

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



March 21, 2025

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BUDGET

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

[Original]

Madam Speaker, let's see whether we can unravel some Liberal math this morning. The 2024-25 economic outlook predicted real GDP growth at 0.8%. According to the Liberal platform costing table, they believed that 0.8% was artificially low. They didn't agree with Finance and Treasury Board numbers, Madam Speaker, and assumed an additional 0.3% of revenue growth. So if the Liberals based their costing on 1.1% real GDP growth, and the economic outlook they just released says 1.1% real GDP growth, how do they explain a \$600-million deficit? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister responsible for Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the question on the budget. I thought we might have gone through that and just moved toward the next subjects.

I want to address some of the comments that we've heard about out-of-control Liberal spending and how a budget is made. Essentially, there are three pools that are taken into account when we do budgets. There are budget pressures, which we know are usual. Those are inflation and increases in usual external factors. There are government decisions. Those are multi-year projects that were started, but those government decisions weren't ours. They were the previous government's. That is the out-of-control spending that we're getting control of right now. I'll tell you, when we look at our platform promises... We keep going back to our election, I suppose. I can tell you one thing. We do have platform promises that we are responding to, but it is a heck of a lot less expensive than the 2% of HST that you were going to take off our revenues.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Okay, Madam Speaker. I asked a question on Liberal math. I'm sorry, but the Finance Minister has failed.

That is the wrong answer, Madam Speaker—wrong answer. He doesn't get to say that, on one side of the coin, we had out-of-control spending by the previous government and yet that the government is able to do the spending that it can because of the previous government's savings and the \$2 billion that it shaved off our debt. How can he square that circle?

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The reality is this: The government members base their assumptions on 1.1% real GDP growth, when FTB, the year before, said 0.8%. They actually had the money that they thought they were going to have. So, I am trying to get the Finance Minister to get on his feet and explain how, when they had access to exactly the money they thought they would have, he went from a \$10-million surplus in the fiscal year to a \$600-million deficit.

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. We've had a bit of discussion and some Conservative math, Tory math, around budget surpluses that were accumulated over the past few years, and somebody made a comment—one of the opposition members—that we were going to undo all that good work. I would ask: What have we undone in this budget from previous health care measures from the previous government? What, in this budget, have we undone on education? What have we undone on housing? Do you know what? We can't find anything, and you're not pointing anything out. The reason you had surpluses is that you did nothing about these things. You can't see a platform that has objectives and a plan in it because you can't recognize it. We are getting things done, and we are moving forward on these important files. If you paid attention, you would see that clearly.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): This would be humorous, Madam Speaker, except for the fact that this is the Finance Minister of our province who is short-answering in question period, when we are asking the government to explain to New Brunswickers how it arrived where it arrived. The financial assumptions were there, but we are not getting the results that the government promised it would have.

New Brunswickers took the Premier at her word that she could produce balanced budgets in every year of her mandate: promise broken. She indicated in her platform that she would have a \$10-million surplus, and now we are facing down a \$600-million deficit. Madam Speaker, this Premier talked incessantly during the campaign about leadership you can trust. Not only has she broken her promise to New Brunswickers to be fiscally responsible, but she is also breaking it for all four years of her mandate, despite her costing table showing a surplus every single year. How is this leadership that anyone can trust?

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): Madam Speaker, when the Opposition Leader talks about this being potentially humorous, he's right, it isn't humorous. I didn't find it very humorous when I got into office and the first thing I was offered was a deficit in Quarter 2 and a growing deficit in Quarter 3 based on expenses that keep growing and keep growing and keep coming in. We did deliver on some promises despite those deficits because we recognize the need out there.

