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SOCIAL POLICY

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

[*Original*]

Madam Speaker, I would like the government to address the issues revealed in the Advocate's latest report, which is about the preventable death of one of our seniors living in a special care home. To be clear, this is not an attempt to blame the government or the minister, but we need to discuss the common elements of systemic failure in both Alice's and Bobby's cases.

We know that systems are necessary and that processes and structure are important. There are compassionate people in our system who care and work hard. No one disputes this, but we have an overwhelmed and dysfunctional system. The rules were followed and boxes were checked, but Alice was repeatedly let down, and it led to her demise. One of the first things that came to my mind upon reading the report was the seeming inability of the system and its processes to prioritize. I would like to ask the Premier whether she agrees with that assessment. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister of Seniors; Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for the question, which enables me to note today exactly what you have mentioned about the report on the 2022 death of this senior, Alice.

We truly recognize the importance of the work done by the Child, Youth and Senior Advocate. We commend his commitment to protecting the rights of vulnerable people. The problems highlighted in the report are truly concerning. We feel really bad about the situation.

That is why, since being appointed Minister responsible for Seniors—now I am Minister of Seniors—I have kept travelling throughout the province to meet with as many seniors as possible. My goal is to make the invisible visible, which means making what is right, positive, and truly fabulous visible, but also making all the inequality, injustice, and insecurity that can surround our seniors visible. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): My question was whether the Premier agrees with me about the lack of priorities in the system. Files concerning vulnerable patients must be prioritized.

[Original]

The Advocate's report summarizes the issues related to Social Development's handling of Alice's case on page 7. The last point he makes is what I would like to focus on. It is about the department's inability to see its own role in Alice's death. As was mentioned by the minister in the media, some time passed between Alice's death and the Advocate's report. There is no way for anyone to know what changes, if any, have occurred within the department with respect to how it handles these cases. Was there any urgency to change so that this could be avoided in the future? Are there more cases like Alice's that we are unaware of? It does appear that the common factor between Alice's and Bobby's deaths stems from Social Development's inability to react with swift change. Can the Premier share whether anything substantial has indeed changed with respect to the department's approach as a result of Alice's passing? Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister of Seniors; Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I again thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for bringing up this matter. We're talking about Alice, who unfortunately passed away in 2022.

In fact, we're working tirelessly every day. We provide as much support as possible to front-line staff working directly with seniors. We have read the report. We have also reviewed all the recommendations. Now we are assessing each recommendation. We're also taking other action. This is what we have been doing since I received my mandate.

We're changing the rules to prioritize vulnerable people for admittance to nursing homes, for example. We're creating an electronic system to report incidents and better monitor programs. I have also met three times with front-line workers to find out whether they have the best possible working conditions. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): I'm not entirely sure why the minister is focusing on the date, Madam Speaker. We know that this happened. It is now public that this has happened. It's about what we've been doing to try to fix this. Alice remained in a Level 2 care facility that, by all accounts, tried its best to keep up with her changing needs. There were plenty of signs that, while no one could foresee or predict this exact outcome for Alice, she was not getting the level of care she needed. The Advocate makes five recommendations in his report.

- 1. The Department needs to hold regional offices accountable for outcomes.*
- 2. The Department needs to create mandatory timelines for reassessment requests.*

3. *The Department needs to empower people on the front lines to propose and escalate proposals for interim measures when the safety and development of vulnerable people is at risk.*

4. *The Department needs to create a culture where workers have permission to escalate concerns around inadequate resources, rather than just fill out forms.*

5. *The Department should hold itself systemically accountable.*

I'm asking the Premier to confirm—

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

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister of Seniors; Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thanks again to the opposition member for talking about the file in the Assembly. With respect to Alice's case, you seem to be downplaying the idea that the events happened in 2022. I think it is, in fact, important to mention the date during the conversation here. It doesn't diminish the significance of the situation involving this senior at all. We're very up to date with the situation, and we are—I want to repeat it again—very saddened.

