

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



November 4, 2025

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[Translation]

ACCOUNTABILITY

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

[Original]

Madam Speaker, I would like to continue talking about this disappearing act of the Premier and her ministers from the media on Friday. Avoiding the media is a recurring theme, Madam Speaker. This government promised to be the most radically transparent government in the history of this province.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): They're transparent, all right. They don't exist in the rotunda.

It's my understanding that the ministers are on Round 4 of taxpayer-funded media training, and it must be Round 5 where they learn how to face questions from journalists. Considering the Premier's and her ministers' disdain for accredited journalists, will she and her ministers commit to being out in the rotunda today, answering questions from the media regardless of who gets asked and on what topic? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I was anticipating that the members of the opposition might ask questions that they were flagging on behalf of the media, questions about property tax reform, our health care system, and herbicide spraying. I think they mentioned that these are things that New Brunswickers are interested in knowing about. Our team is going to be in the rotunda, as usual, today, tomorrow, engaging with the media, as we were last week, yesterday, and today. We'll continue to engage with the media and with the public on the issues that are most important to them. We are out there every day, hearing from New Brunswickers. They want to know how we're improving health care in this province with the recruitment of more doctors and nurses than this province has ever seen. New Brunswickers want to know how we're making their lives more affordable with the property tax reforms that are advancing. We're going to continue to engage with the media and New Brunswickers on the issues that matter to them.

ENERGY AND UTILITIES BOARD

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think that the Premier must be on Round 6.

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Let's talk about this government's lack of action and how its poor decision-making is impacting the EUB. The EUB is a quasi-judicial independent body, and, historically, its reviews have been very complex and have routinely taken one to two years to complete. The fastest the EUB has ever completed a review is three months. This government is now expecting the EUB to do the work necessary to find a solution in only 32 days. The Minister of Natural Resources was a member of the EUB for 10 years. He's setting it up to fail. Why is this minister throwing his former EUB colleagues under the bus?

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. My former colleagues at the EUB have an immense amount of subject matter expertise. When you have a permanent board, you actually have that resident knowledge in place. That applies to the commissioners and the board staff themselves. When you have a permanent board, meaning it is not a part-time environment, it has the agility to move quickly when required. Given the fact that the board has a question that it may want to quantify in a different way—I would suggest that would be appropriate for the cost of compliance to the Clean Fuel Regulations—we on this side of the House would encourage the members opposite to encourage the EUB to do its work. We believe that it has the tools to move with that type of agility and to have any hearing that is required to ensure two things. The first is that New Brunswickers do not pay more for fuel than they should. The second is that we have security of supply. Thank you.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The evidence is there that the EUB has never done this before, yet look at what this government is doing: ignoring all evidence. Either these government members have received the worst advice in the history of this province or they know something that they're not telling us. Either there's a plan to put pressure on the EUB, knowing that it cannot achieve what this government wants it to do, thereby giving this government an excuse to shut it down and deregulate, or it could be that this Premier knows something about the federal budget that is coming down today. Does she know whether Mark Carney is going to remove the clean fuel adjustor? Is she doing this to preempt that, just so she can say that she fulfilled her promise? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Madam Speaker, I would just remind the honourable member that there are precedents in which the board was able to act with agility, having that resident knowledge and having those members in place and that board staffed. A testament to that would be Matter 458. That was a comprehensive review of the general rate application of NB Power that took place in March 2020, in the pandemic era. The panel was able to assemble in a virtual context and render a decision in one day.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): I can't believe this minister is trying to make New Brunswickers believe that these are the same thing. He's talking about NB Power instead of talking about fuel regulation, Madam Speaker, and they are two different things. He was on the board. He should know that. He must not have been paying attention.

