

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



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[Translation]

NURSES

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

[Original]

Madam Speaker, it seems the Premier has an aversion to using certain words. She won't use the word "cut", nor will she admit to any layoffs. So, my question for the Premier this morning... Let's see if she will use the word "redeployment". Will the Premier admit that Public Health registered nurses are being redeployed? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, to the member opposite. Certainly, within our RHAs, opportunities exist to put the right people in the right place at the right time. We have a strong commitment to our nurses, our licensed practical nurses (LPNs), to have them working to scope, in the right places at the right time. So, it remains a tool within our RHAs to realign, repurpose, and remix nursing units to best serve those populations. We don't want nurses working in areas in which their skill set is not appropriate. We don't want LPNs working in areas in which their skill set is not appropriate. We trust the management of the RHAs to put the right people in the right place at the right time. That may involve some redeployment of staff, but we leave this to the workings of our RHAs. Thank you very much.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): So, there it is, Madam Speaker. The Premier disavows anything she doesn't want to touch and has her minister speak. But for anything she thinks she can win on, she'll jump up on her feet. Let's see whether she'll jump up on this one. You know, the minister just admitted that these jobs are being cut. Nurses are being told: Your job is being cut. You can be redeployed, or you can be laid off. This has been going on for months. It's killing morale. Public Health nurses are scared for their jobs, Madam Speaker. Why are you cutting—oops, I mean redeploying—these RNs out of their positions? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, in health care, we do redeploy people. We recognize the need for change for different skill sets. Some areas require a higher level of skill that is not provided by the current team. When we look at folks, other areas may require a different skill set. Yes, health care does often involve redeployment. One of the things that we are quite proud of is that we are not laying our nurses off. We always have a role for them, in different areas of our hospitals, including in emergency care and the ICU. We always have roles for our LPNs. We manage our resources appropriately, and I'm quite pleased that our RHAs take this into consideration. Thank you.

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Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. So, once again, the Premier won't get on her feet because she doesn't want to be connected to this. She doesn't want to be connected to decisions that she is making that are affecting these workers. Well, Madam Speaker, we know that there are at least five Public Health postings that the health authorities have neither posted nor filled. This has been going on for months, directly violating the collective bargaining agreement, which states that vacancies must be posted within seven days. To the Premier, who said she was going to be different and who said she respects collective bargaining rights, why are you taking away these rights?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, you know, we value our nurses. We would not be able to stay open without our nurses and LPNs.

This is why we have committed to a supplement—a retention payment bonus. In fact, I, myself, married a nurse almost 32 years ago. This is a very valuable team.

We do work within the collective agreement. We've had trouble filling spots in almost every area of health care. We are looking at the best mix to serve these patients, and I trust our RHA CEOs to do that and to give us some leadership. For that, I am very thankful. Thank you.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The facts say otherwise. I am sorry to disagree with the Minister of Health. These nurses are saying that they are being told: You either take this redeployment or you will be laid off. Some of these people are deciding to retire, Madam Speaker, at a time when our system can ill afford that.

Yesterday, I had a nurse tell me directly—these are her words—how disappointed she is, as a woman, in this Premier. The job cuts are forcing women with families, who have a stable timeline for their work each and every day, into shift work where they don't have access to childcare. They are scrambling to get their families settled in a way in which their children will be cared for. These were her exact words to me: I didn't think a woman Premier would do this to a woman.

This is the effect that the Premier's government is having on these women. What do you have to say to these women?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, we respect that nurses have worked in different ways over time. It is necessary to reposition nurses at times. We do offer, where possible, similar levels of seniority and similar types of work. This is often the case. If we are unable to do that, then we provide additional training. If a nurse is going to work in an area over time in which she has less experience, then we provide training for that.

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We are very sensitive to the very large number of nurses who are women. We very much commit to treating them equitably and respectfully. We understand that many nurses are parents with children. Some are single parents. We take that into consideration when we are doing our redeployment. We ask that nurses be patient and help continue to serve our system by working in other areas where they are needed. Thank you.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. You can see how difficult this is for the Minister of Health because he is being forced into this position by the decisions of this Premier, Madam Speaker. This is clear.

When you move an RN... Their jobs are very specialized. They have the common training to become an RN, but, once they move into positions, that training is very specialized. That training can take weeks, months, or even years to fully formulate so that they can do the work associated with that particular position. So, now, when you redeploy them, they're going to bump other people who, in turn, bump other people who, in turn, bump other people, and so on and so forth. Each one of these people now has to be retrained.