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Now, when I talk about previous government measures, I know it has been a tradition to break contracts and break promises or previous engagements from previous governments because it is politically expedient, but it's expensive. We decided not to do that. We're going to clean up some of this mess, but we decided not to do it. If you want an example of that, we can all take a pause and just walk down the street and see that courthouse and see what happens when we make crazy decisions and cut out previous promises.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Another nonanswer from this Finance Minister, whose strength is supposed to be numbers. He's a nice guy, Madam Speaker, but he's not very good at math. This government is trying to foam the runway, saying that it is running a deficit because of tariffs. In its \$599-million deficit budget, only \$162 million is devoted to tariff relief, some of which is repurposed money. If tariffs are what this government is using as an excuse, how do you explain the other \$437 million in deficit? The Finance Minister just answered. It's choices. I would like him to explain the choices that lead to a \$437-million deficit and a predicted \$10-million surplus. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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. Thanks for the compliment. The member opposite is a nice guy, too. I suppose he can have some compliments too. I thought it was a nice moment for a Friday morning.

Yes, it is exactly about choices. It is exactly what we are doing, and we chose New Brunswickers. We chose to move forward and make the investments that needed to be made. Those choices are still happening, because there was a major choice that was made just this past fall, one between continuing to restrain the help to New Brunswickers and looking at the bottom line to make government look good and just getting the programs out. In a resounding voice, New Brunswickers said that they wanted the help, wanted the investments, and wanted us to move forward. That's why we're sitting on this side.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, there was a fellow by the name of Serge Robichaud who used to sit with us when we were in government during the Alward years. He used to say something from the government backbenches. He would say: Short memory. These guys have a short memory. We made record investments in education and record investments in health care. As a matter of fact, this government just got caught saying that it was doing a 7.7% increase when it's really 1.8%. Since we're talking about math, can the minister please get on his feet and explain the difference between \$273 million and \$74 million? The math doesn't add up. It's not surprising, considering who is holding the calculator. Thank you.

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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): Madam Speaker, I do want to thank the member opposite for this question. Speaking of funny math, I would say that it's an oversimplification on health, but I can't because I actually asked this question. For the past year and a half, quarter after quarter, I'd say we were always over because of employment costs in health. It was always tied to the nursing contract.

Now, last budget, we knew we had a travel nurse contract. I asked my staff: How can we still be over when we had a contract? We had a clear definition of what was going to happen. The answer was that the now opposition didn't budget for travel contract nurses. It didn't put a dollar amount in there, so this government, instead of waiting for the magic dust that the last government was going to use to make this disappear, introduced legislation this week to move forward, get that money back into our system, and use it in the health care system.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): That was a Vitalité contract, not one from the government of New Brunswick.

Now, let's talk, Madam Speaker, about where money should go. New Brunswickers are going to have to pay \$65 million in debt repayment because of the choices of this government—\$65 million that could go toward services that they so richly deserve and badly need. Instead, because of this government's choices, we are going to have to pay bankers an extra \$65 million.

At the same time, while I'm on my feet, the government members said that they were going to defend New Brunswickers' interests and get the \$74 million from the GST holiday back from the federal government. That would completely cover our debt repayment costs for this year alone. Have they gotten deals that would give us an amount equal to that \$74 million? Let's see whether the minister can come up with those numbers, Madam Speaker.

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, once again. Yes, well, let's clarify the first point. It was a Vitalité contract, but it was propelled into it. Vitalité had provided—what was it? — seven suggestions to us. How about the 15 suggestions it made to the previous government? Those government members said no. They didn't want to have anything to do with it, so Vitalité was forced to make life-saving decisions. It signed a bad contract in order to find ways to solve some problems. If the last government had listened in the first place, it would have been a lot cheaper than what was proposed there.

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On the rest, listen, we are still having discussions with the federal government. It is not \$72 million. It is still estimated at around \$60 million. Remember that we didn't sign off on not getting that money back. It's still there. We did not sign off. There is a process, so it is still there.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): That was incredible, Madam Speaker. The minister just said that the buck stops with government and now he's saying that it wasn't their decision. My heavens, this is... Wow.

Making fuel more affordable: promise broken. Making energy more affordable: promise broken. Retention bonuses for all nurses: promise broken. An extra \$5 000 for nurse retention bonuses: promise broken. Free RSV vaccines for vulnerable people, now only for people 75 years or older: promise broken. A balanced budget in Year 1 of the Liberals' mandate: promise broken. A balanced budget in Year 2 of their mandate: promise broken. A balanced budget in Year 3 of their mandate: promise broken. A balanced budget in Year 4 of their mandate: promise broken. Broken promises, broken words, broken contract, broken trust... Can the Premier please explain herself?

