

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



March 19, 2025

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[Original]

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Historically, it is the practice, after an extended leave of the House, as we've recently had, to make a request for an extended question period. The opposition would like to make that request today, please.

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Do we have an agreement for 45 minutes?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[Translation]

HOUSE SITTINGS

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Good morning, Madam Speaker. At last, we are back in the Legislative Assembly. We haven't sat here for 96 days, and a lot of things have changed in the world.

[Original]

Since then, in the past 96 days, we've seen a global shift in U.S. economic policy. Our province is heavily exposed. As has been said, 92% of our exports go to the United States. We've heard very little from this government on this file in these past months.

There is a mechanism to recall this Legislature in times of crisis or importance to the province. As an opposition, we called for this House to reopen two weeks ago, but we were denied. If this situation does not constitute an emergency to recall the Legislature, then what does?

We're having an emergency debate here later today, but we could have been in this House for the past couple of weeks, getting answers for New Brunswickers. Can the Premier please explain why she denied sitting early? Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am also happy to be back in the Legislative Assembly to answer questions.

I really appreciate this question on tariffs because, obviously, there is no precedent on this in New Brunswick or in Canada. It's a serious issue on which our government has been working hard since we first heard about the tariffs.

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We have communicated with New Brunswickers several times. We have done this every week, so regularly, giving a lot of details. We have also done it online and in the media on a continuous basis. There was even a briefing with the leaders of the opposition parties to answer their questions.

The situation is changing every day. Our team is there. We are working for New Brunswickers, and I encourage the opposition to join Team New Brunswick. We can all fight the United States together.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Absolutely, we are there, Madam Speaker, but it's our job to ensure that the government is accountable for the decisions it has or hasn't made. So, we are there.

[Original]

But she didn't answer the question, Madam Speaker. She wanted to talk about tariffs. We're going to talk about tariffs, and we're going to talk about them a lot. We have a lot of questions for this government. But the question was... I said earlier that this is the place where we get answers. This is the place where New Brunswickers get answers. This is the place where we do better because we're in the same room, we can hear each other's points of view, we can discuss those, and we can debate, always in the best interest of New Brunswickers, Madam Speaker.

The fact that we don't agree with the government doesn't mean that we're not for New Brunswickers. It means that we have a disagreement with the government's approach. That's why we called to have this Legislature recalled so that we could have these kinds of conversations. Our radically transparent Premier did not answer that question last time. Let's see whether she'll answer it this time.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would like to remind the member opposite of the timing of all of this because, as I said, we have had regular conversations with the media, with the public, and even with the leaders of the opposition on the status of tariffs. At the time, when they called for the emergency debate, there were no tariffs in place and our government was still working day in and day out to prepare and respond as the situation changed by the minute and by the day. We did enter into conversation with the other groups about returning. A set time couldn't be found last week. But we are prepared to answer questions today, we are prepared to spend all afternoon debating the subject, and I am prepared to continue engaging with New Brunswickers in live environments to answer their questions on the strong and strategic response plan that our team has put in place.

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I would like to mention that I have yet to hear any suggestions from the opposition on what we should be doing differently, on things that we should be adding. I would encourage them to join Team New Brunswick and put forward their best efforts to fight these tariffs with us.

[*Translation*]

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

[*Original*]

I said publicly that if the government wants our help, then bring us into a group where we can sit, as we did with COVID-19, Madam Speaker. We had an all-party committee. I said that in the media. You know, the Premier ballyhoos about the one meeting we had that wasn't very long and wasn't very informative, but I'm getting a bit of a sense that she doesn't want to answer the question on why she didn't want to be held accountable to New Brunswickers by coming back early.