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There are 1 billion litres of fuel sold in New Brunswick each year. An 8.24¢ reduction in the cost of fuel is \$82.4 million in lost revenues to convenience stores around the province. That is money these owners use to pay their employees, pay back their bank loans, and invest back into their businesses. The way government is handling this file is going to put some of those people out of business. You could be finding different ways to accomplish this, such as different rack prices or different formulas, but, instead, you failed to deliver this in a year, despite what you promised. Now, you're targeting retailers with an \$82.4-million hit. Why are you attacking fuel retailers? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. On the previous questions and on this one, the reason the hearings took so long, sometimes up to two years, is very clear. The positions weren't filled. The previous government sat on open positions at the EUB for years. The board was short and couldn't get a quorum, and that's why it couldn't get the work done. As a government, we acted very quickly to fill those positions and have that EUB operating. When industry representatives came in and asked for the margins, they had their hearing within a few months.

This was after years of waiting, and I mean years. It was almost a decade. I think we've done a very good job equipping EUB to do exactly what it needs to do. It has the tools available. It will get its work done as it needs to.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, the fact that's missing here in what the minister just said is that the report said: Do not take off the cost of carbon adjustor. It's insanity.

The government had a year to do something. It met with stakeholders who consistently told the government everything that it did not want to hear. Now, because of this Premier, who made this political promise, gas supply is being put in jeopardy.

This will not provide affordability relief for New Brunswickers, especially if they have to travel farther or if we have to deregulate and go through an open market process. There is no guarantee that people in rural communities will not have to pay more. All the evidence points to not doing this. Will the Premier admit that this is a political promise and that it has nothing to do with evidence? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Madam Speaker, at a time when New Brunswickers are struggling with the cost of living—and I am certain the member opposite has heard this from residents of his riding—and when people are having a really hard time making ends meet, I am really surprised that what I am hearing from the members opposite is that they are against deregulation. They are against taking 8¢ off the cost of gas for New Brunswickers so that they can have some relief at a time when they are paying a lot at the pump.

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The members opposite are against doing things that support New Brunswickers at a time when they need it, whereas our government is using every tool available to try to deliver relief to people when they need it. We are out there listening. We are in it for New Brunswickers, and we always will be. Thank you very much.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): If that answer weren't so bad, it would be almost funny. Where has the government been for the past year, Madam Speaker? It could have done this long ago, at the stroke of a pen, according to the Premier, but she lost the pen somewhere under her desk.

Now the government is panicking, trying to put this on the EUB and avoid accepting responsibility. There can be no equivocation here. This is a political promise from this Premier, and she is going to do it regardless of the impact on New Brunswick.

What will you have to say to New Brunswickers if your plan does not work and you do not get the 8.24¢ off the price at the pump as you promised? Will you take responsibility for every store that closes? Will you take responsibility for every dollar that New Brunswick does not save as a result of your promise? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Madam Speaker, again, when we were working on this last year, industry members pointed out something that was very clear: They hadn't had a margin hearing forever. They wanted to discuss the cost of carbon adjustor, but there was another issue because the margins hadn't been taken care of. We heard it. We brought it to the Committee on Law Amendments. The committee came back with a clear set of criteria and some recommendations to get it done. We waited for that process to go through. We had those meetings. EUB was able to do its job. All along, it was tripartite. Everybody on that committee agreed on those recommendations, and we got it done. I don't know what the frustration is about.

EDUCATION

Mr. Lee (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last week, I asked the Minister of Education questions about the advocate's report on the education budgeting saga. The minister said that there had been conversations with the advocate about his recommendations. I think we need to address the significant failures that were pointed out in his report. With respect to my questions last week, they remain unanswered.

I ask, again: Can the minister provide a clear explanation of how such a major error occurred with respect to the education budget? Are any officials being held accountable for that fiasco? What specific accountability measures will be implemented to prevent future budget miscommunications and reversals like the \$14.6-million restoration?

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Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Once again, thanks for the opportunity to thank the New Brunswick advocate for his important work.

We share a concern about vulnerable populations in our province, and we share the priorities of enhancing literacy and numeracy rates and improving scores in our province. As I mentioned last week, we've discussed his report extensively, we agree in principle with his recommendations, and we look forward to implementing his important contribution to the way we do our work. Thank you.

