

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



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[Translation]

GASOLINE PRICES

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

[Original]

Madam Speaker, the reckless actions of this government, if you believe the government's figures, are going to take over \$80 million away from hard-working New Brunswickers. This government clearly doesn't mind dipping into General Revenue to cover the costs of its promises. The government did so with its electricity rebate, to the tune of about \$100 million. It could do the same here. It could reduce the provincial portion of the fuel tax by 4¢ per litre, as its members originally promised, and not attack retailers. You could, with the stroke of a pen, cut taxes for New Brunswickers instead of cutting the margins of hard-working New Brunswickers. Why won't you cut taxes rather than cut margins on the backs of hard-working New Brunswickers? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Translation]

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.

[Original]

Thank you to the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, for the question. There has been a series of questions. Yesterday, actually, the member brought up some conspiracy theory that we may be trying to create chaos in order to talk about potential deregulation or the clean fuel adjustor, which, last night, we saw is still here.

Honestly, who benefited most from this chaos, from the Clean Fuel Regulations to the carbon adjustor? It was their side. The opposition members had T-shirts made. They had signs made. They had stickers made. Does everybody remember, "Axe the tax"? Clearly, it was about who wanted chaos first, front and centre. The opposition members couldn't talk more about the cost of carbon and the cost of carbon adjustor. They benefited from it. They wanted to keep it online. They wanted to keep it front and centre. That's where the chaos came from, and that's what they keep trying to do.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): I've heard a lot of bad answers in this Chamber, Madam Speaker, but that has to be one of the worst I've ever heard. Taxes have doubled under this government, so who's benefiting? Please. The math just doesn't add up.

Retailers make a 10.66¢ margin on every litre of fuel. This is not pure profit. There are the costs of paying for the infrastructure in the ground, money that must be invested in their

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businesses, employees to be paid, fees paid on every litre of gas when someone pays with a credit card—in New Brunswick, that equals 60% of all transactions—not to mention when thieves abscond, when they do the fuel-and-flee or the fuel-and-dash kind of thing. Retailers lose money. That's direct money lost to them. This government will take a margin of 10.66¢ to about 2¢. The math tells us that gas will be sold at a loss. Businesses cannot sustain this. Who is this Premier listening to that leads her to believe that this is going to work?

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): Again, Madam Speaker, speaking of chaos, in 2023, the then Conservative government received a report that was commissioned by the Department of Natural Resources and Energy from R-Cubed economic consulting about what the impacts of deregulation would be. The government received the report, and, essentially, the main conclusion was: In New Brunswick, deregulation or regulation has no impact on gas prices. None. Taking it off would essentially not cause any difference in pricing. It would just go on. Yet, that government buried the report. Why would you bury that report? Nobody heard of it. Why? Was it because the T-shirts were already paid for or because the sticker bill had come in? Is that why? That report was there. There are great conclusions in it, and it was buried. Nobody wanted to discuss it because it didn't serve their political agenda or their campaign promises. That's what they wanted to do, and that's why they never brought it up.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Let's talk about reports, Madam Speaker. Let's talk about the New Brunswick EUB's *2025 Cost of Carbon Adjustor Periodic Review*, in which it says:

The methodology in the current CCA formula is reasonable and there are no warranted changes to the assumptions or inputs at this time

So, the minister has zero credibility, Madam Speaker, but I will tell you where it does matter. That's in small communities, where there is only one gas station. If it closes, what happens to the people there? What happens to the volunteer firefighting services that have to fuel up in order to save people's homes?

Will they have to invest in infrastructure in order to have fuel always on hand? This is a cost that municipalities can't bear, and it's all because of this government. The members went from failures on fiscal reform to failures now with a reckless promise that they never should have made. They should have found a different way. What does this Premier have to say to communities that could be in jeopardy if they lose their only gas station?

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, one of the key takeaways from the report, and I'm reading it verbatim, is this: This suggests that regulations have not had a material impact on retail prices and that markets are being driven by normal, competitive market forces.

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There was the ability to remove a whole bunch of logistical wrangling with the EUB in our markets. We could have done this, and, actually, I think that my critic is quite favourable to it. However, for those who weren't here, let's go back in time and remember how this was done. There were three statements every day for a year. Usually, there was one from the member for Miramichi East, one from the Valley, and one from Fredericton. They always went the same way. The first statement was always congratulating themselves on some tactic or something they had done. The second was trying to find a way to connect our then leader to Brian Gallant. The third was bringing up Justin Trudeau, only about his carbon tax. It went that way every single day. They didn't want to touch that report.

