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CONTENTS

SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Savoie
Hon. Ms. Boudreau
Mr. Savoie
Mr. Savoie
Hon. Ms. Boudreau
Mr. Savoie
Hon. Ms. Boudreau
Mr. Savoie
Hon. Ms. Miles
Mr. Savoie
Hon. Ms. Boudreau
Mr. Savoie
Hon. Ms. Boudreau
Mr. Savoie
Hon. Ms. Boudreau
Mr. Savoie
Hon. Ms. Boudreau
Ms. M. Johnson
Hon. Ms. Boudreau

Ms. M. Johnson

Hon. Ms. Boudreau

Ms. M. Johnson

Hon. Ms. Boudreau

AI

Mr. Coon

Hon. Ms. Holt

Mr. Coon

Hon. Ms. Holt

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Weir

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C.

Mr. Weir

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C.

[Translation]

SOCIAL POLICY

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

[Original]

Last week, the Advocate released his second report concerning the death of a person under the ultimate responsibility of Social Development. In this case, it was a senior in care. I asked the Premier some questions regarding the actions of the Department of Social Development, such as the department's ability to prioritize cases, any actions taken to this point, and whether her government would implement all of the Advocate's recommendations. The Premier did not bother to answer for any of this. Her Minister of Seniors was more focused on when this woman died, which is absolutely shameful. This government has shown disrespect for this Legislature and New Brunswickers on many occasions, but this? This is a new low. Now, can the Premier be bothered to defend the actions of her government and her Minister of Seniors? Will she apologize for those shameful actions? 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. I thank the opposition member for the question, which enables me to speak again and amplify the voices of all New Brunswick seniors.

First, I certainly want to say that Alice's story deeply affects us. We also feel for her family and loved ones and what they, unfortunately, had to go through. That is the first thing I wanted to say.

The Child, Youth and Senior Advocate's report contains five recommendations that are very important to us. We support the recommendations. Our department will continue the work that began at the beginning of my mandate as minister.

We will continue working closely with seniors, families, and our partners. We want every senior to get the best care in the best possible environment and conditions. Thank you very much.

[Original]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): None of the questions from last week laid the blame on the Holt government in any way, yet the minister was focused on sharing the year this woman died so as to deflect blame or responsibility. No

blame or responsibility was pointed at the government in the first place. The lack of sensitivity for the senior who died is shameful on its own, but the tone-deaf effort to repeat the year of her death, which the minister has done at least six times publicly, shows the true focus of this government. This is a detail that no one needs to know, as it could help identify the victim. It is both irresponsible and insensitive.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): The Premier is over there laughing right now. Why is this detail so important for the Minister of Seniors to repeat so many times? Alice died under tragic circumstances, regardless of when, while she was the responsibility of one of our public services. It is up to us to do better. That should be the focus. Does the Premier wish to further defend her minister? Will she apologize for this insensitive behaviour?

[*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 again for addressing an issue that our government thinks is very important.

If you will allow me, I will simply talk about the date of the incident that was mentioned in the report. I mentioned the date, 2022, just to remind us that the situation happened then. Last week, you asked what we had urgently done to respond to the person's needs. I addressed the facts.

On our side, we didn't wait a single minute to travel around the province when I took up my position to prioritize seniors and amplify their voices. That is why our government made an historic \$993-million investment so that our seniors get the best care in the best conditions. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Like I said, Madam Speaker, tone-deaf. Regardless of the timing of Alice's death, the facts are that we know about it now and that we must act. We already have a plan to have a committee meet and to call witnesses to discuss the facts about the death of Bobby, a youth in the care of the Department of Social Development. Now we have a report about a senior's death. The Holt government was asked to consider adding Alice's case to the committee work, but the government would not commit. Why not? What sort of message does this send? These questions would not need to be asked had the Holt government only agreed to let this take place. Why won't the government do it? It makes no sense. The weekend has passed, and the government has had time to reconsider. Will the Holt government reconsider adding Alice's case to Bobby's in the work of the social policy committee? There is no reason we

can't do this, unless there is something that this government doesn't want the public to know. The minister just said that she supports seniors, so let's make sure she does so by letting this be part of the work.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister of Seniors; Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you again to the opposition member for the question, which enables me to highlight all the work that we are doing regarding the safety of our seniors, which is at the heart of each of our actions. Though we do not sit on the committee, we will continue our work on the seniors' file. We will be interested in seeing the work done by the Standing Committee on Social Policy, and we are really looking forward to the results.