Mr. Lee (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The *Education Budgeting Saga* continued. Last week, the common themes I heard from the government were all about accountability and transparency, so let's put that to the test. These are my questions to the Minister of Education with respect to the advocate's report: Will the minister submit, table, and divulge the internal memos and briefing notes used to justify the initial cuts, yes or no? Will the minister support requiring the DEC's to publicly disclose the budget impacts before implementing cuts, yes or no? And can the minister guarantee that no essential student supports were permanently lost due to the budgeting failure, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. We will work hard to implement the Child, Youth and Senior Advocate's recommendations. We will focus especially on the budget recommendations. We will seek to determine what the department's responsibilities are regarding the districts, because we will continue working with them to ensure that the dollars being invested in education yield the desired results.

We are investing in literacy and numeracy, and we want to reduce chronic absenteeism. We will therefore continue to work with our partners to achieve the desired results. We will continue to work in a transparent manner. When we have to make adjustments, as was the case last year, we will do so, because we are not afraid of working together. We won't hesitate to correct course. Thank you.

[Original]

Mr. Lee (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Again, there's more from the advocate's opus on the education budgeting saga. These are my questions: How will the upcoming 10-year education plan address the budgeting failures identified in the report? Why did the Department of Education provide evasive or incomplete information to Cabinet regarding the impact of the \$43-million budget directive? And one that I'm certainly curious about is this: Who signed off and agreed to the talking points that the advocate has described as "a dubious relationship to the truth"? This is on page 8, paragraph 2, sentence 1, by the way.

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Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to talk about the education plan. We've launched consultations on this very important work because we know the past plan that was shared in 2016 is finished. We now have the opportunity to create the next steps in education. We've had surveys. We've had in-person consultations. We've had virtual consultations. We're hearing directly from New Brunswickers on how they want to see the next steps in education. This is a really exciting opportunity. I don't want to presuppose what we're going to hear because we are in the middle of these meaningful conversations, but I look forward to sharing the findings with New Brunswickers once we have them. Thank you.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. Weir (Riverview, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. My questions and related follow-ups today about the transparency around addiction treatment in the province are for the Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services. The opposition has introduced several motions with the end goals of saving and restoring the lives of New Brunswickers suffering from addictions and providing the greatest possible support for New Brunswickers with mental health issues and concerns. We brought these several motions forward because there are many sides to the issue and to the needed response by government.

Last Thursday, the Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services made this remark: We are not going to build a treatment centre in every community if it's not needed. Will the minister share the names of all the communities where addiction is not an issue and treatment is not needed? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services; L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the member opposite for bringing the question forward. I appreciate that they brought a number of motions forward so that we would have a chance to debate next steps when it comes to addiction treatment and mental health treatment in the province. We on this side of the House are working very hard to establish a new 50-bed facility that will be of service to the entire province. It will more than double the current offering of treatment beds in the province.

When I speak about not setting up that facility in every corner of the province, I mean that there has to be a coordinated strategy. That's why we're undertaking a needs-based analysis to determine what exactly the needs are. The members opposite sat on their hands for six years. They didn't develop a strategy. Now, they just want to create chaos by suggesting we construct treatment facilities in every last little corner of the province. We're going to take a coordinated, strategic approach to make sure all New Brunswickers get the help—

Mr. Weir (Riverview, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The 50-bed treatment centre the minister is speaking about was introduced by the previous government. It was announced

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a year ago, and the work to get it done took longer than that, maybe up to 18 or 20 months. These things take time. The members opposite are out of time. They need to get at it and need to work in parallel. It doesn't appear that government is taking this issue as seriously as it should. If it were, the Premier would not heckle a member while he shares information.

Heckling is a part of our parliamentary system. The choice of timing and subject matter is left to each of us to choose. If the Premier feels her choice of timing and subject matter is appropriate, she should come to the media scrum and explain. I would like to invite the Premier to join me in the media scrum following question period. The minister can come too. He can name all the communities where addiction treatment is not needed. Does the minister know all—

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services; L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. While I can appreciate that the opposition, which did nothing for six years, wants to put a 50-bed facility in every community in the province, it has to realize that treatment takes different forms for different people. Long-term treatment is not necessarily the right approach for everyone. There are different approaches across the entire continuum of care. There is long-term treatment. There is short-term treatment. There are outpatient services. There are intensive day treatment services. When I speak about not just shovelling money out the door by putting a 50-bed facility in every last little community in this province, I mean that we are going to take a global approach.

