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### VETERINARY SERVICES

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

[Original]

Madam Speaker, I have mentioned many times that, on the floor of this Legislative Assembly, truth matters. The Premier has clearly been given bad information, either from her communications army or her minister, or she is, as usual, uninformed and unaware. The Premier has repeatedly said that the provincial veterinary service is unable to take on new clients. She was directly told otherwise by a person at the demonstration who is literally one of the people who has taken on new clients in the service for the past two years. This person went on to say that the Premier knew that her comments were not true, and she still came onto the floor of the House and continued to put that narrative out there. Whom is the Premier going to blame for this? Will her communications team be her scapegoat? Will her minister become her sacrificial lamb? Will she stop spreading manure on the floor of this Legislative Assembly, or will she, for the first time in her tenure, stand up, take accountability, retract her comments, and apologize to the farmers for her refusal to tell the truth when she was directly educated on this?

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Madam Speaker, the truth is that the provincial vet lab went through a period of two years during which it did not take on a new client. The system has been struggling, which the opposition members know, because, when they were in government, they heard of the challenges in recruiting veterinarians and delivering the services that our agricultural sector requires, an agricultural sector that the minister is investing in, to the tune of millions of dollars, so it can grow. That's why we're going to put in place a service that meets the needs of the agricultural community and that delivers the kind of innovation that farmers have been looking for and the kind of responsive service that they need. We will continue to support food security in this province, all of our farmers, and the people who love the agricultural system and sector in this province. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, there you have it, Madam Speaker. The farmers of New Brunswick still see what their Premier truly stands for.

### VIRTUAL CARE

I'd like to continue with the line of questions that we have for the Holt government on Foundever. Through a letter sent to both the Premier and the Minister of Health, we learned that the nurses who choose to continue with Foundever will be getting paid about

half of what they make now under eVisitNB. Neither the Premier nor the Minister of Health responded to verify that this is indeed the case.

The Premier has given her full endorsement of the deal that gives New Brunswick virtual care services to Foundever, a financially floundering company that is also American. Can the Premier tell the people of New Brunswick, especially the nurses whose pay will be cut, whether she knew about this cut when she gave her full-hearted support to Foundever on February 16 of this year? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to be clear, Foundever also has my full-hearted support. We speak with Foundever. It is changing—revolutionizing—the level of virtual care that will be available in New Brunswick through multiple sources, in both official languages, in due time. You know, we contract the company, and it pays its employees. Wages are not our business. The company will be monitored to ensure it provides the service that we expect it to provide. Come July 1, August 1, and September 1, we will have high-calibre virtual care in this province. I'm thankful for the time that eVisitNB has spent, but I'm more thankful for the care that our new virtual care provider is going to provide to all New Brunswickers. Thank you.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, what the Holt government promises and what the people of New Brunswick actually get are never the same thing. The Holt government promised that, on April 1, 2026, Foundever would take over virtual care services from a company located and founded right here in New Brunswick. The government told eVisitNB that its services were no longer required and that a New Brunswick company that literally invented virtual care services in this province was no longer good enough, even though that company helped thousands of New Brunswickers avoid a trip to the emergency room and had a 94% satisfaction rate. The results of a right-to-information request show that, on January 23, the Premier knew that this Foundever deal was a mess and asked about extending service from eVisitNB, yet on February 16, she gave Foundever her full and enthusiastic blessing. Can the Premier explain to the people who are about to have their e-health system thrown into turmoil what changed her mind about Foundever between January 23 and February 16? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, I'm very glad to support a company that employs New Brunswickers as a majority of its employees, more than before. I'm pleased about that. I'm pleased that this company will provide more expert care. I'm happy about that. I think that New Brunswickers will be pleasantly surprised by what they will see come July 1. The company will provide virtual care that is high calibre and available through multiple venues. It will be possible to make an appointment, and results will be followed up. The provider will know what happened yesterday, which is not possible today. This is very positive news for New Brunswickers. Stay tuned. Some people will be pleasantly surprised.