The Government House Leader, in an interview, inferred that the opening of the Legislature would get in the way of doing government business. He said the Premier had made 10 Facebook posts. If I were a business owner and my investment depended on where I found information, I highly doubt I would go to the Premier's Facebook page to find it. Is the Government House Leader seriously insinuating that the best place for the official opposition to ask questions is by commenting on Facebook posts?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think it's interesting that the Leader of the Official Opposition refers to the opportunity I gave him and the leader of the third party to engage with me on tariffs. One of the reasons that meeting wasn't very long was because the member didn't have any questions and didn't have any suggestions on how we could improve the situation.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to flag a point he made about the critical importance of this issue to our business owners. While they do engage with the posts we put out on Facebook, we have also engaged multiple times with them directly on regular Zoom calls with businesses all across the province to provide them with the information that we're learning and to receive information from them. We have had calls with chambers of commerce. We have gotten hundreds of people online to talk about market diversification and how we are going to help them reach the end. We had a specific briefing for businesses across this province to walk through our tariff support program in detail. We have seen great support from the businesses in New Brunswick that have joined Team New Brunswick in this fight, and I ask the Leader of the Official Opposition to do the same.

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Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, we have a Premier who has been criticized for not doing a very good job in the face of all these tariffs, so I don't know whose press she's listening to.

The reality is that people are scared. They are worried. We're already seeing frozen investment, and people are not sure where to turn. We've seen other leaders in other provinces, as referenced earlier this morning, being out there and people knowing exactly what their Premiers are doing and how they're leading. We're not seeing that here. I'm going to ask this, I believe for the fourth time. That's why we called to have this Legislature reconvene—so this Premier could then answer our questions. If she can give us confidence on the job she's doing, then we'll be happy to support what she's doing. It was February 4 at one point, Madam Speaker. It was almost three weeks before we saw any sort of update on the government website. So she can talk about her sales job. We want to know why we didn't sit early.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have answered the question. There weren't tariffs in place at the time. We had been successful in postponing the tariffs from January 20 and postponing the tariffs from February, and we are optimistic that, as we stand now with very limited tariffs in place, our efforts are going to continue to be successful. We were just on the verge of tabling our tariff response plan as soon as they were put in place.

I have yet to hear a question on our tariff response plan. I have yet to hear a constructive suggestion from the official opposition, when our government has received a strong response from the business community and from the analyst community on the fact that we joined Team Canada and our other Premiers in immediately removing alcohol from the shelves, immediately freezing U.S. procurement, and moving to dismantle trade barriers and to support New Brunswickers. We were the first to have our package out supporting businesses in this province, and we have been there on the stage with the other Premiers with our elbows up and our voices raised, engaging to defend this province. You should join us in that work.

TARIFFS

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. This Premier thinks that it is a win for her that she is asking the opposition to submit itself to the will of government. That is never going to happen. We will do our job to hold the government members to account for their decisions or their nondecision. There has been a lot of nondecision.

She wants to talk about NB Liquor. There were millions of dollars removed from the shelves. I have a question for her: Was that liquor already paid for? That is one question.

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Here is another question: With all the liquor that government has removed from the shelves, has it replaced it with New Brunswick liquor so that we do not see a loss in revenue?

I am simply asking for concrete examples. I am doing my job. My job is to hold the government members responsible. They seem to be feeling an awful lot of pressure. I said in one of my press releases that they seemed overwhelmed. I think we are seeing the proof of it here, Madam Speaker. We are seeing a government that is overwhelmed. Answer our question.

[*Translation*]

L'hon. M^{me} Holt (Fredericton Sud-Silverwood, première ministre ; ministre responsable des Langues officielles, L) : Merci beaucoup, Madame la présidente. Finalement, on nous pose une question sur notre plan pour ce qui est des droits de douane. Il a fallu attendre entre 10 et 12 minutes pour en arriver à une question concernant notre plan pour contrer les droits de douane. Je n'ai pas encore entendu des suggestions pour améliorer le plan ou un appui à l'égard de celui-ci. Notre gouvernement est prêt et il a pris des mesures fortes. Nous avons l'appui de notre secteur des affaires.

[*Original*]

I am also a little confused as to what the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting he wants. He said it was great that we took the liquor off the shelves as Doug Ford did, but now he is saying that maybe we should not have done it or that we should have done it differently. We have paid for that liquor. We continue to own that liquor. That liquor will be sold when the tariffs are dropped. That revenue still sits available to be earned. New Brunswick products have been put front and centre in our liquor stores, and they are flying off the shelves because New Brunswickers are ready to support this province in the fight against these tariffs. I would like the opposition to do the same.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, at the end of the day, we are all New Brunswickers, but we do not have to agree on the approach of government. Even if we do agree with the approach of government, in some ways, we still have a responsibility to make sure that it is doing its job in others. This narrative that she is trying to put out there, that we are not supportive of government and that we are not adding to the discourse, is just completely not there. We have been living under the threat of tariffs for months now. We understand that it is a very fluid situation. The trade policy is the de facto policy of the Trump administration. In situations like these, you can only control your own actions and response.