We're currently looking at how it will be possible to adopt a 360-degree perspective on the management. With a 360-degree perspective, all partners involved with our seniors can be part of the proposed solution or solutions. We have listed the different recommendations from the Child, Youth and Senior Advocate, and we have had the opportunity to meet with him twice. We have talked to him, and we will continue to work together to ensure the well-being of our seniors. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. While Bobby's situation was different from Alice's, there are still enough similarities to show trends in Social Development's handling of cases. Of course, when the system works, no one complains, and that makes perfect sense. When it does not work, as it did not in these cases, changes must be made. As a Legislature, we recognized this when it came to Bobby's case. We will be convening an all-party committee to review what went wrong in Bobby's case and to call witnesses. That work will inform us, as a Legislature, as to how to make those changes. The official opposition would be supportive if the government agreed to add Alice's case to the committee's work. The benefits of hearing the commonalities between Alice's and Bobby's situations and the department's handling of them are clear. Being able to hear and understand the differences in the cases will also help

us to avoid missing anything. The Advocate is in favour of this as well. Will the Premier commit to this? We hope that she will agree. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Miles (Hanwell-New Maryland, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, to the member opposite. You can tell that this impacts us all. Every single member here would get up to say that what happened can never happen again. What gaps do we need to fill? What cracks do we need to fill? We all carry the weight of Bobby's, Alice's, Maddie's, and Leah's stories. I appreciate the space from which the member opposite is asking us to consider this question. Madam Speaker, through you to the member opposite, we will consider this. Thank you.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, I was hoping for something a little bit stronger and more assertive than that, Madam Speaker. The reality here is that this committee is going to get together and do that work. It could do that work very effectively. The reality is that there are overlaps and common themes in terms of what's happening in Social Development, but, ultimately, there are some differences that I think need to be captured as well. If we do this work on Bobby's case but we don't do the work on Alice's case, what do we risk missing? I don't want to overburden the committee in its work, but I do think that important revelations will come out of each case that could be helpful in both areas. That's why I'm asking, and the entire opposition is asking, that the government not just consider this but also consent to it. We all need to work together on this. I think this is something that could really be beneficial in determining how to move forward with the changes that need to take place in the department. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister of Seniors; Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the opposition member for another opportunity to rise in the House to explain the situation.

We realize what you are saying about requesting consultations or transparency. I can tell you that our government has been working extremely hard since it took office to be transparent in everything it plans to do. What we've wanted since the beginning is for communities, seniors, caregivers, and people involved with seniors to come see us and share their concerns with us. The government has demonstrated that it has prioritized seniors. They were forgotten for so long. I heard that during each of the visits I made in the province. I really want to mention that, for our government, our seniors are at the centre of every action, and their voices are extremely important. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let's move on then. The Holt government's school lunch program is literally a year late and a free apple short. The government members promised free school lunches to people who needed them the most, but, instead, students are getting a pay as you can program. This is not what the government members promised. They promised free nutritious food for our New Brunswick students. Now students are being forced to pay \$4 per meal to \$5 per meal. The government members offered free food and are now, in true Liberal fashion, reaching into people's pockets for money. They screwed up the breakfast program so badly that they used that as an excuse to delay this rollout, and they still could not get it right. The Premier promised free school lunches. What does the Premier have to say to New Brunswick families, and, in particular, to the students who were expecting a free lunch and who are now going to have to pay? The lesson for New Brunswickers, Madam Speaker, is that there is no free lunch with the Liberals.