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**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Foundever will be pleasantly surprised, because it will make more money off this contract. Everyone knows that this deal with Foundever stinks, Madam Speaker—everyone except the Premier and the Minister of Health. Nurses are alarmed and are deeply concerned about the future of virtual health care in New Brunswick. They are saying clearly that Foundever is not capable of handling this contract. Nurses will be forced to see far fewer patients. They will be paid less, and patient outcomes will be negatively impacted. However, what we have heard from the Minister of Health is that the vibe in the room is great. This is from an accredited medical practitioner who should respect the opinions of fellow accredited medical health practitioners.

I would like to ask the Premier how her government measures success. Is it by considering the fact that 70 nurse practitioners do not want to sign on to her new program? Is it by giving another New Brunswick contract to an American company? Is it by paying nurse practitioners half of their current wage? Or does she, like her Minister of Health, measure success by the vibe in the room?

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, I have always respected the opinions of my colleagues—nurses, nurse practitioners, and other physicians. That hasn't changed. I do hear from nurse practitioners who are coming to the new company with the new contract. In fact, in the past week, the number of nurse practitioners who have signed up has doubled—doubled. These New Brunswick nurse practitioners are coming on board and recognizing the value in the new company. I am optimistic that the people who send us letters of concern will reconsider and come on board with a new, progressive company. I expect that. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

## TAX REFORM

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

[*Original*]

This government's actions do not line up with what it promised on tax reform. Municipalities are incensed. The President of the Union of the Municipalities of New Brunswick (UMNB) said: I am writing to express our profound disappointment and frustration with your government's approach to property tax reform and the comments made about our order of government. The public communications around this legislation do not meet the standard of partnership and trust set by your government.

The President said: Additionally, the legislation falls short on your government's commitment to fix the broken property tax system. We are calling on you to pause this bill

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and engage with councils to understand the impact this will have on our sector. UMN's members feel strongly that more work is needed to address fairness, provide flexibility, and meet the needs of our shared citizens and communities.

Will the Premier do the right thing by pausing this bill and consulting with stakeholders rather than ramming it through this House? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Kennedy** (Quispamsis, Minister of Local Government; Minister responsible for Service New Brunswick, L): Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's nice to hear that the interim Leader of the Opposition, who has only five days left in that role, finally wants to ask questions about local government and property tax reform. We have ensured that the system is going to be stable, predictable, transparent, and fair for New Brunswickers, because, at its very core, when assessments go up, tax rates should come down.

Perhaps the interim Leader of the Opposition will recall this:

*The New Brunswick government is calling on municipalities to consider cutting their tax rates for 2023 in the face of large assessment increase notices*

That's from an October 4, 2022, CBC story.

*"Local governments will need to take these assessment increases into consideration when setting their . . . tax rates*

Who do you think is responsible for that quote, Madam Speaker? It was the Minister of Service New Brunswick of the day, who is the member for Oromocto-Sunbury today.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): We'll take no lessons from the one-term wonder over there, Madam Speaker.

This bill took 18 months and does not even come close to the term "comprehensive overhaul". It does not address key elements that municipal officials were looking for. The government ignored municipalities in the consultation process. Instead of addressing municipalities' needs, government members have tied municipal officials' hands with more provincial oversight and then blamed them for being irresponsible with taxpayers' money.

Imagine the gall. For a government that has overspent by a record \$3 billion, its members are blaming municipal governments for not being responsible with taxpayers' money. These are elected levels of government. Their officials are held accountable through elections. If they are not managing well, they get voted out. Yet this government tries to score a political win by blaming municipal leaders.

My question is for the Premier. Maybe she can get up. Can she give even one example where a municipality showed it could not be trusted with the tax dollars it generated?