I want to give the Premier an opportunity to talk about the concrete actions this government has taken. This is not to say that we are against them. We want the

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government members to explain their actions to New Brunswickers so that everyone can know what they are doing. Once we hear that, then maybe we could have something to support, or maybe we will have something that we need to question further. That is our job. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think it is unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition has not been listening as this government has repeatedly explained its support for this province in the form of our tariff response plan. I am happy to describe it again because we have a comprehensive, strong, and strategic response plan to these tariffs.

It starts off with supporting New Brunswick workers and making sure that the people who, today, are afraid for their jobs know that their government is going to be here for them and that PETL has funds and people ready to support them should their jobs be impacted by tariffs. The federal government is partnering in that effort.

We also have a plan to support New Brunswick businesses. That includes funds to help with their working capital should their revenues be disrupted. That includes programs to help them reach new markets. We were doing that very successfully in Boston just last weekend, promoting New Brunswick's world-class seafood to countries around the world that want to buy what New Brunswick is selling. We have a plan in place to reduce internal trade barriers and have taken action on that, specifically, with regard to labour mobility.

There is more that I cannot get into a minute. I look forward to talking about it.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that it's only a minute, but, again, we're here to make sure that the government members have the opportunity to express themselves.

I'd like to flip for a quick second to the Premier's trip to Washington. Very simply, what did she accomplish? What benefit was there to New Brunswickers to have her and her entourage there? How much did that cost?

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 giving us a chance to talk about a number of things that were accomplished in Washington. Our first interest and objective is always to get rid of the tariffs, postpone them, or diminish them. One of the successes was the fact that tariffs weren't put in place following our trip to Washington. We continue to wait for a broader impact to be felt. Right now, the tariffs are limited to steel and aluminum, and our tariff response plan is in place to support the businesses that are impacted by that tariff today.

We were also there to gain information and meet with the people who surround the White House and influence the White House to better understand what further measures we

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could take to achieve that objective of preventing or reducing the tariffs. Again, we've seen success on that front.

We were there to build relationships with the states that rely on New Brunswick products and rely on New Brunswick companies and to make sure they were raising their voices and expressing their concerns to the Secretary of Commerce and to the President. If you look in the U.S. media, you will see that that is now being done.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. We are using a U.S.-based consulting firm at a cost of \$27 000 per month. Why are we not using the regular diplomatic channels, such as Ambassador Kirsten Hillman? What doors has this opened that we normally would not have had access to?

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. It's a good one. Ambassador Hillman has been exceptional in the work that she has been doing for Canadians and for New Brunswickers in defending our interests. We have been working very closely with her and her team. However, she is one woman and is not spending all her time at the state level, which is where New Brunswick and other provinces across Canada that have also engaged their own partners and their own third-party firms are.

We are making sure that we blanket every single one of the states and that every governor, every congressperson, and every senator can clearly explain to the White House how these tariffs are a bad idea and the impact that they'll have on the American economy. We're working in partnership with Ambassador Hillman and her team to make sure that we have blanketed that message and are putting a full-court press on the White House to achieve the elimination of these tariffs that threaten the New Brunswick people.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The taxpayers of our province might like to know the date that this contract started and just how long this Premier has signed us up for. People are also asking about the connection between the Premier and the lobbying firm she hired as a contractor for the government to hire this Tennessee firm. It was reported on CBC, so it's public knowledge. What benefits are New Brunswickers getting from the \$27 000 that we're paying for this service? What benefit are we seeing from that? Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I don't have the date that the contract was signed, but I can absolutely follow up and provide you with that date. The contract is on a month-to-month basis, so it can be cancelled at the first minute when we see that we've achieved the result that we're striving for, which is the elimination of the tariffs. It gives us lots of flexibility.