We are conducting the needs-based analysis that the members opposite didn't complete, and we are going to complete the 50-bed facility that, again, they didn't complete. They waited until the last month of their six-year mandate to put out an RFP. We're just cleaning up the mess the former government left. We're taking a coordinated approach for the entire province.

Mr. Weir (Riverview, PC): This government has not yet completed a 50-bed centre that was promised by the last government and that this minister promised would have results this fall. It is not there, and it is not happening.

On Friday, the Premier and several of her ministers made a hasty retreat rather than face questions from the media. I am glad to say that the minister responsible for mental health and addictions was not one of these ministers, Madam Speaker. His colleagues, however, ran away from their duties, showing the Premier's claims of transparency and accountability to be a complete work of fiction in the process. I'd like to ask the minister whether he will show up at the media scrum today, if he is requested, to speak about the communities where addiction treatment is not needed. Even if the Premier runs off, will the minister come to a media scrum if he is requested?

It's important that we keep transparency in this, and we need to speak to this need. The minister often talks about having set goals and about having it all work together. I understand that. It needs to happen now as well. We can't do all of it in the future.

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Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services; L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you, again, to the member opposite for the thoughtful question. I appreciate him not yelling at me today. It's a little easier to make out the question when he speaks eloquently.

As I said, we're working on a coordinated plan. I'd be happy to speak to the media if they have questions. We're here for every New Brunswicker in every community across this province. We're going to build the 50-bed facility. We know that 50 beds are not enough to meet the needs of New Brunswickers. We will work on the next facility. We will work on the full continuum of care.

As I said, healing is different for everyone. You could be a mother with children who can't leave to go to an intensive, live-in treatment facility.

However, in Moncton, there is access to an intensive day treatment program. Maybe that's something that could be useful in the Tantramar region. Maybe it's something that could be useful in Campbellton or Tracadie. We're going to look at the needs of every community and make sure they have access to the right services at the right time.

SECURITY

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Madam Speaker, when Trump launched his trade war against Canada, the Premier made a great show of taking American booze out of the liquor stores and of musing about shutting off electricity exports to the United States. However, now she's welcoming two American energy companies, Missouri-based PROENERGY to Tantramar and Texas-based VoltaGrid to Lorneville, to burn fracked gas and welcoming the U.S. Department of War's money for the Sisson mine. This is a threat to our very security, as they will funnel money out of New Brunswick and into the pockets of Trump's drill-baby-drill crowd and shovel tungsten into the American war machine. These projects will bind our economy to the U.S. even more tightly while Trump batters our softwood lumber sector in the ongoing effort to make Canada the 51st state.

Will the Premier send Trump's business boys and his Department of War packing?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thanks to the member opposite for the question. He illustrates a real challenge that New Brunswick is facing right now. Our economy has been tied to the American economy for a very long time. New Brunswick is the most export-intensive province, with 92% of its exports going to the United States. Our supply chains are inextricably linked. We have businesses that are tied directly, whether up in Madawaska or down in St. Stephen, to our neighbours in Maine, in the forestry sector, the energy sector, and beyond.

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[Translation]

We are working very hard to find a way to be more self-sufficient here in New Brunswick. We are looking for new markets for our products. We are providing our businesses with assistance and services. They are having a very hard time right now because of the tariffs. We are there to support them, find new markets, and create new partnerships with other Canadian provinces through an interprovincial free trade agreement that we will talk about this afternoon.

[Original]

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Madam Speaker, as long as Trump is President, the Premier must treat the U.S. as hostile to our interests. Trump is hell-bent on breaking our resource sectors to make it easier to assimilate our country. He's turning world leaders into sycophants as he defies international and American law. He has even ordered the Secretary of War to have the National Guard form quick reaction forces by January 1 in order to quell civil disturbances across the United States as he undermines democracy. In an October 31 editorial, the *New York Times* examined 12 indicators of autocracy and found that the U.S. has regressed on all 12.