**Hon. Mr. Kennedy** (Quispamsis, Minister of Local Government; Minister responsible for Service New Brunswick, L): Perhaps, Madam Speaker, we should reflect upon the 2014 election results. The one-term wonder did not maintain his seat. He did not defend his seat. He lost that election, was thrown the biggest lifeline in the history of New Brunswick politics, and managed to make his way back into this House.

Thanks to last year's fiscal reform bill, municipalities in New Brunswick received \$63 million more from our government this year. The member opposite failed to deliver on that. He punted the ball down the field because he couldn't deliver. Of course, the member forgot what happened in 2014. He also forgot what happened across the street in March 2024. He and his former leader were jeered by people from the Union of Municipalities of New Brunswick for their lack of attention to what municipal officials had been asking for.

We gave municipalities an incredible amount of money through fiscal reform. Now we're looking after homeowners with a stable, predictable, transparent, and fair property tax system, which is something that, as usual, the PC members failed to deliver.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): That's not what municipalities are saying, Madam Speaker. Both the UMNB and the Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick (AFMNB) have roundly criticized this government's efforts on tax reform. This legislation impacts municipal budgets, reduces municipal autonomy, and does not meaningfully deal with revenue diversification. While this government tries to paint municipal governments as irresponsible, putting more economic restraints on them will make it more difficult for them to deal with infrastructure shortfalls. That's because this government is going to set the rate, and municipal officials will have to write a letter explaining why they need more money.

Will the Minister of Local Government's name now be on the ballot in municipalities where he or she has approved increased rates? Who now bears the ultimate responsibility for those decisions? This just scratches the surface. Much work remains in order to understand this bill.

Will the Premier listen to municipalities and their representatives on both the UMNB and the AFMNB, slow down on this bill, and send it to the law amendments committee? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Kennedy** (Quispamsis, Minister of Local Government; Minister responsible for Service New Brunswick, L): Well, Madam Speaker, perhaps I should remind the interim Leader of the Opposition that the Mayor of Caraquet says that this tax reform makes a great deal of sense. The outgoing Mayor of Shediac also says that this is a fantastic deal for the people of New Brunswick because we are going to put in place changes that are going to make the system more predictable, stable, transparent, and fair for New Brunswickers.

(Interjections.)

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**Hon. Mr. Kennedy** (Quispamsis, Minister of Local Government; Minister responsible for Service New Brunswick, L): I've read the letters. Again, I remember when the member opposite was getting jeered at.

(Interjections.)

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): Members.

**Hon. Mr. Kennedy** (Quispamsis, Minister of Local Government; Minister responsible for Service New Brunswick, L): Again, this was in the tax bill insert that the member opposite's government put into the March 2024 tax bills: As tax rates are set locally, any questions about your local tax rate and how the money is spent should be directed to your local government or municipality. That was passing the buck and blaming municipalities for increases in the rate. Madam Speaker, you know, and New Brunswickers know, you can't spell "hypocrisy" without PC.

**Ms. M. Wilson** (Oromocto-Sunbury, PC): Madam Speaker, this bill creates a grand new local rate stabilizer, a mechanism to supposedly stop municipalities from raising tax rates too high. However, under this bill, if a local government wants to exceed the stabilizer, all they will have to do is write the minister a letter explaining why. That's it—a written note. What does this added layer actually do? Can the minister give me an example of when he might approve a request for an increase and when he might deny a request for an increase to the rate? Minister, try your best to actually answer the question.

**Hon. Mr. Kennedy** (Quispamsis, Minister of Local Government; Minister responsible for Service New Brunswick, L): Madam Speaker, municipalities are empowered local governments in the province. They are free to make whatever decisions they want to make. After record increases in assessments for a number of years when the previous government tried to blame municipalities for increases in tax bills and did nothing about it, we on this side of the House have decided to put the stabilizer in place because when assessment rates go up, tax rates should go down. When the municipal government decides that perhaps it needs more money, then it will be able to make the decisions that it deems best for its residents. It will be able to show that to its residents. That is the transparency part of this.