We are attentive to the reality of our seniors in the province and of families and nursing home staff, because we want to get a better understanding of the challenges each of our seniors is faced with. I am emphasizing each individual senior, because each one has the right to be respected and acknowledged in their story. We will truly do everything we can to ensure that each of our seniors feels safe in their environment. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): That was a lot of platitudes and no answer, Madam Speaker. We know from the report on Bobby that the Advocate found out about Bobby's death only because someone told him to look into it. Bobby died alone in a flophouse from a drug overdose. The Advocate should have been informed directly about a child in care dying under adverse circumstances. He wasn't, because nothing compels the coroner's office to notify the Advocate when someone dies while in the care of the province. This legislation exists in other provinces in Canada. Having the coroner report these cases to the Advocate would allow the Office of the New Brunswick Advocate to respond more efficiently and quickly rather than years after the fact. Would the Premier commit to enacting legislation here in New Brunswick to have the coroner's office connect to the Advocate's office when circumstances call for it? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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 once again for the opportunity to make sure that the public, residents, and community members of New Brunswick understand some of the challenges and tragic events experienced by some of our young folks who come through the care system. We need to take every opportunity we have to make this conversation public. As tragic as it is and as hard as it is to hear, it is important for every single member and community member in New Brunswick to hear this. The member opposite is asking about

the process and whether we will consider this. We're looking at this now, and we're having conversations about that process. What are other jurisdictions doing? What are the best practices? I look forward to having further conversations, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): The right answer was yes, Madam Speaker.

It's Nursing Home Week. The Holt government is clearly failing seniors. Representatives of the nursing home sector have said that the government's strategy falls short and that the sector is in crisis with high turnover and a lack of beds. There are 1 000 seniors waiting for placement. Only one minute is being added to the daily hours of care, which are at only 3.1 direct hours of care.

The worst part is that seniors will have to wait until January 2027 for that extra minute to be added. Seniors are treated as an afterthought. The Holt government's entire strategy backends everything after this mandate, which does nothing to help seniors now.

Read the report. There is literally fine print that shows the government is not serious about helping seniors now. Let's let the Premier get up on her feet and follow her usual tone-deaf approach, talking about how wonderful her government is for seniors when all the signs point to the facts being otherwise. Premier, go ahead and reuse your tone-deaf talking points. Doing so during Nursing Home Week insults those who built our province and the people who care for them.

[*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 again for talking about a new subject: hours of care. We are very aware of what is happening in each of our nursing homes. That is for sure, because we work closely with people in nursing homes. As partners, they even participated in drafting the plan we implemented on March 26, which you undoubtedly know about.

The budget for this fiscal year includes record spending on seniors and long-term care. The amount allocated to senior care and long-term care in the budget for this fiscal year increased by 19% compared to the 2025-26 budget. This is a \$162-million increase, for a total investment of \$993 million.

As announced when the budget was presented and the plan was launched, we are investing an additional \$2.6 billion in 2026-27 to increase the number of hours of care provided to nursing home residents. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): The reality, Madam Speaker, is \$2.4 million for one minute. That's all this is. The Holt government made a great big deal about the appointment of a Minister of Seniors, but what has this minister really done? She created a seniors strategy that falls short and backends everything until after this mandate. She broke a promise to increase the comfort and clothing allowance. She added one minute to the hours of care, which will only be added in January of 2027. Seniors will have to wait until next year for that extra minute. Yet, on her Facebook page, the minister celebrated the government providing \$1.5 million in funding for arts and culture. The minister should fight for more for seniors. Does the Premier defend her Minister of Seniors' celebration of arts and culture funding while she fails to help a senior care system in crisis? 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. I thank the opposition member again for his question. It will enable me to provide more information on the subject you raised.