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to talk about the school lunch program. I am so excited about this program. It was an important platform commitment, and, moreover, it shows our commitment to supporting New Brunswick families with respect to affordability. We have 25 prototype schools right now. Yesterday, we visited one of them, École Les Éclaireurs. We got to see this amazing program in action. I can assure you that this is a game changer. Let me tell you why this is a win-win-win-win. It will improve nutritional status for all students. It will increase the sense of belonging that students have at their school. That is so important. It will improve academic results, and it will support New Brunswick families.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): There's an old saying that there's no free lunch. However, the Holt government members promised it anyway, and they managed to prove the old adage right. They promised a free lunch, but, instead, they are like the bullies in the schoolyard shaking kids down for their lunch money. This is the government that fired librarians and lowered the bar on educational scores. It continued the PD day pilot with no data. It failed to meet its own lowered expectations for literacy outcomes. In school, when a student does this poorly, they're sent to summer school. However, Madam Speaker, the government members have cancelled summer school too. They have had to repeat their Porter O'Brien communications courses multiple times, but their grades never get any better. Next week, school is out for this session of the Legislative Assembly. Will the Premier tell us whether there will be a new crop of social promotion Cabinet ministers when we return in the fall? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, I am delighted again to talk about the success of the lunch program. We've been in office for a year and a half. Madam Speaker, are you aware that students in New Brunswick have access to breakfast and that, now, they have access to an affordable lunch? That is incredible. I absolutely agree. We saw this great program in action yesterday at École Les Éclaireurs. We heard students and families saying how wonderful the program was. People said: The program is incredible; the food is good. Families told us: This takes away the burden of deciding what the children will eat because we know they will have nutritious and affordable meals at school.

The meals provided at school will support students and enable them to learn better, because we know, Madam Speaker, that when we have a full stomach, we are more able to learn. Students also behave better when they have a full stomach. The program is so good.

[*Original*]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, the Premier likes to chirp. Maybe she should get on her feet if she has something to say.

The Holt government promised that this program would be based on good nutrition and fresh, healthy food. Again, what we're seeing from this government is not at all what was promised. We have heard that the government, instead of providing fresh, locally sourced food, has entered into a contract with Chartwells, a provider that has worked in New Brunswick's schools in the past. Chartwells provides prepackaged food, which is not at all the fresh, nutritious, healthy, and locally sourced food this government promised.

Worse, this new Holt government program is going to displace volunteer organizations that actually do provide home-cooked, healthy meals for students in their schools. School kitchens that currently get used every day will no longer be used in favour of a prepackaged option. Will the Premier come clean and provide details on whether volunteers will be kicked out of schools they have served so faithfully to be replaced by prepackaged food, and will this happen across the province?

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, one of the key elements of this program is engaging with community partners. That is exactly what we've done. That's why we see this a little bit differently depending on where this happens.

Now, let me tell you about École Les Éclaireurs from yesterday. That program is done in partnership with CÉ D'ICI and Meals on Wheels, which is wonderful. Those are two community partners. We got to see first-hand the fresh foods that were prepared. Yesterday, on the menu were fish, vegetables, and potatoes. That was one of the beautiful

meals that students had access to. The other one was chicken pot pie with mashed potatoes. Those are two examples of meals cooked from scratch. It was a beautiful thing, and the kids ate it. They loved it so much that demand has gone up by 50%. That's how much people love this program. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

EDUCATION

Mr. Lee (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Madam Speaker, families across New Brunswick have been blindsided because the online summer school option has been eliminated, and no district website currently advertises an in-person summer school option for 2026. This year, the department has eliminated the entire online summer school program province wide. According to the Anglophone West School District, families will now have to pay hundreds of dollars out of pocket, and no subsidies exist for them. The *River Valley Sun* reports that more than 1 000 students relied on online summer school courses last year. Perhaps the department confused online summer school with provincial heritage sites that attract fewer than 5 000 visitors.

Now, with only weeks left in the school year, students have no clear path, no provincial alternative, and no communication from the department. Minister, this is not planning. This is chaos. So here is my question: Why did you cut a program that is essential for student success? If the answer you give me is teacher availability and the need to retool, then you darn well better table the documents that justify eliminating online summer school rather than keeping it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, I thank the opposition member for giving me the opportunity to speak a little about our new high school programs. We have adopted a much more flexible approach to supporting students on their path to high school graduation. With this flexibility, we're giving students many opportunities to catch up during the school year. As well, students have the opportunity to catch up virtually.

The member opposite is right. Working with the school districts, we decided to reduce offerings this summer because the demand was lower. The demand is lower because students can catch up during the school year. However, alternatives are still being provided.

Because of our more personalized approach, we can provide individual support to students, which reduces the need to provide courses on a broader scale. Thank you.