My question to the Leader of the Official Opposition is this: When he goes to the scrum later, does he want to dust off his copy of the report, or does he want to borrow mine?

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. This guy looks in the rear-view mirror so much I'm going to buy him a back-up beeper. My heavens.

HOUSING

This government has been in power for one year, and here is what we've seen in the past year. We've seen the wait list for affordable housing increase to an unprecedented 13 000 people. We've seen the number of people experiencing homelessness increase to over 1 500 people. We've seen a government that's delayed tax reform, which further delays new development. Rent costs have increased by 10% despite the 3% rent cap. The only new affordable housing units this government has announced were started by the previous government. You might want to look back at that. Homeless encampments are on the rise, and to top things off, the government has kicked its own target of reducing homelessness by 40% another year down the road.

My question is for the Minister of Social Development. The social crisis is deepening under your watch. You are ultimately responsible for the junior minister. Will you take responsibility for his failures?

Hon. Mr. Hickey (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. We knew from day one that we were in a crisis. Over the past six years, we saw homelessness in this province increase by 210%. We saw our communities change before us, and New Brunswickers demanded action. That's why they elected a government with the vision to do something about it. That's why we made sure that we reduced the number of people entering homelessness with the establishment of legislation containing the single largest tenant protection of this century in the form of a rent cap. That's why we made sure that we put \$20 million out the door in direct to tenant supports to secure housing for over 2 500 more New Brunswickers. That's why we stood up a first of its kind ministerial task force to make sure that every arm of government was working in the same direction to deliver a vision for New Brunswickers

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on homelessness, to make sure we could do something. That's what we're going to continue to do. This is our vision.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): That is completely disconnected from reality, Madam Speaker. These are the facts: the housing wait list has increased to an unprecedented 13 000 people, the number of people experiencing homelessness has increased to over 1 500 people, delayed tax reform has further delayed new development, and rent costs have increased by 10% despite what the government members say about their vaunted rent cap. It's not working. The only new affordable housing units they've announced were started by the previous government. Homeless encampments are on the rise. We're talking about what's happening right now on the ground, and this housing minister can't sign for anything. It takes the Minister of Social Development to sign off on anything. That's why she's ultimately responsible, and I'm asking for her to stand up, Madam Speaker. What is she, as the Minister of Social Development, doing to get her junior minister back on track?

Hon. Mr. Hickey (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Let me affirm one thing, Madam Speaker: I am the Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation. I stood up in this Legislature, as we did at the state of the province address, to affirm our key indicators of success. We have maintained those ever since day one. We are making sure that we develop more affordable housing in every community across the country.

The Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about urgency. The last time I was asked a question in this Legislature was 343 days ago—343 days. It was on November 27 of last year. That was the last time I was asked a question by this opposition. If the opposition members want to talk about what we're doing in government, then they should have gotten on their feet over the past 10 months and asked a question about it.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, Madam Speaker, we stood up Housing New Brunswick, so he has a job. You're welcome.

Madam Speaker, the junior minister is in charge of a task force that took a year to come together. It made it a reality that this government has pushed back its homelessness targets by another year. The minister should be aware—the Minister of Social Development should be aware—that her junior minister also chaired the standing committee on homelessness in Saint John, where homelessness got worse under his watch. Now it's getting worse under his watch as the junior minister of housing.

As the Minister of Social Development, you bear ultimate responsibility for the progress of this task force. In six weeks, we've had two photo ops and no results. The government members know, or should have known, how to deal with this issue, but they've had a year, and they've accomplished nothing.

It's getting colder. More people are unhoused. So far, this task force has offered nothing besides a photo op. How many people—a number—will get out of the cold this winter due to the government's task force? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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Hon. Mr. Hickey (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition is right about one thing: I have one person to thank for this job, and it is, indeed, him.

We know that there is a crisis in the communities, and that's why we have responded. In Saint John, right now, 238 people are living chronically on the street this month. In Fredericton, it's 194. In Moncton, it's 537. Our communities have been begging for vision. Vision is what we've delivered.