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We've partnered with a local firm that has connections. It helped us identify the exact, right partner that would have a relationship with the states where New Brunswick has a story to tell and where we were likely to get the results of governors raising their voices to the White House and making the kinds of calls that we knew Secretary of Commerce Lutnick and the President would respond to.

So far, we see the proof in the pudding. The fact is that New Brunswick is not currently exposed to tariffs across the board. As soon as that threat is diminished, that contract will be wrapped up.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. How much of a finder's fee is this contractor being paid? Is it also being paid monthly as some sort of government contractor on top of the \$27 000 per month that the Premier is paying the Tennessee firm? Can the Premier explain to the people of our province, especially the taxpayers, why they should not be concerned that she hired a former colleague and supervisor from the Gallant government?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to provide the details of the contract in terms of what portion of the fee is going to Porter O'Brien for the support that it has been giving in identifying the partner and helping with the government relations work and regarding the portion of the fee that's going to the Ingram Group for the work that it's doing to make sure that we're fighting these tariffs with every resource that we have to defend our economy. We'll provide those details shortly.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. If the average New Brunswick taxpayer knew the lobbyist registry was chock full of the Premier's colleagues from the Gallant government and top Liberals, would they be concerned? At a glance, there are a half a dozen examples, from former ministers, chiefs of staff, and communications directors, to, yes, even the former Premier himself. Should the everyday New Brunswicker be concerned that a Premier who so freely and willingly supports paying for the influence of an American lobbying firm might be unduly influenced by her former bosses?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is interesting that the member opposite refers to six meetings, none of which happened with me. There is work being done at the departmental level with experts who have access to information that helps us make evidence-informed decisions.

However, I appreciate the opportunity to talk about something that we need to see advanced. It was made very clear under the Higgs government, when there were issues with folks on the lobbyist registry who hadn't kept their filings up to date and who hadn't



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been available for the kinds of questions for which they were needed, that we need to strengthen the lobbyist registry. It is something our government committed to in our platform because transparency is a value that we hold every deeply. During the time that we are in government, you will see the lobbyist registry get strengthened and the request for information process get overhauled so that New Brunswickers have the information they need about who is talking to whom in our government. It is something I share every Monday when I share with New Brunswickers who I am meeting with and what's on my agenda. I would love to see the Leader of the Opposition do the same.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just as a follow-up, I have a simple question. Did the Premier ever convene a meeting with the Council of Atlantic Premiers and the New England Governors as I asked back on November 27?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. That's a great question with a straightforward answer. Yes, I convened a meeting of the Council of Atlantic Premiers. New Brunswick is the Chair, currently. We are not the Chair of the New England Governors and Canadian Premiers meetings, but a meeting of the New England Governors and Canadian Premiers was convened by the Premier of Newfoundland, who is currently the Chair. We've actually just requested that the Premier of Newfoundland reconvene the New England Governors and Canadian Premiers because it's been a number of weeks since we last touched base. Those ongoing relationships with key figures in the U.S. are a big part of how we continue to defend New Brunswick against the threat of tariffs.

One more time, I will encourage us to issue a unanimous call of support, as the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba did. The work that its members did together, to get behind their government and join Team Canada... We know, and will make sure that everyone knows, that New Brunswick is unified in our defence of our people and our economy.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Absolutely, Madam Speaker. We will be more than happy to join with the government when it does something that even the media won't criticize it for as being a weak or tepid or do-nothing response, Madam Speaker. It's not that we're not supportive of New Brunswick or of the New Brunswick government. We are questioning. We are doing our job and questioning whether the government is doing its job. Of course we support New Brunswickers, Madam Speaker. Of course we support their efforts to fight these tariffs. And, yes, we do appreciate the efforts of all legislatures and all Premiers who are doing this work every day to try to make sure that we can fight this.