These nurses have been stressed, anxious, and unhappy. They were watching this government yesterday. They were unhappy with the lack of answers from the Premier. I am going to ask the Premier: Will she stop the uncertainty that she is creating and stop what she is doing to public health nurses?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): I'm sorry, Madam Speaker, I got a call from a busy family doctor who wants to be redeployed.

To the member opposite, yes, people do require training when they move from one area to another, some more than others. For example, when we put our registered nurses in an ICU, we give a very particular course so that they are comfortable working with colleagues. One of our goals is to have enough people working in a given area.

When we redeploy nurses, we give them training. It differs from area to area. We want nurses to be competent and comfortable and units to be well-staffed. We provide additional daycare at the Saint John Regional Hospital, and, in Fredericton, we recently opened new daycare opportunities for folks who work with us there. Yes, we're consistent. We're concerned about the stress that this places on people.

We try to ensure that they are properly trained. Thank you.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We see very clearly what is going on here. We see that these cuts are happening and that these nurses are being forced into other positions or told that they can retire or be laid off. We can see that it is killing morale. It is creating chaos in the system. That's just the human resource side of it. It's upsetting families. When you look at the economics of it, you see that it's causing havoc. Nurses have to be retrained. There's a

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domino effect. These positions, when and if they're being refilled, are being refilled with LPNs who have a different skill set. They also need training to do these jobs.

So the question is this: Has anyone, the Premier or the Finance Minister, figured out what this is actually costing or what they think they're actually saving? Let's not forget the cost when it comes to the lives of patients who will be impacted by the actions of this government.

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, we're very concerned about the well-being of our staff, but we often do have to make changes. There was one time that my boss told me that, after a career in endocrinology, I needed to work in the emergency department. It was stressful, but it was necessary. I had colleagues who worked with me to make sure that my skill set was adequate. We do the same with our nurses.

We very much value our LPNs. These people are trained for a very broad scope of practice. They can work in these jobs and are taking these opportunities very aggressively. They like to work to their scope. We want to make sure that people are dealt with safely, by the right person at the right time, and it is the same thing with our nurses. We want them in a role where their scope of practice is appreciated and they are working to their full scope. We continue to do that throughout the health care system. Thank you.

EDUCATION

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): When I grew up and was taught by the sisters, we focused on the three Rs. That referred to reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. You know, it was extremely important. When I talk to parents today... As a parent myself, I've told my children: You can be whatever you want to be. I tell my grandchildren: You can be whatever you want to be. You need to work for it, and we need to have expectations to do that.

When I talk to parents today, I hear that they want their children to learn how to read and write, do arithmetic, and do science. I am a little confused as to how we're going to achieve that in education when we've decided that what we really want to do, by lowering academic standards, is to make children feel good about scoring lower. So I'd like to know how the Minister of Education thinks that's going to improve the literacy scores and mathematical ability of our students in New Brunswick.

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, through you to the member opposite, I completely agree. I talk to the same parents, the same people who are worried about literacy and numeracy. Do you know what they're telling me? They want teachers in the classrooms, in the schools, teaching their children to read and write. That's what we're hearing. So that's why we're investing, in the classrooms and in the schools, \$200 million more than last year. We're going to target those investments to academic support teachers. They're the ones teaching our kids

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to read and write. We're also going to be investing in behaviour intervention mentors, because they're also going to be helping to manage and keep kids in classrooms, where they need to be.

I'm hearing the same things, and I'm hearing that we need the best qualified teachers in our classrooms.

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't disagree with the fact that we need the best qualified teachers in our classrooms. I don't disagree. I mean, I said that I talked to parents too, and what they want is for their children to learn how to read and write. That wasn't my question. My question was about this minister, this government, and this Premier lowering the expectations for students in the province. No longer do we want a 90% achievement rate—57% will work, because we want students to feel good about not doing well. I don't understand that logic.

I'd like the Minister of Education to explain to me how lowering the standards for education is going to improve results for our students.

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, through you to the member opposite, thank you for the opportunity to clarify. The standards remain the same. Targets may move because we want to set realistic targets that will increase year after year after year. We're measuring them. We're measuring literacy rates. Then we're going to adjust. We're going to adjust based on the results. As we promised during the state of the province address, these are the metrics that we're going to be monitoring. We're going to be increasing targets year after year in a realistic, incremental way because that's how we know that we sustain change. Thank you.

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Madam Speaker, you know, I'm not a Rhodes Scholar. A friend of mine is. I think I understand English fairly well, and I have pretty comprehension when it comes to French. That answer was just... I don't know how to characterize that.