We've made sure to stand up a ministerial task force to deliver results for communities faster. This is why, in the first two weeks after that committee was established, we made sure we rolled out a clear plan. We are delivering \$7.4 million to impacted communities so they are able to partner with non-profits and establish housing first projects in the interim to get people out of tents and into housing.

Ms. Conroy (Miramichi East, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the throne speech, the government committed to creating 6 000 new housing starts every year. That sounds impressive on paper, but when we take a closer look, only 1 700 of those are expected to be affordable units by 2029. Meanwhile, more than 13 000 people in the province are on waiting lists for affordable housing. These are families, seniors, and individuals who simply can't afford a place to live.

How can the government assure New Brunswickers that these new builds won't just be higher-end apartments that most people can't afford? What steps is the department taking to make sure that a meaningful share of those 6 000 housing starts are truly affordable, rent-geared-to-income homes that actually help people get off the waiting list and prevent more people from becoming homeless? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Hickey (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): It's been 343 days, and now I'm up non-stop. It's exciting because there's a lot to share here. There's a good story to share in these numbers. The member opposite is right. We are well on target to hit our 6 000 housing starts for this year, and we're well on target to hit our 30 000 over our committed timeline.

We have been clear about one thing. We are making it easier to develop in this province, and we will continue our effort to become the most competitive development landscape in Atlantic Canada. That's been our commitment. That's why we made sure that one of our first orders of government was to eliminate the HST on new multi-unit constructions. This has ensured that more developers get off the sidelines in every community in the province so that we can see more development in more places.

It's why we also made sure that we're tying those to programs such as our Affordable Rental Housing Program (ARHP) and to our public housing starts so we can get more affordable units off the ground. We know we need to make sure that we have those community partnerships to be able—

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Ms. Conroy (Miramichi East, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm glad the minister is excited about standing on his feet. I have been preoccupied with my questions and with trying to stop the ridiculous cuts to my riding.

This throne speech promises that the government will release a homelessness action plan before the end of the year. We've all seen the growing number of people sleeping rough and relying on temporary shelters. This is not only in our larger cities but also in our rural areas and smaller communities. People are frustrated. They hear about plans, strategies, and targets, but they want to see action and results. Where's the proof?

Can the minister tell us what the plan will actually include in terms of actions, results, and funding? More importantly, how will this plan tie in with the 6 000 housing starts that this government committed to so that the new supply actually supports those who are homeless or at risk of losing their homes instead of just adding to the housing market?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Hickey (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

It's an excellent question, and it bears on the exact work that we've committed to doing through our task force. We're making sure that we come up with a whole-of-government strategy for tackling this crisis in every community. That's why we've pulled together a task force that represents every department that's impacted and every section of the community that's impacted as well. It's why we announced and rolled out, as an immediate measure—not waiting for the full plan because we knew communities were demanding action and we had a pipeline of projects that needed to be funded—\$7.4 million to make sure we delivered for communities and to get people directly out of tents and into housing. We know that these solutions will work to curb the homelessness crisis in our communities and in this province, and we know that these are the key measures that we're going to take. We're leaning on every government department that is implicated to be able to deliver for New Brunswickers.

Ms. Conroy (Miramichi East, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The minister has some great, well-rehearsed speaking notes, but pretty words will not solve the housing crisis and homelessness crisis. We have heard that the number of homeless people in our province has surged with a 210% increase in the major cities, bringing the number of people experiencing homelessness to 1 529 as of March this year. With the federal government's ballooning budget, I can't see those numbers getting any better either.

The cold weather is here. For people waiting and living rough, the biggest question they have is when. When will the shelters be available? When will the minister and this government stop talking and provide results? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Hickey (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We made it clear. There is

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\$7.4 million delivered for every community in this province. That's ensuring that we're making the right partnerships with non-profits so we can deliver for the communities in this province that are facing this crisis head-on and that need support from the provincial government so New Brunswickers can see a vision that delivers on homelessness.

Over six years, there has been a 210% increase in homelessness in this province. The previous government had no plan and provided no leadership. Over the course of the past 343 days, during question period, I haven't been asked a single question about the work that we're doing.

This is the leadership. We're stepping up to make sure we deliver for New Brunswickers. We're making sure that we do it clearly and with a plan.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, Horizon recently revealed that there are 190 patients being treated in hallways and storage closets and that the Chalmers hospital has reached 42% ALC patients who are more accurately described as people forced to live in hospital. Seniors in smaller hospitals seem to have no way out.