I just want to go back a little second. The government mentioned that it would be removing nine regulations, narrowing one, and possibly removing six more. This was in its press conference, Madam Speaker. Now that we have an opportunity, can the Premier share with



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us which regulations are being removed and how removing them actually benefits New Brunswick? Why did it take two months to make these decisions, and does the government think that was a reasonable amount of time?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston—Vallée-des-Rivières, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs; Acting Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister responsible for the Research and Productivity Council; Minister responsible for Immigration; Minister responsible for Military Affairs, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for asking me my first question in the Assembly as minister.

Madam Speaker, over the past few weeks and months, we have worked very hard—very hard—to establish and identify the exemptions that we could lift for internal trade between provinces and territories.

This is an important file. It is an important file because we understand that, if we have a challenge to overcome involving our closest ally, our neighbour to the south, we have to work even harder with our allies in the provinces and territories. We have done extremely important work.

The Leader of the Opposition is undoubtedly aware of the files and things we are working on. The goal, working so that every province eliminates barriers, is clear and straightforward.

Also, we want to ensure that our employers and employees in New Brunswick can access opportunities elsewhere in Canada.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Absolutely, Madam Speaker; I am well aware that government procurement and contracts are highly regulated.

[*Original*]

What I was asking for was the list of the regulations, Madam Speaker. Again, this is just about sharing it with New Brunswick. We've looked on the government website. That list is not there, so that is why we are asking the question. It is so that people know what the actual regulations are and can judge for themselves the efficacy of what the government is actually doing.

This was mentioned earlier. I think the Government House Leader mentioned Chinese tariffs. My next question is about the New Brunswick government's response to the Chinese tariffs on our fishing and agriculture industries. Do the government members have a strategy? Is there anything they can share regarding whom they have met with, what work they have done, or whether they have spoken with the federal government or people in the



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federal government who deal with Chinese ambassadors? Can they give us an update on the Chinese tariff issue?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Finnigan (Kent North, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Thanks for the question. As our Premier said, we were in Boston just last weekend. I met with the Chinese delegation. They know that we have a superior quality of product in New Brunswick that meets the highest standard in the world. They realize that there are tariffs coming but, from what I got from them, they are willing to pay a little premium because we have the best products in the world. Madam Speaker, I can assure you that we are concerned, but we are doing what is necessary to make sure our product is delivered across the world.

[Translation]

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): I thank the minister for that response. What I'm looking for is whether or not we are going to diversify our seafood offerings. If the Chinese are willing to pay more, for how long? And how long will it take before we start seeing an impact on our revenues in those industries? You know, this is not something that I want to hold the minister to today, but perhaps he could come back to the House with that.

BUDGET

I want to turn to the \$162-million stimulus package. The government budgeted \$162 million so far. What has been the uptake on the program? How many businesses have applied, and roughly how much money has been distributed? The Premier went on today about how well the program is doing and the outreach and work that are being done. I would like to know this: What are the results of what has been done? Is this program hitting the mark? Is it actually beneficial for New Brunswick businesses? That is why I am asking for those details on the uptake. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

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working very closely with New Brunswick businesses to understand exactly what they need in the face of these challenges. Fortunately, we are at a place where tariffs aren't in place across our entire economy. They are only in place against the steel and aluminum sectors. The eligibility for the programs that we put in place is related to exposure to and impact from tariffs. We have been engaging with the companies in the steel industry and the aluminum industry, and they haven't yet drawn on the programs because the impact hasn't reached the point of revenue damage or employee layoffs, but it is something that we are watching and engaging with very closely.

New Brunswickers need to understand that their government supports them. The programs are there and ready should tariffs be put in place, but we are doing hard and effective work to prevent that from being the case and to make sure that New Brunswickers' interests are being defended on the national stage and on the international stage. So far, we've made progress. We all await what's going to happen on April 2, and I look forward to the Leader of the Official Opposition being there with me on April 2 to defend the province.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The official opposition will always be here to defend the interests of New Brunswick. That is actually the definition of our job.

Madam Speaker, I will go just a bit further on this. Do you know what? I have called the Business Navigator line, and yes, I can confirm that the people on the other end are saying that the money is there. But I feel that, considering the fluidity of the situation, we don't really know who qualifies or under what auspices. We need a little more detail on that. I did the research to see that this program is there, but I want to know how much uptake there has been.

As we are talking about tariffs and how they could be a long-term policy of the American President, does the government have a plan should the tariff war continue over the long term?