We're looking at what the Premier said in estimates, which was that we're going to increase our expectations—which I guess is a target—by 1% every year—1%. Currently, in this former government's... Well, I guess it was the Gallant government that had 90% as a target. That was the goal. Now we have this: Oh, we want them to feel good about not doing better. We're going to add 11 PD days in a pilot while removing 150 pedagogical specialists from the system. Who is going to help deliver these extra PL days to teachers?

[Translation]

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, I thank the opposition member for giving me the opportunity to clarify how we're going to support our teachers at school and in the classroom.

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We place a great deal of importance on teachers' professional development because they need the best possible tools to teach our young people the science of reading, literacy, and reading comprehension. These are all the wonderful things teachers are currently teaching our children in the classroom, in our schools, where the resources are needed.

To reach our objective, teachers must be supported so that they can use all their skills in their teaching. We are listening to teachers, and that's what they're asking us for. So we want to provide them with this support. Thank you very much.

[Original]

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Thank you. In January, our neighbouring province adopted a bill declaring domestic violence an epidemic in the province. Since then, organizations including White Ribbon Fredericton, Survivors United Against Violence, and the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, with the endorsement of more than 20 local community agencies, asked this government for the same declaration. Those pleas have gone unanswered, despite New Brunswick desperately needing to move the needle in the right direction.

New Brunswick has the third-highest provincial rate of intimate partner violence in the country and the highest in Atlantic Canada. Over the past dozen years, abuse has increased in the province by 39%, leading the country. New Brunswick has the highest increases in the nation, especially in the rural areas of our province. This is a time when none of us wants to be number one.

To the Minister responsible for Women's Equality: Does the province have any plans to make this important declaration that would put a necessary spotlight on this horror that is continuing to grow?

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister responsible for Seniors, Minister responsible for Women's Equality, L): Madam Speaker, thank you very much to the opposition member for her question. I'm honoured to rise in the House today to talk about the very alarming situation that you just mentioned.

We're very aware of what's involved in violence of all forms in New Brunswick. That's why we're travelling throughout the province to hear from the different people involved daily—they're there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week—in working with and supporting victims of violence.

We will focus on prevention. We understand the need to focus on prevention, because it will enable us to create a province where it's possible to meet all the needs in the fight against

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violence throughout New Brunswick. We can't get there without the help of all New Brunswickers, everyone in the province. Once we're aware of the violence and know what's happening, we're in a position to work on finding solutions. Thank you.

[Original]

Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Thank you so very much. Going back to the minister, I really don't believe that you answered that question. Why will you not declare an epidemic?

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister responsible for Seniors; Minister responsible for Women's Equality, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak. I thank the member opposite for her question. We understand that the situation is very alarming. We are not hiding the New Brunswick data. We share it every time we give a presentation. We indicate that New Brunswick is at the top of the list of provinces with the highest rate of violence of any kind. That is why we will continue to work tirelessly.

As you know, and as New Brunswickers are aware, we have also invested millions of dollars in the file. It is a historic moment. We announced that when the budget was tabled recently. We will continue to bring forward several initiatives for first responders and shelters. We are also investing in strategies and resources to promote prevention as well as intervention. We will invest in training at all levels, too. Thank you.

[Original]

Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Thank you so much. I'm going to try for a third time. Talk, talk, talk—there's lots of talk. We understand that there has been action. I don't know whether we're moving the needle in terms of what this minister's targets are. We haven't really heard about targets. I will ask again: Why are the women and families of this province not as important? Why will you not declare an epidemic in this province when statistics are so staggering? Why won't you declare it?

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister responsible for Seniors; Minister responsible for Women's Equality, L): Madam Speaker and honourable opposition members, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak for the third time on a file that is really important to me. I am speaking on my own behalf, but I can also say that I am speaking on behalf of all the members sitting on the government side in the House today. Thank you very much.

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We are investing \$9 million—yes, \$9 million. It is a historic moment. I will break down the amount. Funding of \$800 000 will go to community initiatives to end all forms of violence in the province. The government is also investing \$100 000 to end violence on university campuses. We have learned that some students live in quite precarious situations, so we are investing money to improve the situation.

We are also continuing to invest in developing strategies to counter violence, more specifically, \$309 000 to fight sexual violence against children. Thank you.