There will be a new bill in March 2027 that will afford municipalities the opportunity to celebrate the investments they're making in their municipal governments. Residents will be able to see that, and they will be able to accept that. What municipalities can set as their tax rate is not being capped. Municipalities are free to continue to do that, as they have been, Madam Speaker. We're here to support municipalities, something the previous government didn't do.

**Ms. M. Wilson** (Oromocto-Sunbury, PC): Madam Speaker, question one—no answer. The minister has repeatedly pointed to the safeguards in place for residential property owners,

but my question is about commercial taxpayers. Under this proposal, municipalities will be able to apply a multiplier of one to two times the municipal rate to commercial property taxes. I'm sure this is of high interest to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which represents more than 3 900 New Brunswick business owners and which has delivered a petition with over 2 400 signatures to you, minister.

This government clearly does not trust municipalities. You don't trust them enough to decouple the tax rates because you fear they will jack them up. You don't trust them enough to set their own rates, so you're handcuffing them with more oversight, yet you are okay to give them this expanded multiplier. None of this appears to be predictable, transparent, or simplified for municipalities or businesses. Municipalities will have to justify the local tax rate. Will they have to justify the multiplier for businesses as well? Yes or no?

**Hon. Mr. Kennedy** (Quispamsis, Minister of Local Government; Minister responsible for Service New Brunswick, L): Madam Speaker, earlier this week, when the member for Oromocto-Sunbury was talking about this particular bill, she mentioned that all municipalities are going to go immediately to the 2.0 multiplier. Here she is blaming municipalities, saying they are going to go after the money. I believe that was the quote. Why wouldn't municipalities do that? She also forgot to mention that the multiplier has been extended on the lower end as well. It's gone from 1.4 to 1.7 and from 1.0 to 2.0. Again, factor in the quick arithmetic. It's a multiplier. So, when the tax rate goes down, it's being multiplied by a smaller number, which means it will add up to a smaller number. Madam Speaker, municipalities are going to be able to predict stable, predictable, transparent growth. Homeowners will be able to do that as well.

Municipalities received a huge injection of cash this year thanks to our fiscal reform package, and we're now ensuring that homeowners also get that benefit. They've been talking to us about this. Throughout the campaign, they told us that something had to be done about property taxes in New Brunswick. Madam Speaker, we're doing something about them.

**Ms. M. Wilson** (Oromocto-Sunbury, PC): Question 2—wash, rinse, and repeat, but no answer, Madam Speaker. Let's see how we make out with Question 3. The *Community Funding Act* adds grants to local governments where heavy industrial properties are located, and it gives the local governments and council the power to determine the amount of grants and the conditions for receiving one. Also, the stated aim, as per the GNB news release, is to ensure that "communities with heavy industries receive more direct financial support to help them cover the additional costs of servicing these properties".

The minister has stated that this brings simplicity and stability to the tax system, but the government gets the final say on how much and under what conditions this grant goes to municipalities. Can the minister explain when a municipality might get 100% of this grant and under what conditions a municipality would get zero, since Cabinet has the authority

to decide this? Does the minister think this is predictable for municipalities that have access to this grant? Please, minister, on Question 3, answer the actual question.

**Hon. Mr. Kennedy** (Quispamsis, Minister of Local Government; Minister responsible for Service New Brunswick, L): It's incredible, Madam Speaker, to the people in this House and to New Brunswickers to hear the opposition members who sat in government throughout these incredible increases in assessment. They did absolutely nothing about it other than to blame municipalities by saying they should lower their tax rate because assessments were going up. The people of New Brunswick told us in 2024—they certainly told me at their doors in Quispamsis: Assessments and property tax bills are through the roof. The current government is doing nothing about it. What are you going to do about it?

