

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions



December 12, 2025

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*[Translation]*

### HEALTH CARE

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

*[Original]*

Madam Speaker, I'd like to have a little chat with the Minister of Health this morning, a chat about the functioning of these collaborative care clinics. As you know, Madam Speaker, we have a doctor shortage, and we have a nurse shortage. I know that the previous government had a net increase in doctors and a net increase in nurses and that this government is working on a net increase in doctors and a net increase in nurses. But I'd like to establish a baseline here, with the Minister of Health. Can he verify that we are still experiencing an overall doctor and nurse shortage, even though we're trying to get better? There's no question there. Can he confirm that there is a shortage of doctors and nurses in this province? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, I can verify that we still have a shortage of doctors, nurses, and other health care providers. However, we are moving ahead aggressively and passionately. We will fill those gaps through a number of measures, which I previously listed. I want to take this opportunity to thank all those health care workers who are here today, working over the Christmas holiday season, in our hospitals, in our emergency departments, on our front lines, and in our communities. To them, I owe extreme gratitude.

I would also like to thank all the people in the Department of Health who have supported me tremendously this year. When I walked in, I received a breath of fresh air from them. They have helped us provide these extra people from our Talent Recruitment Division. I won't go through the names. I have a long list here, but they know who they are. I feel quite supported in my role of helping New Brunswickers by providing primary care in their communities. Thank you very much for raising this today.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm comforted that the Minister of Health feels very supported, but New Brunswickers still feel that health care is moving in the wrong direction. With the Minister of Health, I'd like to try to get down to the details of how these collaborative care clinics are going to work. I recognize that not all clinics are going to have doctors in them. That's been established already. I would like to more deeply understand how that's going to work.

There are only 24 hours in a day. These doctors are working in their offices, and they're seeing patients. How is this going to work? I recognize that each collaborative care clinic is going to work a little differently, but the question is... We only have so many hours per day. Doctors do rounds in hospitals. They go to their offices to see patients, and now they're going to collaborative care clinics. So, to the Minister of Health, to his knowledge, are there

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going to be any doctors who are going to lose time in hospitals or in their own offices in order to be at these clinics? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, there are 24 hours in a day, and people are sick 24 hours per day, frankly, so we need to work in collaborative care clinics so that people do not get sicker and do not go to the hospital.

We also have to support our tertiary services in our hospitals. As per the Auditor General's report, we want to have shorter wait times because people are going to enhanced primary care. We want to have fewer people who are boarded in our emergency departments, and we want to get them up on the floors. We have strategies for that. The Auditor General challenged us to do that, and we are doing that.

I am, as the member pointed out, quite optimistic. It can't get worse. We have been getting better over this past year, and that will continue in the years to come. I am quite buoyant and bullish about attaching at least 86% of New Brunswickers to primary care nurse practitioners and physicians. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, but that's not an answer. This was the question: Will you be taking doctors and nurses out of rotation from hospitals in order to cover these clinics? It's true that our emergency times are increasing. I understand that he's saying we're going to shift doctors over here so that people aren't going to the emergency rooms. But when people need that emergency care and the doctors are not there, it's not going to help the situation. We have a shortage of doctors.

I'd like the Minister of Health to confirm this, yes or no: Will doctors have to sacrifice time from their hospital and office rotations to be part of these collaborative care clinics? There are only 24 hours in a day. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate what the member opposite is trying to say, but I want to point out a glaring difference between the previous government and ours. Our government recognizes that there aren't one-size-fits-all solutions for New Brunswick.

*[Translation]*

Realities vary in our province, and we celebrate that. There is no one solution to resolve the shortage of doctors.

*[Original]*

We have some doctors who do not want to do rounds in hospitals. They want to focus on family medicine and stay in their clinics, and that's one reason they haven't been accepting our offers. We have other specialists and other health care professionals who want blended

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roles. They want to spend a bit of time in surgery. They want to spend a bit of time in a sports clinic. They want to spend a few days a week in a collaborative care clinic.

The previous government could not get out of the box of rules it put in place, but our team recognizes the value of every single health care professional in this province. We have put in place a flexible model that supports the way health care professionals want to practice, and that's why we're attracting more of them than ever.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): My heavens, Madam Speaker, taxpayer-funded talking points do not make a bit of difference to New Brunswickers who still need health care. Not one bit. Not one bit. Madam Speaker, all I'm asking for is clarity. These government members talked about transparency. They talked about being open with New Brunswickers. I'm simply asking this: Functionally, how do you expect a shortage of doctors... You know, we're short of doctors. Government members admitted it. There is a pool of work that needs to be done by a minimal number of people, and now they're saying that they have this solution. All we're asking is this: With this solution, are other areas of our health care system going to be sacrificed?