We certainly recognize that there is still a lot of work to do on hours of care. In our opinion, the investment budgeted for the 2026-27 fiscal year is a first step in the right direction. It demonstrates that we still prioritize them, despite the difficult decisions that must be made during a fiscal year.

Increasing the number of hours of care in nursing homes is a multi-year process. We will continue working with various partners so that staff get the best tools for their work with our seniors. Thank you very much for the question.

[Original]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Those are vague platitudes as usual. It's blah, blah, blah but nothing concrete. In other provinces, governments have acted to get the hours of care up to the recommended national standard for long-term care in Canada, which is 4.1 hours of direct care per resident per day. Established by the Health Standards Organization, this standard ensures residents receive adequate hands-on attention from registered nurses, licenced practical nurses, and personal support workers.

New Brunswick is currently at 3.1 hours of direct care. Ontario has committed to and legislated 4 hours of care per day. Nova Scotia has a mandate to get to 4.1 hours of care per day, while New Brunswick is legislated to have 3.2 hours of care per resident per day. This is one of the worst records in the country. Seniors are falling further behind. Will the

Oral Questions

Premier commit to establishing a mandate, including timelines, to get our seniors the care they need and deserve now, and not just vague platitudes?

Thanks, 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 again to the member opposite for his question about hours of care.

As I mentioned earlier, though the investment that was announced may not necessarily have been what was expected, it was one of the first steps to reaching our objective.

At the same time, I want to highlight all the work nursing home staff are doing. I am trying to visit every nursing home. I have had the opportunity to travel throughout the province to have discussions and exchanges. I have also had the opportunity to talk with our various partners, including the New Brunswick Association of Nursing Homes. We really want to work closely with our partners to go through these steps and finally reach our priority objectives. As I mentioned earlier, despite difficult decisions, we will all work together on the next steps. Thank you very much.

[*Original*]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): It's a deficit that is completely of their own making, Madam Speaker. In a scrum on March 26, the Premier committed to increasing the hours of direct care by 0.1 in the government's next budget, but only if the financial situation allows for it. At that rate, it will take 10 years to get to 4.1 hours of direct care, and that's only if the finances allow for it. Once again, this Premier is hedging and qualifying care for seniors as only possible—as an afterthought. Why is she putting financial qualifiers on helping the most vulnerable seniors we have in this province? Would she do that to any other group of people? Well, we know the answer to that, and it's yes. The government wasted a whole year with no planning, and once again, it has no plan to act now. This sector will fall further behind at the rate this government is going. Will the Premier commit to establishing a mandate, including timelines, to get our seniors the care they need and deserve now? Seniors, their families, and the sector are watching. Choose your next words carefully.

[*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 his question. As I said at the beginning of our discussion, we truly put our seniors at the

centre of each of our actions. We also acknowledge all the work that staff in our nursing homes do.

That's why we are continuing our work together and our communication. In fact, I had a conversation last week with the President of the New Brunswick Association of Nursing Homes to discuss ways to reach our objective.

As I said, our seniors are at the centre of our actions. The services we provide to them are also at the centre of our actions. So, we will continue to work with our partners. As I said earlier, this truly is a good first step in the right direction. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The public Advocate's report, *Death by System*, lays bare a heartbreaking failure. An elderly woman with dementia wandered from her care home 12 times. With every warning sign documented, with every non-political staff concern noted, and with medical assessments confirming she needed higher care, the system did nothing urgent. Policies were followed, forms were signed, but a preventable death occurred while she sat on the wait list for over a year. This is not an isolated tragedy. It is a system that appears to value process over people. These are my questions to the Minister of Seniors: Will the government commit today to implementing every single recommendation in *Death by System*, and will the minister provide this House with a clear public timeline for when each recommendation will be fully in place?

[*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 her question, which enables me to come back again to the unfortunate story of Alice in the Child, Youth and Senior Advocate's report. We have already responded to some of the recommendations. We support each of the recommendations. It's important to note that. Thank you for enabling me to amplify the voices of our seniors.