The crisis of overcrowding in our hospitals is actually revealing the crisis in long-term care. The report from the Seniors' Advocate, *What We All Want*, published over 18 months ago, called for "A clear, costed action plan, establishing hard targets each six months for reductions in the number of patients in Alternate Levels of Care, should be presented to the Legislative Assembly".

In his recent follow-up report, the Seniors' Advocate identified that no action was taken. Can the Minister of Social Development, who has now been there for 12 months, tell us why she won't complete this recommendation?

Hon. Ms. Miles (Hanwell-New Maryland, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, L): Madam Speaker, through you to the member opposite, thank you so much for the question. This has been a challenge. This isn't something that happened 12 months ago. Let's be very clear about that. For years, folks in this House have known this was going to come. The care and the support that seniors and their families need have not been a priority. They are now a priority. We are working together with the Seniors' Advocate, we are working together with partners, and we are working with Vitalité and Horizon to find the best supports to work with families, the hospitals, Horizon, and the advocate to make sure that seniors and their families get the care they deserve.

We are focusing on home care. We know that folks do not get the best care in hospital. They get hospital care. We have folks in our hospitals who are doing the absolute best they can do. Seniors are getting hospital care. We know that they will do better at home when it's safe and supportive for them to do so. That's why we're working with our community partners to come together and bring up a plan. Thank you.

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Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, I agree with the minister. This didn't happen overnight. This didn't happen just this year. It is infuriating that seniors and patients are being robbed of their dignity because government after government has refused to act with urgency. This crisis has been growing for years. My dad was treated in a hallway when he was sick and dying eight years ago. Government after government have refused to take this seriously and to care enough to act, and I'm tired of it. To quote the advocate: The actions of government do not reflect the urgency or scale of the issue.

I've heard that Social Development is capping the cost of special care homes for alternate level of care (ALC) patients by subsidizing their care. However, people living in the community appear to be excluded. Can the Minister of Social Development confirm how long the subsidy for ALC patients will last and whether it will be extended to everyone who needs access to special care homes?

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister responsible for Seniors; Minister responsible for Women's Equality, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. I am very grateful to have the chance to speak about the work government is doing to improve things for our seniors. I'm so sorry to hear about your father.

[Translation]

We're working closely with all our partners. We're certainly aware of all the care that needs to be provided for our seniors. We're working tirelessly with everyone involved with seniors.

Seniors are really at the heart of each of our measures. That's why I met yesterday with 185 people who work with our seniors. I organized a Teams meeting. I was told that it was the first meeting like that in 16 or 18 years.

I want to assure you that we will devote all our energy to making sure that seniors get the best care, in the best places, and in the best possible environment. Thank you very much.

[Original]

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, I didn't hear an answer to my question, unfortunately. I would still like to get an answer.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker, the government's current plan is obviously ineffective. There is an ever-increasing number of people who are in hospital with no prospect of getting out or who don't have access to care because health care resources are fully committed. The Holt government is going around in circles, while seniors' health and quality of life are deteriorating in hospitals. What is your plan?

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Will the Minister of Social Development present the Legislative Assembly with a clear action plan, complete with numbers, and, before the session adjourns on December 12, will she show us her plan for getting out of the current crisis?

[Original]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister responsible for Seniors; Minister responsible for Women's Equality, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for your question.

[Translation]

I'm very pleased that you are raising the whole issue of our long-term care plan. Since the beginning of its mandate, our government has been committed to working with all partners, who are working tirelessly so that our seniors get the best possible care in the best possible place from the best possible professionals.

We're well aware that hospitals are not the ideal places for some seniors right now. That's why various departments are working together on this file. Obviously, the Department of Health and all the other partners are working together so that our seniors get the best care there is. Right now, we're working very closely with our partners to implement a plan.

We're actively working on a plan. We meet nearly every week. We're making progress, and, as soon as possible, we will present the plan to you. We will be delighted to present it here in the Legislative Assembly. Thank you very much.

[Original]

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to continue the conversation our leader had with the Minister of Energy about the cost of carbon adjustor. About two or three months ago, we had a public accounts committee meeting with Energy and Utilities Board representatives. They talked about the impact of the cost of carbon adjustor. We had small retailers. I remember we had someone from my riding who runs a very small shop. She works diligently, 50 to 60 hours or more per week, to keep that shop open. Her profit margin on gas is very thin. Now, if that shop and dozens of other gas stations close, we will see intense blowback from rural areas across New Brunswick, and that doesn't include urban areas.