It is normal for the province to do multi-year projections with respect to budgets. Does the government anticipate that this will be a budgeted line item in subsequent budget years?

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Clearly, when it comes to the President of the United States, we are concerned about what he will do in a few weeks, not what he will do in a few years.



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[Original]

It's clear that, with this president, it's hard to say what he's going to do tomorrow not to mention what he's going to do next year. We have built a strong tariff response plan, ready to go today. We have built a contingency should the situation get worse. But so far, we've seen success in avoiding the tariffs on January 20 and avoiding the tariffs in February. When they came into place in March, they were limited and on a very small section of our economy. We wait to see what's going to happen on April 2. New Brunswickers need to understand that we're there to respond to them today, tomorrow, and next year. For as long as the threat to our economy and our people is in place, this government is going to do everything that it takes to look after the jobs, the businesses, and the life that we value here in New Brunswick.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. There's a bit of a sales job going on with the Premier here this morning. You know, at the end of the day, we need details on what it is that the government is doing. These are reasonable questions, Madam Speaker. It's reasonable to assume that the government has under its control an ability to budget, to plan. You can look at this as a worst-case scenario. The government members are looking at deficit spending for the next four years, so we know that there's somewhat of a plan out there, but it's to make sure that we can control, we can control, and to do that.

So, what are the government's plans for this year? Let's talk about this year then if the Premier doesn't want to talk about successive years. What are the plans for this year? If the demand exceeds \$162 million in the budget year, what will the government members do? Will they overspend, or will they cut it off and leave New Brunswick businesses without access to these programs? Will they exceed it? Will they cut it off? What are they going to do this year?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much. That's a hypothetical question that the Leader of the Opposition is asking. We've put a plan in place that responds to what we know to be the situation today and the potential that has been threatened from the President of the United States. We've even put an additional contingency in place to make sure that, if things get worse, we have that room to move. We have the opportunity to do that in future years.

I wait for suggestions from the opposition members. If they think that we haven't budgeted a sufficient amount at \$162 million, do they have a better estimate for what they think this might cost? At the end of the day—I'll say again what I've said a number of times—this government has put a comprehensive plan in place. It responds to the needs of New Brunswick workers. It responds to the feedback of New Brunswick businesses. It's ready now, and it has been scaled appropriately, with buffer room. We will do whatever it takes



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to protect this economy, to protect these workers, and to ensure the long-term success of New Brunswick. That's what we've done in a budget that is balanced and looks to the future, and that's what we will continue to do.

[*Translation*]

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

The Premier has repeatedly said that up to 180 000 New Brunswickers don't have a primary care provider. The Minister of Finance repeated this in his budget speech yesterday. The budget provides just \$30 million to create collaborative health care teams this coming year. These are designed to ensure that everyone has a medical home. As we know, there is no specific funding model for all those team members who need to be hired other than for physicians. Those 180 000 New Brunswickers languishing on the wait list are wondering how many unattached patients will have their own health care provider or a team by the end of this fiscal year thanks to the budget. Can the Minister of Health give us an estimate of the number of people who will be removed from the wait list this year as a result of this \$30-million investment?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, thank you very much for the question. It is the main reason why I ran and entered politics—my concern about the people of New Brunswick who do not have a primary care provider. I am pleased to report that a significant part of this project has been dedicated to collaborative care teams.

Each of these teams will increase the capacity of people that it can see. As you all know, a number of people who are on the current wait list are cared for by NB Health Link. They are getting better care than no care at all. Those folks are moving toward being people in New Brunswick whom we consider as having an adequate family doctor.

We are starting this year with 10. We are hopeful that we can do more. We will commit to a successive 10 in subsequent years. As for an exact number, there will be a lot more who have family care, or who have primary care, than there are today. While I cannot commit to an exact number, we will report on this at the end of the year. Thank you very much.