[*Original*]

Mr. Lee (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. A spokesperson from the department has stated:

This summer, NBVLC is not offering any courses. This is being done following consultations with districts in order to allow for program retooling and to give staff a chance to focus on other priorities.

Maybe that's a 12-year education plan. No, I mean a 13-year one.

Minister, families learned about the elimination of summer school through media reporting, not from the department. Folks have said there was no public advisory, no direct communication to parents, and no time to plan. The department has said it will be "re-offered in the future" based on future demand. That's a quote. My question is this: How can you measure future demand when the program has already been eliminated and families have been forced to use expensive, private alternatives?

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for the opportunity to explain this once again. Because we now have a more flexible approach at the high school level, we are able to support students' goals on a more individual level. That means that we give them the opportunity to do those catch-up classes or do the things they need for their future success during the school year. That means that the member opposite is right that there have been changes to the programming. It's much more personalized in that we support the students and what they need. That may be an option during the year. It may be a virtual option. It may be an option during the school year. The programs have been modified to meet students' needs. That's what's going on, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Lee (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. In previous years, the program offered free summer schooling to students who had failed courses, were dissatisfied with their marks, or were missing required courses they had not taken. Now, students will have to find alternatives such as Ontario Virtual School or NBCC. My question to the Minister of Education is this: Why did your department eliminate a free provincial program without ensuring any financial support for families? Replacement courses cost somewhere between \$400 and \$600, depending on the provider. How is this consistent with the government's stated goal of reducing barriers to education?

[Translation]

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Our approach with respect to high school is to support students with their learning objectives. It can vary according to the student's needs. With this approach, students will sometimes choose to catch up during the year. Sometimes, as the opposition member said, they will choose to catch up or move ahead by taking courses at CCNB or other post-secondary institutions. The basic idea is really to provide students with personalized support in school. That's exactly what we're doing. We're giving them different options to reach their goals, and, yes, changes have been made to the highly prescriptive program because we're trying to move away from that approach. In fact, we

know that providing students with personalized support increases the chances of success. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

NATURAL GAS

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Here, on March 27, we heard a great announcement for the Canadian economy and the people of Germany. Just to give a little history, many years ago, Germany demolished all its nuclear power plants and relied on Russian natural gas to produce electricity for its people. However, when the Russian war with Ukraine broke out, all of that was cut off. Now, Germany is desperate for energy so that it can produce electricity for its people.

On May 27, British Columbia, with the government of Canada, made a great announcement that it would ship natural gas from British Columbia to Germany. Now, just to understand that journey, you would have to take natural gas from British Columbia, go all the way down to South America, go through the Panama Canal, move up to the Caribbean, and go across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe. That is 9 300 nautical miles. Madam Speaker, it is 3 000 nautical miles from Saint John to the same port in Europe. Why are we continuing to miss opportunities with this ridiculous natural gas moratorium?

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank my honourable friend across the way for the question. I would suggest that the announcement the federal government made with the government of Germany is a very positive one. This nation is clearly looking for new relationships of political and economic interdependence. It has been very clear that the Germans are looking for an array of options with respect to the supply of natural gas. In this case, they may be utilizing new infrastructure that is yet to be built. We wish our British Columbian brethren good luck in their endeavour in Prince Rupert. Again, this is a good-news story.

There is the possibility of German offtake of Canadian natural gas. In this case, it may be from the West Coast. There may be gas from the East Coast at some point in the future as well. Maybe the honourable member will actually support us in our pipeline initiative. I thank him for his question. I know he shares the same desire for New Brunswick to unlock more wealth from our natural resources. Thank you.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): The minister is correct that this is great news for British Columbia. Meanwhile, New Brunswick sits on 77 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. That's under our feet, and it stays locked because the members opposite will not unlock that potential.

Madam Speaker, the minister talks about exploring more opportunities for Germany through natural gas development. In reality, on April 20, the Minister of Natural Resources

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met with Alberta's Minister of Energy about a pipeline coming into New Brunswick so that Repsol can export its natural gas to European markets. He is advocating for Alberta's natural gas to come to New Brunswick to be exported elsewhere. Who would benefit from that? Alberta. When is this government going to start benefitting New Brunswickers? Lift the moratorium on natural gas, and let's get it done.