In the recent federal budget, the government talked about the Clean Fuel Regulations being part of it. My question is for the Minister of Energy. Can he clarify whether these changes in the federal budget will have any bearing on the EUB or the cost of carbon adjustor?

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[Translation]

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. As we saw yesterday evening, the discussion on the federal budget, which was quite extensive, dealt with the industrial rate and the cost of carbon adjustor. We have not yet seen any impacts, but we are still analyzing everything.

The opposition member talked about a meeting of the Standing Committee on Law Amendments. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts also met last week. It was actually last month—excuse me. The Chair and Executive Director of the New Brunswick Energy and Utilities Board actually mentioned then that small businesses, retailers, or wholesalers can make a request regarding margins to get the real amounts related to the cost of carbon adjustor, or to the cost of carbon, I should say. They now have the opportunity to make a request to the commission...

[Original]

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Madam Speaker, I don't know whether we were sitting in two different meetings, but that is not what I heard from the EUB representatives. What I heard from the EUB is that if the cost of carbon adjustor is removed, then there will be a great unknown about how they will determine gas prices for retailers going forward. This is going to have a massive impact on those who are trying to sell gas in New Brunswick and make a profit. Right now, retailers are making slim profit margins, and if they accept credit cards as payment, those profits diminish even further. Their margins are very, very slim right now.

My other question is for the minister. Government is determined to remove the cost of carbon adjustor, which will impact gas stations across New Brunswick and cause closures. Yet, it says that the EUB can come up with another formula to balance the equation. Are New Brunswickers going to save 8¢ per litre, or are they not going to save 8¢ per litre? If you replace one formula with another, then it will be a wash anyway. It's a mess, and the Minister of Energy doesn't have the guts to back out of it.

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The question the member posed was: What savings will occur for New Brunswickers if the cost of compliance with the Clean Fuel Regulations is based on actual costs versus the formula that's in place right now? The member doesn't know, I don't know, and the EUB doesn't know. We don't know because the EUB hasn't conducted a hearing following normal regulatory practice wherein it is incumbent on the applicant or the sector to come forward and show what the cost of compliance is with respect to the Clean Fuel Regulations.

The Leader of the Opposition actually made a list of questions that the regulator must consider in terms of its cost of operations. All those are recoverable, but they have to be tested before the EUB. That has not occurred. It's an affordability issue. We believe New

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Brunswickers should not pay a penny more than they should. It should be based on the actual cost of compliance.

[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESSES

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): Thank you. In downtown Moncton, retailers have come together for the Enough is Enough campaign and have sounded the alarm. They are not just talking about a few isolated thefts, but steadily increasing wrongdoing. There are broken windows and graffiti, and many customers are avoiding the streets around these businesses. The bill is going up. Millions of dollars in additional security costs, insurance problems, and lost sales revenue are involved.

The comments I have mentioned echo a much broader observation. These are not just opportunistic acts. Sometimes, systematically repeated thefts exhaust the resources of small and medium-sized businesses, weaken neighbourhoods and retailers, and undermine staff morale.

What concrete financial measures will the government take now to help our businesses cover the increase in costs related to security, insurance, and loss of revenue and to support the vitality of our downtowns?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Kennedy (Quispamsis, Minister of Local Government; Minister responsible for Service New Brunswick, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Earlier, the Leader of the Official Opposition mentioned fiscal reform, and I'd like to remind him that we delivered on fiscal reform where he failed. There is \$63 million more for municipalities in 2026. I'm not sure if he has been paying attention, but local governments are now starting to come forward with their budgets for 2026. They're freezing and reducing their tax rates. His taxes in the city of Saint John are going to go down in 2026.

However, they've put forward two motions to remove the spike protection, reducing it from 10% to 3%, and the cost of assessment. Then the municipal associations came out. I'm not sure if you read his email last night. It said: Without any municipal consultation or engagement, these motions will have significant negative consequences for our members. That's because of the motions that this opposition is bringing forward. They don't engage. They don't collaborate. He didn't do that when he was in government, and he's certainly not doing it now that he's in opposition, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Oral questions have expired.

[Translation]

The time for question period has expired.