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. On the first part of that, when he said that there was nonaction, let's just clarify that the way it works for the HST rebate is that we have to sign a waiver. Us not signing the waiver is acting. I know he does not understand the process, but that is how it works. We still have the option... Right now, we are being reimbursed for that if we do not act on it. That is fine. It is taken care of.

I do want to address this because it is one of my mandates. The member opposite talked about not doing anything for affordable energy. I will remind the member opposite that, as an opposition, we twice presented a motion to remove the PST on electricity, and twice we heard all kinds of arguments from the previous government about why this was not affordable and we could not do it. Despite the fact, again, that they are not allowed to have any kind of deficit, we decided to help New Brunswickers with affordability to the tune of \$90 million. We acted on that when they were given two—

PHARMACIES

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Madam Speaker, in the Liberal election platform, they acknowledged that access to primary health care is a challenge across the province. The platform went on to make the following promise:
Review and expand healthcare professionals' scope of practice to optimize their roles.

One would think that this was a sincere promise to get better access to primary care for New Brunswickers. I guess one would be wrong. On March 14, we learned that the Holt

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government will not extend a tremendously successful pharmacy clinic program designed to get better access to primary care for New Brunswickers. The program handled thousands of appointments, reducing the number of unnecessary visits to emergency rooms. The Holt government will not expand it. I have a simple question for the Premier: Why not?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity. We participate in many pilots. Some work and some do not. The pilot that we worked with here did help some people who did not have primary care practitioners, but 75% did. It raises the question: If you have a primary care person, how do you obtain access?

We are very committed to working with rank-and-file pharmacists, significant members of our team, whose scope of practice is expanding. They already look after a number of minor ailments, and we are asking that they collaborate with our primary care people, nurse practitioners and physicians, so that they can see even more in their scope of practice. We are committed to doing that. We are shifting the pilot resources to the collaborative care teams. I welcome the opportunity to be thankful for—

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): I'll take that as a tongue-in-cheek answer, Madam Speaker. To break a promise is to say one thing and do another. The Liberal Premiers are nothing... That is nothing new, in this province, from a Liberal Premier with broken health care promises. That is a disgrace.

The pharmacy clinic program was getting fabulous results. During a six-month period of evaluation, more than 10 000 patients were seen. The patient satisfaction scores showed that 100% of those surveyed would recommend the service to their family or friends and that they would go back—100%. I can't imagine. You can't get any better than that. I made a commitment to give the Premier an opportunity to rise in the House, apologize to New Brunswickers, and reverse this poor decision.

Would the Premier care to stand and do those two things?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, I welcome the thanks that we are receiving today for increasing access for New Brunswickers. You know, this illustrates the value of being able to see your practitioner at the right time. But you want to see a practitioner who has the full complement and is supported by other people. When you see a pharmacist, this is great, but when the pharmacist works together with a nurse practitioner and a physician, you get the full spectrum of care. That is what we are working toward: collaborative care. Thank you very much for the accolades.

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was at the Prospect Street Shoppers Drug Mart the other day, and it had done construction so that it could offer

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this new service within the pharmacists' scope of practice. Here we go again, with more Premier Tim Houston envy. The Nova Scotia Premier seems to get right so many things that the Premier of New Brunswick seems to get wrong, and this is another example. In Nova Scotia, which has a similar program, there was a more than 9% decrease in ER visits during the trial, so the province is expanding the program to now have more than 45 pharmacies. That is 45 clinics in Nova Scotia pharmacies and 0 in New Brunswick—what a shame. What a disgrace.

There has been a lot of loud public outcry to this ridiculous decision. Pharmacists were able to offer chronic disease management to patients who have previously been diagnosed with diabetes, COPD, asthma, and cardiovascular disease—but no more.