We must not feed this beast, yet this Premier is welcoming Trump's drill-baby-drill buddies and the Department of War's cash into our province to do just that. Why won't the Premier bar the door to New Brunswick from Trump's corporate supporters and the cash from his Pentagon?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston—Vallée-des-Rivières, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs; Minister responsible for Immigration; Minister responsible for Military Affairs; Minister responsible for the Research and Productivity Council, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, when situations that are a bit more problematic arise, opportunities need to be embraced. How can we ensure that our provincial economy progresses? Look at what we have done in the past year. We have worked in partnership with the other provinces and territories, as well as the federal government, to make progress on free trade between our jurisdictions.

With respect to products, we have worked on direct sales to consumers. We have also worked on the bill concerning labour mobility. This is an extremely important file for New Brunswick businesses, since it enables them to keep looking to the future. We will continue working with our partners across the country, since there are extraordinary opportunities for New Brunswick businesses and workers.

I can guarantee you, Madam Speaker, that this afternoon, we will introduce another great initiative that the Liberal government of New Brunswick wants to implement to work even harder with all...

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[Original]

SMALL MODULAR REACTORS

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to direct my question about small modular reactors to the Minister of Energy.

I'll start by reading a press release that came out just a few days ago: Canada Growth Fund, a federally incorporated Crown corporation, will provide up to \$2 billion in equity funding, while Building Ontario Fund will provide up to \$1 billion in equity funding.

It goes on to say the following:

According to the Conference Board of Canada, DNNP

—Darlington New Nuclear Project—

will create up to 18,000 Canadian jobs annually through the construction phase, while adding \$38.5B to Canada's GDP over the next 65 years.

This is great news—for Ontario. What has the Minister of Energy or the Premier done to get any federal investment in our energy security? Why is this government not continuing the vision that our predecessors had in research and development for SMRs? Why aren't they bringing federal partners home to New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the question. I think that, in the last little bit of the question, the subject of energy security was brought in, and that's very important. Yes, Darlington is creating an SMR right now, but it's a first-of-a-kind SMR. It's the most expensive of them. Actually, it's a \$19.3-billion or \$19.4-billion project. Ontario can do it because that SMR, at 300 MW, represents a very small portion of the risk for its whole portfolio.

New Brunswick's in a different situation. Every other province in Canada is trying to reduce that first-of-a-kind risk because it is exceedingly expensive. Everyone knows New Brunswick is not in a position to take that risk. We are still working with the Point Lepreau site. It is still technology agnostic. We will be able to put in new nuclear when the price is right and the risk is mitigated. That's what we'll do. We don't need to run after cash that is not risk-averse.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. What the minister fails to recognize is that, over the past several governments, millions of dollars have been invested in the development of SMRs. In the summer of 2018, the Gallant government committed \$10 million in SMR research and development. As the previous government, we also committed several million dollars to this important project. Both governments understood the opportunity for a huge return on that investment when it's done right here in New Brunswick.

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Recently, in the public accounts committee, a representative from NB Power said something, and I will not forget his words. He said that what keeps him up at night is worrying about the electricity supply meeting future demand, yet this government refuses to continue this important investment in research and development for SMRs. Why is this government not taking this issue seriously? Why does New Brunswick once again get left out in the cold with a big goose egg from the federal government?

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. That was an interesting analogy about goose eggs. If the member opposite had looked at the budget last year, he would know that federal dollars are being spent right now with NB Power on the Point Lepreau site, essentially for nuclear—for new nuclear. SMRs are right there. We've been at it all along.

Now, the key is for it to be the first of a kind. The last government was willing to risk it all. The cost didn't matter, yet every day I hear speeches about Liberals spending and not being responsible with money. All of a sudden, this is forgotten when it's politically correct to try to throw shade on a party. That's fine. Okay, whatever, that's fair game.

However, the point is that we will not take that risk. We will spend the money. It's a 15- to 20-year play. It doesn't have to be done right now. I know we're all caught up in headlines, but the reality is that we continue to work on it, we'll do it responsibly, we'll do it when New Brunswickers are protected, and we'll do it when energy security is guaranteed.

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): The time for question period has expired.

[*Translation*]

Question period is now over.