We can also see all the work that is done daily to ensure that every senior gets the best care in the best place. To reach our objective, working from a 360-degree shared leadership perspective is a must. That means all partners can work closely together. You play a role, and we also have a role to play so that every senior feels safe.

This morning, I took part in the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day walk. I was there earlier to say that we are listening and prepared to acknowledge our seniors' voices. Thank you.

[Original]

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, PC): One of the most damning findings in *Death by System* is that the danger to this vulnerable senior was very well known. Front-line workers, who, incidentally, are not political appointees, showed that she required a higher level of care, yet there was no mechanism to escalate her case or protect her.

The Advocate made it very clear that the system lacks both flexibility and urgency when seniors are at an obvious risk of serious harm.

Here is my question to the minister: How many seniors who currently live in special care homes or are awaiting placement have been flagged as high risk? How many would be wandering or at risk of elopement? What immediate, concrete steps is the government taking right now to prioritize and protect those individuals before another preventable death occurs? Will there be more Alices at the mercy of this system?

[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 her question. I'm going to answer the last part of her question. I want to say that we certainly don't want another senior dying under these circumstances. That's the most important thing to mention. We're really saddened by what happened to Alice.

What we can also say about the report is that we really recognize the importance of the work done by the Child, Youth and Senior Advocate, and we commend his commitment to defending the rights of vulnerable seniors. We're adding our voice to the Advocate's. I have had the opportunity to meet with him a few times in the past few weeks to determine how we can work together to ensure our seniors' safety.

To give you an example of what we're also doing, we're conducting a survey in all nursing homes to verify safety and determine what we can do with regard to this file. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, PC): Well, I hope that the findings will be entered when it comes time to sit down and examine all of this in committee. The lesson of *Death by System* is quite clear. Our long-term care system has become so bogged down with wait lists, paperwork, administrative burdens, and bureaucratic procedures that it has lost sight of the human beings it is meant to protect.

Oral Questions

Families across New Brunswick have read this report. They're wondering: Holy cow, will my loved one living with dementia be next? Do I have to be concerned about whether my mother or father will wander out and be lost?

Sympathy is not enough anymore. My question to the Minister of Social Development is this: How much new funding and how many additional staff members and long-term care beds will this government announce this year to meaningfully reduce wait times and to ensure that seniors receive the appropriate level of care when they need it, rather than after a crisis has already happened?

[*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 her question. As I mentioned, we really support all the recommendations. That's why we're working directly with the people who work very closely with seniors.

There's no one better than seniors themselves to tell us about their stories and situations. It's our duty to provide them with the resources they need when they need them to ensure they are safe. That's why I travelled throughout the province. I assessed the environments. I had discussions with partners, families, caregivers, volunteers, and everyone possible to hear about our seniors and see what they need for healthy ageing.

We know that it's essential to communicate clearly and effectively. We spoke with front-line workers; we will also be there to support them and hear their needs. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

AI

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Madam Speaker, tech billionaires like Sam Altman, Elon Musk, and Peter Thiel have unleashed artificial intelligence on the world and on our kids. Altman has said that ChatGPT can lie and that it "will confidently state things as if they were facts that are entirely made up." He calls it the "hallucinations problem".

Madam Speaker, tech billionaires are preoccupied with power, seeking their own immortality in the cloud or on Mars, whatever comes first. I can't make this stuff up. These are quotes from these guys. They don't care about us, and they don't care about our kids. They care about themselves. In fact, they're keeping their own children away from the tech they helped create. Peter Thiel lets his kids access a screen, for whatever reason, for one and a half hours per week.

Oral Questions

Madam Speaker, it's time for this government to step up and get its arms around this problem. Will the Premier confirm—

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Madam Speaker, we agree with the member opposite, and we are hearing about this from educators, parents, and pediatric health professionals. Childcare experts have been raising concerns about the measurable negative impact that technology and social media are having on young people's mental health, development, and well-being. The research shows that social media increases anxiety, depression, and self-harm among adolescents, particularly girls aged 10 to 14.

Our government has called on the federal government to implement a ban on social media, establishing a minimum age of 16. We've also urged the government to prohibit targeted advertising directed at minors and to restrict algorithmic content feeds for minors. New Brunswick is prepared to deploy the tools and legislative measures in our provincial jurisdiction to protect New Brunswick's children and youth online, and we have called on the federal government to do the same.