[Original]

HOSPITALS

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): Madam Speaker, I was recently contacted by one of my constituents concerning troubling experiences they recently had, on multiple occasions, when seeking health care at the Sussex Health Centre. Donna, a disabled individual who utilizes a walker for mobility, had to seek treatment on two occasions. The first occurrence was for X-rays, and the second was for blood work that needed to be sent to Moncton. Donna made me aware that, despite all of the advances in medical technology and patient care, this facility still does not have a washroom for disabled individuals near the lab testing area. When will the government act immediately to install washroom facilities for disabled individuals at this location so that she and future patients do not have to soil themselves when seeking health care in our province?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, thank you for letting me know this fact. I will be in touch with our RHA CEO, who has direct control over what happens in the local facilities. I agree with you. This is not what we want to see happen. When people have to go, they have to go. They can't afford the time to look all over the hospital. Thank you very much for drawing this to our attention.

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): I recognize the minister... Sorry, I recognize the member for Fredericton-Grand Lake.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): No apology needed, Madam Speaker.

CARBON TAX

Now that the federal Liberals have held on to power, the Prime Minister has promised to put yet another carbon tax on industry, which will impact our Saint John refinery. According to a report published last year by the Atlantic Economic Council of Canada, the family business, including the refinery, employs approximately 1 in 12 New Brunswickers. It also contributes over \$500 million annually to our GDP and 50% of the province's trade value. Half of Canada's exported refined petroleum is exported right here in New Brunswick, from Saint John. Will the Minister of Energy fight against this carbon tax,

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knowing the significant impacts such a tax will have on our economy here at home and on the workforce here in New Brunswick?

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, we find the opposition hanging on to the carbon tax argument and trying to make noise. We don't know what the federal government is going to come out with yet in terms of a plan. We know we have to make some changes. We will continue to have discussions with the federal government and will work to see what we can do. We know the importance of the Saint John refinery and know what it does for the economy. We continue to work with our counterparts. We are waiting to see, first of all, who the federal Minister of Energy will be. We don't even know that yet. Once we get that information, we will make the appropriate calls and will find out what the federal government's plans are. Then, we can adjust accordingly.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Well, Madam Speaker, I think it's clear that this regurgitated tax is coming. They campaigned on it. When the carbon tax was cleverly and temporarily removed during the recent federal campaign, the price of gas dropped by about 20¢ per litre, just enough for the Liberals to buy a few votes so they could barely hang on to power. With this new regurgitated carbon tax coming, I do not believe the federal government, the minister here today, nor the Premier are naive enough to believe that this tax is not going to be passed down to consumers. It is inevitable. Any taxes put onto these corporations will be passed down to everyone filling up their gas tanks, once again driving up inflation and making the cost of living in New Brunswick even more unbearable. Will this Premier and this Minister of Energy stand against more taxes and inflation, or will this government support driving New Brunswick further into poverty?

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, we see the opposition following suit to when it was in power. It is forgetting about affordability.

(Interjections.)

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Order.

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): The removal of the carbon tax took 17¢ off the price of one litre of gas. People were able to find some relief. Now that is seen as buying votes. For years, that is what the opposition has been crying for, but now it is seen as buying votes. The opposition will never be pleased on this issue. There is a way to work to find balance and find a way forward. We will work with the federal government. We will work with our

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partners. We will not be conflictual, as the former government has been for the past six years. We will work together to find solutions that benefit New Brunswickers.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. That's quite the response. We are talking about a carbon tax that we know has a direct impact on consumers. That is why the federal government removed it during the federal campaign. It knew removing it would drop the price of gas by 20¢ per litre, enabling it to buy a few votes and barely hang on to power on the federal scale. Now, we have the same situation with the provincial Liberals. During their campaign, they promised the carbon adjustor would be removed so that they could reduce the price of gas by 4¢ per litre. However, that promise just seems to have died, and we are not quite sure where.

(Interjections.)

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Order.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): At the end of the day, Madam Speaker, what the federal government does has a direct impact on New Brunswickers. The carbon tax has a direct impact on inflation. It has a direct impact on people's wallets and pocketbooks. From groceries to consumer goods, everything we buy is shipped, and it costs gas to ship things. Will this government fight against its federal counterparts to get this carbon tax off the table so it does not impact New Brunswickers?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to take the opportunity to reply to what the member was suggesting in a couple of different ways. It's clear that the opposition is having a difficult time adjusting to change. It's something that New Brunswickers asked for. It's something that New Brunswickers voted for. They wanted something different from what they had been put through in the past six years, and we notice that the federal government has also enacted an agenda of change by cancelling the carbon tax. The opposition can't seem to keep up.

I want to acknowledge that change is hard. We know we need different results in our education system. New Brunswickers are demanding different results from our health care system. We cannot keep doing things the same way, and we certainly won't do things the way the previous government did by disrespecting teachers and disrespecting nurses. We know we need to get qualified teachers into the classrooms. We know we need to get RNs and health care professionals in front of patients to serve them. We are going to change the results for New—

[Translation]

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