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Thank you very much. Once again, I appreciate your thanks. It is very important that people who see a person don't see just that person. Collaboration is critical, and we don't want to build more silos in pharmacies. We want our pharmacists to work together. And I'm glad you mentioned Shoppers Drug Mart. You know, it is big pharma that has been pushing this, not so much the rank-and-file citizens of our province. They want collaborative care, and I'm glad that the member is very supportive of this in his community and other communities around the province. Thank you very much.

BUDGET

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): Madam Speaker, not long ago, New Brunswick was the most indebted province in Canada. In 2015, our province had the second-highest debt-to-GDP ratio in the country, raising serious concerns about fiscal sustainability. But through a commitment to responsible spending, the previous government was able to balance the budget for seven consecutive years. The Premier and the Minister of Finance built their campaign on promises of continued fiscal discipline and a commitment to balanced budgets, yet after they took office, those promises began to shift. First, they claimed that a 1% deficit might be acceptable. Then they opened the door to 2%. Now, New Brunswickers are faced with a \$400-million deficit for the last quarter and \$3 billion for the entire mandate.

Madam Speaker, this government campaigned on maintaining responsible financial management, but, just months into its mandate, it has already abandoned its own fiscal targets, and there is no clear plan to restore balance. How can New Brunswickers trust this government to manage our finances?

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 have a couple of points. The

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member opposite talks about the responsive government of the previous government, when the spending trend is exactly the same as it was. You don't turn around a government operation of 50 000 employees. By the way, that grew quite a bit—quite a bit—under the previous government. That is not something you see, but let me tell you, it has grown quite a bit. We are just into that trend. We need to start moving it forward, but we are going to work with people. As opposed to getting orders from a corner office, from one person, we are working with different departments to find different ways of doing things.

I do want to take a quick second though, because there seems to be a lot of envy from the member for Woodstock, I believe, of the Nova Scotia Premier and all that he does. I wonder why the member never comments on Nova Scotia's budget deficit this year? It seems to be right in line with what we are doing. It's all innovative over there, but it's all wrong over here.

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): The government had four months left in the fiscal year to act. The minister claimed in November that efforts would be made to curtail spending and introduce cost-saving measures, yet those efforts have been invisible to the people of this province. Instead, we see a government that has allowed spending to spiral out of control while everyday New Brunswickers are left wondering what services may be at risk in the future to make up those losses.

This government cannot continue to blame the previous government for the current deficit situation. If we look at the budget speech, the government states that it works for New Brunswickers and will honour its commitments to them. The speech also says: "It does not mean we are abandoning our plans to work toward balanced budgets".

Madam Speaker, instead of kicking the deficit down the road, when will this government take accountability for its actions and ensure that New Brunswickers get a balanced budget, exactly as they were promised by the Holt government?

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister responsible for Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, we are acting responsibly. We cannot just start curtailing willy-nilly, as has been done before. Who among the members opposite wants to see some of their roads unpaved? Who wants some of their hospitals closed or their schools not built? These are real-time measures that have to be—

(Interjections.)

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): Yes, the jail is an excellent example. We could have easily taken the easy road on that one. However, it was the right decision to make, and we made it. We are doing this responsibly, and we are going to do this in collaboration with the people who



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know these files best. It'll take the time that it takes, but it's going to be done responsibly and done right, just as we promised. That's exactly what you are going to be a witness to in the coming months.

[Translation]

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): When the federal government proposed an HST exemption for two months to help Canadians deal with the rising cost of living, we expressed concerns about the \$74 million in revenue that the province would lose.

Premier Holt and the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board stated that the province was in discussions with Ottawa to recuperate these funds, because the impact on New Brunswick's finances would be considerable. At the time, the government's position was very clear: it wasn't prepared to assume the loss without asking the federal government for reimbursement. Can the Minister of Finance actually give us an update on these negotiations and tell us when we will receive the money?

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 find it interesting that, finally, an opposition member mentions the federal government, because we know it was the federal government that, over the last few years, helped the former provincial government balance its budget year after year after year.