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Well, Madam Speaker, let's talk about AI, as I was talking about. Research shows that using AI can make the developing brains of children mushy. Yet, this government is permitting the use of AI in our schools, with supervision in the lower grades and less in the higher grades. Some governments are finally stepping up to challenge the agendas of people like Sam Altman and Elon Musk for our kids. Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew announced that his province will ban AI chatbots for children under the age of 16. Considering the mounting evidence, will the Premier confirm that she intends to join Premier Wab Kinew in banning AI chatbots for children?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Our government completely agrees. We see that researchers, parents, and doctors all agree on the measurable and harmful effects on our children from using technology and social media, as well as their algorithms and tools, as the member opposite mentioned. They harm our children, their mental health, and their well-being. Using these tools can cause anxiety and other problems among our young people.

That's why our government has asked the federal government to take action at the national level to prevent people 16 years old and younger from using this technology. Our government is also investing in educating our young people. I can give you a personal example. What is my youngest daughter, who is only 8 years old, learning in school about AI? She's learning how to tell whether a photo is real, meaning whether it was created by AI. We're preparing our children with the goal of protecting them against the...

[Original]

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Weir (Riverview, PC): Thank you. Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services. This past week, our community of Moncton saw a serious spike in overdoses that were linked to a toxic drug supply that included fentanyl mixed with other substances. Emergency responders handled at least 65 suspected overdose calls in just 72 hours, and stakeholders indicate there have been over 200 calls in the past two weeks. This is far above normal levels.

At the same time, our hospitals are under extreme pressure. We are hearing reports that emergency room patients classified as triage Level 3 are waiting over 16 hours to be seen. This is placing enormous strain on patients, families, and front-line health care workers.

Police, paramedics, and community organizers are all being stretched as they deal with the increasing dangerous drug supply in our communities. Madam Speaker, given the seriousness of this situation, when can New Brunswickers expect the government to deliver on its promise to create a mental health and addiction advocate? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services; L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for the question. The spike in overdoses that we saw last week and that has been ongoing is deeply concerning to us. Our thoughts go out to the families that are affected, the people on the streets who are affected, and the people on the front lines who are working to address this cause.

Madam Speaker, we are working hand in hand with our partners, which include the Department of Health, Social Development, and non-profits on the ground, on the front lines, to better understand what is going on. I personally spent some time this weekend, on Saturday morning, at Ensemble in Moncton.

I spent time in the backyard talking to staff and to users of the site to better understand what is going on and to offer my support. We will continue this dialogue with them. We encourage people to check their drugs at Ensemble and use its services. They can use the overdose prevention site. They can use with peers to ensure their safety. We will continue—

Mr. Weir (Riverview, PC): Madam Speaker, through you to the member opposite, I appreciate that you care, but that is not the question. We know the government committed to improving access to mental health services and improving accountability within the system, including with measures to reduce wait times and better support New Brunswickers in crisis. An independent mental health and addiction advocate was part of that commitment. It is a role that could help patients and families navigate the system and ensure that concerns are heard. At a time when communities like Moncton are facing

repeated overdoses and increasing pressures on services, that kind of oversight and support is needed.

Madam Speaker, can the minister tell this House when, specifically, that advocate position will be established? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the opposition member for the question. Madam Speaker, on this side of the House, we realize that people suffering from mental health or addiction problems need a strong, independent voice who will act as their champion and advocate within the system.

[*Original*]

That is exactly why we have committed to establishing a mental health advocate. We had been advocating for one when we were in opposition. We committed to it in our platform. We had committed to having it done in this session. Obviously, we have not tabled legislation at this time, and we acknowledge that it has taken longer than anticipated. We are studying the legislation for the Ombud and the legislation for the Advocate, the Child, Youth and Senior Advocate, to ensure there is no duplication. The Advocate already has jurisdiction for vulnerable adults, so it's very important that we get it right. It is taking a little bit longer than we had hoped, but I am determined to get this done this year. We will push this over the finish line. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

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