Madam Speaker, here we are. We've come up with a system that will make property taxes more transparent, more stable, more predictable, and fairer for New Brunswick homeowners who deserve that after years of inaction from the previous government. That stability and predictability will also be in place for the municipalities of New Brunswick. We will take no lessons from the six years of inaction from the previous government.

### SOCIAL POLICY

**Ms. Mitton** (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, some governments are finally stepping up to challenge social media and AI corporations. Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew announced that his province will be the first to ban social media and AI chatbots for children under the age of 16. In Newfoundland, members of all parties voted unanimously for a motion urging that province to do the same. Australia's recently implemented social media ban for children is already showing early signs of success, as the number of children using Snapchat has decreased by 40% since the ban went into effect in January. I recently asked the Premier whether she would ban social media and AI chatbots for children and youth here in New Brunswick. I was glad to hear she was looking at potential policy options. Can the Premier provide an update on whom in government has been tasked with providing policy recommendations and when she expects to be able to make a firm commitment to a ban?

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, through you to the member opposite, yes, we are absolutely paying attention to how we can best protect the mental health and well-being of our students and all young people here in New Brunswick. We are. We're paying close attention to what's happening in Manitoba and what's happening in Australia. We're going to find the best fit for here.

While we wait, we are already protecting students in the school system through Policy 311, which ties technology use to learning objectives at all times. In addition to that, we are updating the digital literacy curriculum so that students can learn about these things. Part of this is learning about potential risks. In real time, I've been hearing examples of what

that could look like in schools. For my kid, that means being aware that overusing phones is a problem and reminding the adults in his life about how to get his attention. Thank you.

**Ms. Mitton** (Tantramar, G): I am extremely worried about the AI curriculum the government is rolling out, but I am actually asking about a ban. Social media platforms are designed to be addictive. AI chatbots are sycophantic, fawning, and full of praise to keep you engaged for longer. They interfere with healthy thinking, eating, and sleeping habits. This has resulted in a mental health crisis and in children experiencing body dysmorphia. AI chatbots have literally caused death. One chatbot aided and abetted the Tumbler Ridge mass shooting. Chatbots have encouraged suicide and have provided advice to youth on how to kill themselves.

In response to my questions a few weeks ago, the Premier said that we need to make sure our kids are protected from what we see as a really complicated environment that can cause significant mental health harms. Considering these harms, I would like to hear an answer from the Premier to my first question. I would also like to ask: Will the Premier seek to hold social media and AI chatbot companies accountable for the harms they've caused in the same way government has with tobacco companies?

*[Translation]*

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, we care deeply about the well-being of students in our schools. This is a main component of the education plan we announced earlier this week. One of the things that needs to be done to ensure the well-being of students is to protect them from overusing screens and social media. We are very aware of the risks overuse can pose. That's precisely why we must teach them to deal with the risks.

This is part of our responsibility in the public education system. Students must be shown how to leave their phones at the door and not use them in the classroom, unless there's a very clear learning objective that requires their use. Their use of technology also needs to be limited, their needs need to be met, and they need to be encouraged to eat healthy meals and play outside. In our opinion, these are all absolutely important. That's precisely why they are the key aspects of the 10-year education plan. Thank you.

*[Original]*

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. Monahan** (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): The Liberal Holt government continues to promise ambitious economic growth targets while economists themselves are warning that the government's policies simply do not match its rhetoric. Experts from UNB and the Fraser Institute have pointed to high energy costs, excessive taxation, and a lack of meaningful growth-oriented reforms as major barriers preventing New Brunswick

businesses from competing and expanding. They have also criticized government for offering broad aspirations without providing any clear roadmap for achieving these targets.

Will the Premier explain how this government expects to achieve 10% in economic growth when economists are openly warning that the government has failed to create a competitive business environment capable of attracting that very investment, supporting exports, and allowing existing New Brunswick businesses to grow?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I sincerely thank the member for the question. I'm really looking forward to talking about our economic growth plan. Yes, it's ambitious. We could perhaps even say it's bold. However, personally, I like having difficult objectives to reach, since we see potential in the New Brunswick economy.