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The New Brunswick Medical Society called for \$50 million per year to be invested to expedite the transfer of unattached patients from the wait list to collaborative care teams. In the Green Party's election platform, we budgeted \$100 million to get people off the wait list and into health care much faster than that because the need is dire, so much so that, a year ago, a

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family physician attending a community gathering held in Richibucto during my health care tour said: We need a generational investment to give every New Brunswicker a medical home within a few years. I agree. I do not think that \$30 million per year to create collaborative care teams represents a generational investment. Can the Minister of Health tell us how many years it will take to provide the 180 000 New Brunswickers without a family doctor or a nurse practitioner a permanent collaborative care team?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, that is a great question. In our mandate, we are committed to coming as close as possible to every New Brunswicker having a primary care home. That is an aggressive goal. We will work hard toward achieving that. I agree with the member's friends who say that every New Brunswicker should have a primary care home.

Beyond the \$30 million that we are putting in this year, we are putting in more money in subsequent years. We are also putting money into training more physicians to graduate through our medical schools. We are doing a practice ready assessment, which you have seen in the news this week, to bring more physicians on board. We are very positive about the number of caregivers, nurses, and nurse practitioners who will help serve New Brunswickers.

TARIFFS

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. While other wars rage around the world, our country has found itself in a trade war. The United States has put a 25% tariff on steel and aluminum, China will impose a 25% tariff on seafood products, including lobster, tomorrow, and Trump will bring in a 25% tariff on almost everything else two weeks from today, on April 2. Our economy is on shaky ground, and many workers and small and medium-sized businesses are already struggling, with sales down, some staff laid off, and extreme uncertainty about what will happen next. I am concerned about how they will get through this difficult time. Has the Minister of Small Business done an analysis of how many businesses are and will be affected by the tariffs and which industries are most at risk? If so, will he table this analysis?

Hon. Mr. Randall (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, L): I want to thank the member opposite for the question. As you, in this House, all know, small business is near and dear to my heart. Ever since I was appointed to this position, I have been out speaking to small businesses, speaking to chambers of commerce, talking to the staff at ONB, and engaging with members in the business community. I just want to say that we are working very hard. We are working with ONB staff who already have those client relationships to understand what the challenges will be.



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Our focus right now is on export-driven industries, so people employing individuals here in the province. We are looking at businesses that have a future in this province and that are already on the ground creating jobs. We are also looking at businesses that are telling us: Listen, this is an opportunity. This is an opportunity to expand. We are helping them find new export markets. What we are not focused on at this moment is helping workers in other countries. Certainly, we want to focus on New Brunswick.

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would still like to know whether the minister has the analysis that I asked about and whether he can table it for the House. In terms of the government's response, it did announce a competitiveness and growth program that has a goal of enhancing the long-term sustainability of New Brunswick's large, export-intensive companies.

I'm not as worried about the multinationals, such as the Irvings, the Cookes, and the McCains of the world. I'm very concerned about the smaller, local businesses, including fishers and farmers. Some businesses were just getting over pandemic challenges. We must reduce our reliance on exports and imports and become more self-sufficient. Small businesses need help diversifying their businesses, and it's time to strengthen our province's local economy. We need a plan to make sure that we are more self-sufficient and support our businesses. This is going to need real, transformative change in our economy. What is the minister going to do to help small businesses, including fishers and farmers, with this change?

Hon. Mr. Randall (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, L): I really want to thank the member opposite for the question. However, I'm confused because your leader actually just asked for an emergency debate on protecting exporters in the city of Saint John.

I just want to speak to this House. Whether you're a McCain or whether you're a small business on the Northside of Fredericton, whether you're in Bathurst or whether you're in Moncton, all businesses employ people in this province. I become really concerned in this House when we start tearing down what was a small business, what was a small french fry factory upriver in members opposite's ridings. I get worried when we talk about taking that down and hurting New Brunswick potato farmers. We need all the pieces of this beautiful puzzle that is New Brunswick. I am very confused when I hear that we do not need large businesses in this province. We need all businesses.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much again, Madam Speaker. Just continuing on with the economic impacts due to tariffs, the CME, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, has indicated that as many as 50% of the businesses that have a footprint in both Canada and the United States are open to, or are considering, moving their businesses to the United States. We've heard from business



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owners that businesses are being lured away from New Brunswick and to the United States by being offered lucrative concessions to relocate their businesses south of the border.