Regarding the 2% HST holiday, we are in discussions and, in fact, if you want to know, we have included a \$50 000 reimbursement in the budget. It's in our revenues. This isn't the final amount because there are still assessments to do of the months already gone by. We don't have the exact numbers; they are coming from Ottawa. When we have them, the amounts will be accounted for in our books.

[Original]

COMMUNITY CARE CLINICS

Ms. Bockus (Saint Croix, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. My riding is in a dire situation following the death of one of our few family care physicians. Dr. Bugwandin's practice is now closed, and his patients have been notified that they can obtain their medical files by contacting a company that is charging them \$95 per file. My question to both Horizon and the Minister of Health is this: Can the government not provide a subsidy of some sort to help with the cost for these patients? Many are seniors on a fixed income. Also, where are the patients supposed to take the files when they get them? The answer from the minister was this: Simple grants won't fix this, but working with you in the community will.



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The minister says the clinic in St. Stephen will be one of the first 10 planned and he is hopeful there will be progressive steps soon. Thousands of my constituents without doctors are also hopeful. Can the Health Minister tell me when the clinic promised in the budget for St. Stephen will happen?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, thank you. You know, there is not a single member here today who does not want a collaborative care clinic in their town. The member opposite does recognize that this is one of the first 10 clinics. This is one of the reasons we need collaborative care clinics. Right now, when a solo practitioner leaves their practice and no one takes it over, the charts are left in a profitable venue. This is not good.

You should know that, when your physician retires, goes on holiday, or is replaced, those charts stay in that clinic and are accessible anytime afterwards. You illustrate a point on why we need collaborative care, and I'm glad you thanked us for putting one of those clinics in your community first. Thank you very much.

Ms. Bockus (Saint Croix, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. You kind of didn't answer my question. When can we expect a clinic in St. Stephen, one of these collaborative care clinics that were promised in the budget? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We have committed to starting 10 clinics in this current calendar year. St. Stephen is one of them, so I think I've given an answer. It will be within this year. We have already signed contracts with groups of people who are putting these collaborative care clinics together. While not everybody has a clinic promised in this next year, yours is one of them. It will not be tomorrow. It will be before the year is out. Thank you for your question. I am glad I was able to answer it.

[Translation]

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

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

[Original]

You know, much has been made by the Premier and this government this week about Team Canada and how much she supports Team Canada and everything that's going on with the tariffs and everything else, right? We just recently found out that the new Liberal Prime Minister, Mark Carney, whom I'm sure they all support and appreciate very much, has just awarded a \$6-billion contract to an Australian firm when we have a company right here in Canada that can fulfill that radar contract for far less money. So, with their much-



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ballyhooed Team Canada approach, will this government stand up and admonish the new Prime Minister for his awarding a contract to an Australian firm when there is a Canadian company that can deliver this? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*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. It's a little bit ironic to hear the Leader of the Opposition talk about the government and the tariffs. You will understand, Madam Speaker, that there was an emergency debate this week. For seven hours, the Leader of the Official Opposition and his colleagues were unable to propose a single solution to ensure that people, businesses, and entrepreneurs in New Brunswick were adequately protected.

The official opposition is telling us that plenty of things need to be done. I can tell you one thing, Madam Speaker: We have clearly determined that we support and will continue to support the people to move our businesses forward. We want to ensure that our businesses and jobs are protected because we want New Brunswick to have a bright future.

I urge the Leader of the Official Opposition to propose constructive solutions to us and join Team New Brunswick.

Point of Order / Rappel au Règlement

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

[*Original*]

You know, the Acting Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour just got up and said clearly that the opposition gave no suggestions, Madam Speaker. He is misleading this House. He was misleading the House, because the member for Oromocto-Sunbury gave concrete—

[*Translation*]

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): I am up.

[*Original*]

I am up. Thank you.

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Mr. M. LeBlanc (Belle-Baie-Belledune, L): Madam Speaker, the point from the Leader of the Official Opposition is clearly not a point of order. But he used the term “mislead” multiple times to say that my colleague misled the House. I hope you’re going to ask him to apologize for making such comments himself.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): It’s Friday, and I understand that everyone is looking forward to going home. Let’s be respectful to each other. We are all honourable members. Thank you.