We have incredible resources. Here, we have a minister who works tirelessly, and we will benefit from our mineral resources over the next few years. We will see that they will contribute to a very significant increase in our GDP. We also see opportunities with respect to our natural resources. We have the best fish, the best food, and the best forestry sector in the world.

Even though the member who asked the question said, during his response to the throne speech, that he didn't want to invest in the forestry sector, we know New Brunswick has the best wood in the world. People in the sector need our support. Thanks to our natural resources and our human capital, we will achieve the required growth.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Monahan** (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): Economists reviewing the Liberal Holt government's economic growth strategy have raised serious concerns about the contradiction at the very centre of the plan. While government claims that it wants to attract new companies and private investments to New Brunswick, experts argue that existing businesses are already struggling under high property taxes, rising energy costs, and continued economic uncertainty created by this very government itself. Even experts supportive of ambitious growth targets admit that the plan lacks the policy reforms necessary to actually deliver results.

How can this Premier expect investors to choose New Brunswick when businesses already operating here are telling us that they can't remain competitive under the very conditions that this Liberal government continues to maintain?

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much. I'm glad to have the opportunity to expand on my

comments about the economic growth plan and particularly the conditions required for growth. Our government is conscious of the cost of energy. The members opposite want to add a levy to power bills, but our government recognizes that we need to deliver an energy environment that allows companies to grow. That's why we have three key areas of investment in our economic growth plan.

The first is to support New Brunswick businesses in attracting capital to these existing operations. That's why we changed the small business investor tax credit. It was so that New Brunswick businesses have the best deal in the country to grow their businesses.

We've also expanded our support for productivity investments. That's what's going to help our companies become competitive and ensure that they can compete anywhere in the world.

Finally, we're going to help New Brunswick businesses open up new markets. We're out there, around the world, finding customers for New Brunswick companies. When you pair that with our excellent infrastructure in the Port of Belledune and Port Saint John, which are other critical conditions to New Brunswick's growth, we are going to see meaningful growth in this economy—

**Mr. Monahan** (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): I have two things. That was a nice word salad, and second, I'd recommend that the Premier and her government members listen to my throne speech response from March 19. They're only listening to one part of it. That's typical. It's smoke and mirrors.

The Liberal Holt government's economic strategy speaks extensively about growth, productivity, and attracting investment. Yet economists reviewing the plan have pointed out many times that major opportunities are available to New Brunswick, including natural gas development. Export expansion and major infrastructure projects are either missing entirely from the government's plan or lacking any concrete implementation details. Experts have said that the strategy contains optimism and boosterism but very few specifics about how this government will actually unlock investment and create long-term economic competitiveness. Will the Premier admit that this Liberal government is long on slogans and short on the actual economic policy needed to deliver real growth for New Brunswickers?

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Well, we are making great investments in our literacy programs, so when I read Hansard and I see "a modest levy" on power bills, I know that's exactly what the member opposite said.

Our government is trying to reduce the cost of living for New Brunswickers by taking 10% off everyone's power bill, not adding a levy to their power bills. Our government is supporting our forestry sector and our entrepreneurs, not ruining them, as the member

opposite said in his reply to the speech from the throne. Our government is supporting the development of our natural resources and investing in things such as cybersecurity. We're going to see leadership in our position as the home of the Canadian Army and the place where our military is made.

We're going to deliver on cyber defence opportunities that attracted \$15 million in investment to a New Brunswick company just last week. That's because of the work that we've done with the New Brunswick Innovation Foundation (NBIF) and with the small business investor tax credit to deliver the kind of growth that's going to mean well-paying jobs for New Brunswickers. After years of the previous government neglecting the economy, this government is growing things.

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): Question period has expired.