Has the government been made aware of any New Brunswick businesses preparing to leave the province, and does the government have a strategy to deal with this?

Madam Speaker, considering the uncertainty and everything that we've talked about this morning, losing businesses in this province right now would be disastrous. Is there a plan in place to make sure that we have the right tools to ensure that those people who may be considering leaving have the incentive to stay? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Our government has been in contact with businesses across this province—small businesses, businesses looking at investing in the United States, and businesses that are being recruited to move. We understand those situations intimately and have been working very closely with the businesses themselves, with the chambers of commerce, with the small businesses and big businesses, and with the Canadian manufacturers and exporters organization—which has been a part of our regular calls—to make sure that the tariff action plan that we developed responded exactly to those needs and that we had the tools in place to ensure our businesses were competitive. This is a great place to do business because these businesses can take advantage of support for productivity investments and have an export development team ready to get them into that new market that's going to pay top dollar for their products and be a reliable partner to Canada.

I'm glad to highlight that we have an excellent team at Opportunities New Brunswick. It is a team that is working exceptionally closely with the CME and with both small and big businesses in this province. It is working to have a working capital program, a competitiveness package, and to have flexibility for the navigators that the Leader of the Opposition mentioned to hold the hands of businesses and work them through this.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Look, question period is very difficult because it's short and quick. We'll get more information on this once we hit main estimates. We'll be able to have more of a conversation around that.

JOBS

I'd like to discuss the projected impact on our labour force. The Premier previously projected that 4 000 to 6 000 New Brunswickers could lose their livelihoods due to the impact of tariffs. That projection was made months ago. Considering that 92% of our exports are to the United States and that, according to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Saint John is the most negatively impacted by tariffs in the country, does the Premier still believe that those projections are accurate? Considering the exposure to Saint John alone,



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the city most exposed to tariffs in the country, does she believe that those projections are still accurate?

[*Translation*]

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

[*Original*]

I appreciate this question because our team is watching this situation very closely. We have analysts who are looking at impacts on a daily basis, even though, with the rhetoric from the White House, the situation changes moment to moment. Unfortunately, the 6 000 jobs estimate that was developed a number of months ago has shifted and it's gotten higher. Should full tariffs be put in place at 25% across our economy, the estimate is now that the impact could be as high as 10 000 or 11 000 jobs for New Brunswickers.

We don't want people to be afraid, even though, understandably, that's a concern for the workers, the communities, and the small businesses and big businesses that employ those people. That is why we are there every day, reassuring people that we have programs in place, including our programs to support the communities and especially those on the border that may see impacts, our program with RDC to help them, and our programs to help the workers connect with Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, and to get them the support they need in order to move through this challenge. Our government has people's backs, and we're looking forward to the opposition joining Team New Brunswick.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that straightforward answer from the Premier. We agree—nobody wants anybody to be afraid. But at the same time, we have to know what it is that we're dealing with. It was good to finally get an answer from the government that said, Do you know what? In a worst-case scenario, this is the plan that we have.

Now, in the time that we have left, I want to know... We've talked a lot about the impact of these tariffs on provincial revenues and our economy. In the spirit of the answer the Premier just gave in talking about worst-case scenarios and possibilities and how the government is projecting that provincial revenues will take a significant hit, what exactly are the numbers? How did that impact the budget calculations? What does the government plan to cut to make up for the loss in revenue? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Leader of the Opposition. I appreciate that response and question because we have to walk a fine line between not creating extra fear in a public that is already experiencing a lot of unrest while

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also giving them the real information about the situation and how challenging it is. We've seen it in our budget. We had a GDP growth projection of 1.5% that has been squeezed down to 1.1%. That might sound like a little number, but that 0.4% of GDP value is worth a significant amount to the New Brunswick economy, and it is the reason the top-line revenue figures haven't grown the way we have seen them grow in the past. That is thanks to both inflation and population growth as well as federal government transfers.

That takes a lot of money away from our ability to respond to these crises, but we didn't duck at the moment. Our government is ready to meet the moment and put the kind of package in place that is going to ensure that every New Brunswicker will be supported through this tariff challenge.

[*Translation*]

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Question period is over.