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think having a conversation with our Alberta brethren makes sense. We want Confederation to work. There's a role for our East Coast ports to play in actually creating wealth across the country.

I am a little struck by the irony here. The member is asking questions about something members opposite had six years to implement themselves. I don't know why members are going back in history in that particular regard. I'd like the honourable member to be enthusiastic about supporting us with our new mining Act, Bill 45. I hope that honourable members will support us in that particular endeavour. We can talk about natural gas later.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Madam Speaker, while we talk about natural gas later, ships from British Columbia are going down and exporting their potential, which is getting great revenue. Revenue of \$15.5 billion is going to British Columbia, with \$1 billion going to the Canadian economy. We have 80 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. That could give this province an economic boost of \$21 billion along with thousands of full-time jobs.

(Interjections.)

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

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Even NB Power, on page 21 of its review, said that, with the high prices of electricity, natural gas would be a game changer for households to heat their homes.

(Interjections.)

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

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): These guys are missing the mark at every turn. The more we sit on our hands with this government and this ridiculous moratorium, the more New Brunswick seeps into poverty with deficits and debt. Madam Speaker, stop the foolishness. Minister, lift the moratorium, and let's get New Brunswick on the right track.

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. What has occurred is that Canada and Germany have an offtake arrangement. That's a good thing. However, there is still 700 km of pipeline that needs to be built to actually get to Prince Rupert. The facility hasn't been built yet. That's

going to take a number of years as well. There are no ships going down the Pacific Coast any day soon. We still believe that if there is going to be natural gas going to Europe from Canada, the default location is in Saint John.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker, I might add that a moratorium is still in place and it is subject to some conditions. We know there have recently been conversations about that. There is a lot of interest in natural gas. We can talk about that in the future.

[Original]

SENIORS

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, PC): Madam Speaker, the public Advocate's report, *Death by System*, is a devastating indictment of how our province cares for some of its most vulnerable seniors. The report details how an elderly woman living with dementia repeatedly wandered from her care facility, how concerns were raised over and over again by caregivers, and how assessments confirmed that she required a higher level of care. Despite all these warning signs, she remained on a waiting list for more than a year. The Advocate found that policies were followed, forms were completed, and procedures were respected, but the system failed to protect the person at the centre of it all.

My question to the Minister of Social Development or to the Minister responsible for Seniors is this: Will the government commit today to implementing all the recommendations arising from *Death by System*? Can the minister provide a timeline for the full implementation of those recommendations?

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister of Seniors; Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the opposition member for giving me the opportunity to talk again about the report from the Child, Youth and Senior advocate. The report is titled *Death by System* and is about Alice's death in 2022.

You mentioned urgency earlier. I have a question to ask the opposition members. The incident unfortunately happened in 2022. What measures were taken between 2022 and 2024 to follow up on this sad situation?

Our government read all the recommendations very carefully. In fact, I've had two meetings with the Child, Youth and Senior Advocate. One of the meetings involved dealing directly with all the recommendations. Our government is committed to working with all partners involved with our seniors, including, of course, our front-line workers. We want to ensure that they have all the tools they need. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Please state your point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. M. LeBlanc (Belle-Baie-Belledune, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I understand that the Leader of the Official Opposition is in his last few days in that position. I have been listening very carefully over the past few days, and he's been walking a very fine line, a line that I believe he crossed today. If you look at previous rulings from the Speaker, you will see that you're not to say that a member must "come clean". The Leader of the Official Opposition used that term today, and I believe that he should retract it and apologize. He also said that the government is "shaking kids down for their lunch money". I don't believe that term to be parliamentary, and I would like the Leader of the Official Opposition to retract that comment as well. Thank you.

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): We will look closely at the Hansard, and I will get back to you on this.

Obviously, there have been words that were close to the fine line, and I do appreciate that we respect each other. We're all honourable members, and we should level up the debate. Thank you.

Question period has expired. I almost said the cheerleading period has expired, but that's okay.