and respect them.

Nurses in nursing homes have been included in the plan since the very beginning, including private nursing homes and not-for-profit nursing homes. They have a mirroring agreement to extend compensation and bonuses that are changed for folks in the public system to folks in nursing homes. The LPNs and RNs in nursing homes and long-term care are included in the bonus program and will be receiving that retention payment.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. That is really important to know. I am hearing from nursing homes that they have a lot of concern that the message is not being delivered accurately. We have certain nursing homes now in the nonprofit sector that are simply not receiving the information saying they are going to receive that retention bonus. I want to encourage this government to make sure its message is clear to those nursing homes so that they know exactly what is coming.

When we talk about nursing homes in general, we know staffing is a real issue, especially nursing homes in rural areas. I would like either the Minister of Social Development or the Premier to help this House understand what government is going to do. I know there is one bed closing in my riding due to a lack of staff. I know there are some issues with not being clear on the payments to nurses. What is the minister going to do to help these rural nursing homes retain staff and keep those beds open?

Hon. Ms. Miles (Hanwell-New Maryland, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, L): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for the question.

Again, I would like to reiterate thanks to you for also highlighting how important nurses are and the critical role they play in so many different sectors.

We value the work that’s being done. As the member highlighted, perhaps we can all do a better job of communicating in order to make sure that the LPNs and RNs working in nursing homes know that they will be receiving this payment. We understand that the retention plan does not cover all individuals. These workers are valued. We’re reviewing how we can best support other employees in the system as well.

To the member’s point, this has been going on for a while. We know that. We need to do all we can to ensure that these folks we are asking to care for our folks get the support they

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need. In our platform, we committed to doing that, and we're going to do it in a variety of ways. We're going to do it through—

[*Translation*]

SMALL BUSINESSES

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): Madam Speaker, a recent survey revealed that 75% of small businesses anticipated that the GST/HST holiday would be both costly and difficult to manage. Many of them anticipate a median expenditure of \$1 000 to update their point of sale systems.

Small business owners have expressed strong concerns about the additional costs related to the administrative changes caused by this policy, especially given the limited appropriation period. They're afraid they will be at a considerable disadvantage compared to large businesses and online retailers, which are better equipped to manage these changes.

In light of these concerns, is the Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business providing targeted financial support to help small businesses cover the anticipated costs of updating point of sale systems, which could amount to \$1 000 during this period? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much for this question, because we are hearing this information from small businesses, which tell us that it's really an issue of managing this measure put in place so quickly with a lack of communication. These small businesses need help.

So, our team, with our incredible Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business and Opportunities NB employees, are doing what we can to find ways to help these small businesses implement this measure.

[*Original*]

It's clear that small business owners are going to do the best they can to deliver this tax savings opportunity to New Brunswickers, but our team at Opportunities New Brunswick and the minister are here to support them and to help smooth things out to make sure that, as that benefit is delivered to New Brunswickers, it doesn't hurt the small business owners who are trying to figure out how to administer it.

Our government recognizes that New Brunswickers are struggling with the cost of living. They need help, such as the 10% off their power bills. They are going to benefit from this tax holiday. Our team is here to support those small businesses and the New Brunswickers who want to have—



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Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Question period has expired. We have—

(Interjections.)

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): No, question period has expired, I think. We have questions that were taken under advisement.

CANADA POST

Hon. Ms. Miles (Hanwell-New Maryland, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Recently, I took under advisement questions related to the Canada Post mail strike and clients of Social Development. I have been getting regular updates from the department. As of yesterday morning, December 12, 2024, more than 95% of manual cheques had been received. Out of the total of 3 477 cheques printed and distributed by staff of the department, there are 172 cheques remaining to be received by clients. Teams will continue to work to contact individuals and make arrangements for the remaining cheques.

We looked into how many other departments were reached out to with this offer. We heard of no contact outside of Social Development and Service New Brunswick. Their staff worked together to determine the best course of action.

While the government appreciated the thoughtful offer from Canada Post, we were simply not in a position to accept it. Doing so would put the delivery of cheques at risk, in the case of a lockout, for instance. We would have been left to make last-minute plans to deliver the crucial aid to individuals. Instead, the government is using a previously successful process. The department is relying on regional offices to deliver assistance, as it did with previous disruptions in postal delivery in 2018 and 2016. The system has been effective. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the minister. I'm certain it was a scramble, especially at this time of year when offices are busy as well. I appreciate the fact that your team has come together and managed to deliver this, and I'm certain that the 172 remaining customers will be thrilled when they receive their cheques in time for Christmas. Thank you very much for the response.

SNOW REMOVAL

Hon. C. Chiasson (Grand Falls—Vallée-des-Rivières—Saint-Quentin, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, the member for Kings Centre asked about what he perceived to be brand new plow trucks at the depot up on College Hill Road. I did some digging in. It's a big learning curve for me,



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as a new minister. Getting questions like that helps me to learn. So, I did some digging in and found that what is up on College Hill Road are actually truck chassis. There is actually a two-year supply of them. Because of supply chain issues, we got one shipment late and the other shipment came in on time.

So, what we have up there are new chassis. We have to put dump bodies on them and plows or salt spreaders. There's a lot of work that has to be done to get those trucks actually onto the road. Supply chain issues have slowed that process down as well, as have labour shortage issues. There are a few issues that are slowing down the process of getting these new trucks on the road. I can assure the member opposite that the very first truck that is coming out is actually scheduled to go to Chipman.

Mr. Oliver (Kings Centre, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the minister for the very timely response. I hope that we continue to find parts and continue to increase the number of assets that we have. You'll realize quite quickly that we are in great need of it—not just in Chipman, but throughout the province. Thank you very much.

WORKSAFENB

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 pleased to rise to provide a response to questions my colleague, the Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business, took under advisement earlier this week. The questions came from the member for Saint Croix and the Leader of the Official Opposition on the topic of WorkSafeNB premiums and the planned performance refund. As Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, I have WorkSafeNB as one of my responsibilities. However, it is important to note that this is a Crown corporation, and it operates at arm's length.

The first part of the question from the member for Saint Croix pertained to the reduction in WorkSafeNB premiums and whether the government had any immediate plans that would affect this. First, with respect to workplace premiums, we recognize the excellent work done by previous governments and by WorkSafeNB itself. Our WorkSafeNB premiums have continued to drop, and it is our plan to continue along that path. If we continue to do so, then we will have the second-lowest rate in the country.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to share that the WorkSafeNB team has been working hard to ensure the \$180-million distribution moves forward next week, despite the Canada Post disruption. This will be made possible through a collaborative partnership with Service New Brunswick. Further to what has already been mentioned, the refund is essentially a return of an expense that has already been a tax benefit. Therefore, the refund is taxable. This approach is consistent with how similar distributions have been handled by other boards across the country. Thank you.