Now I'll ask about nurses. We've had a shortage of nurses. Are we going to see nurses coming out of our hospitals and coming from other areas of care in order to cover shifts at these collaborative care clinics? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): What we're actually seeing, Madam Speaker, is a government that has demonstrated that it respects and values health care professionals in this province. For that reason, we're seeing more of them enroll in training. We're seeing more of them return to the profession when they had left the profession under the previous government because they weren't respected. Our government gave them the retention bonuses that people had received in other provinces and from the federal government. We are giving them the scope of practice and the recognition of their value so that we are growing the number of nurses in hospitals and growing the number of nurses in collaborative care, because it's not either/or.

Our government has recruited more doctors and more net-new nurses to this province and within this province than the previous government did by a long shot, and we will continue to do that, because we are ensuring better health care for New Brunswickers. It's our number one priority, and that's why health care professionals are responding to the respect and support that this government is giving them.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Once again, there was no answer, Madam Speaker. It is just marketing and spin. I can tell you that the nurses who didn't receive those retention bonuses, who worked every bit as hard as the nurses who did, are not very happy.

The licensed practical nurses whose jobs the government tried to take are not very happy. The seats that were created by our government, which allowed this growth, are part of it

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too. None of this means anything to New Brunswickers unless they are getting the health care they need.

We know there are plenty of nurses looking for full-time work, but historically, many have not been able to get that full-time work. I know this because—

(Interjections.)

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): Order, member.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): When I was in hospital, nurses came to me and said: Look, we would like to have full-time work.

I recognize that some nurses want part-time work. They want flexibility in their daily schedules for various reasons like childcare and so on. Can the Minister of Health tell us whether the hiring freeze has been lifted for—

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Mr. D'Amours** (Edmundston—Vallée-des-Rivières, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs; Minister responsible for Immigration; Minister responsible for Military Affairs; Minister responsible for the Research and Productivity Council, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, our government is certainly working on attracting health care professionals to New Brunswick to make a difference in the system and ensure that New Brunswickers receive the services they expect.

Here are some concrete examples, Madam Speaker. We added eight seats in medicine at the Centre de formation médicale du Nouveau-Brunswick, which will be filled in September 2026 to get more family doctors in the province. We announced a new physiotherapy program, the first physiotherapy program in New Brunswick, to get the health care professionals people need, Madam Speaker.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, we passed a labour mobility Act so that professionals elsewhere in Canada can come to work here in New Brunswick very quickly. Madam Speaker, we are a government that acts, adapts, and works for New Brunswickers.

*[Original]*

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, if you can't say it well, say it louder.

I asked whether Horizon and Vitalité made the changes necessary to allow nurses who want full-time hours... It hasn't always been the case. There are nurses who want full-time hours. I'm asking the Minister of Health this: Have Vitalité and Horizon changed their policy so every nurse who wants to work full-time, who wants to have that opportunity to take the pressure off our health care system... Nurses are being asked to do more. They're being asked to do shifts in the hospitals, shifts in the clinics, and shifts in Public Health. I'd like to know whether Horizon and Vitalité have taken off any restrictions so that more nurses can

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work full-time and add to the pool of resources so we can get better health care. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Herron** (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Madam Speaker, we are on the eve of the holidays, so I think New Brunswickers need a little bit of good news. Would you agree, in that regard, Madam Speaker?

From the health care perspective, I awoke to a bit of Christmas future. The opposition might want to pay attention to Hampton when it comes to collaborative health care clinics in the new year.

Also, with respect to bringing some good news to New Brunswickers, this Premier has been laser-focused on affordability. She has challenged the Office of the Premier and challenged the staff. Today, I am very pleased that we have amended the *Petroleum Products Pricing Act* so that E10 is now used to determine the benchmark price for regular gasoline in New Brunswick. This change better reflects the cost to refiners for the market price of regular grades of gasoline. This will also result in saving New Brunswickers 5¢ to 7¢ per litre at the pumps next week.

**Mr. Cullins** (Fredericton-York, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. According to the New Brunswick Health Council's latest primary care survey, only 63.5% of residents in health Zone 3, the capital region, have a primary care provider. This is the lowest attachment rate in the entire province. That means nearly 65 000 people in and around Fredericton do not have access to a family doctor. Meanwhile, other regions are doing significantly better. In the Moncton zone, 83% of residents are attached to a provider, and 82% of people in Saint John also have a doctor.

Madam Speaker, why is this government unwilling to address the worsening primary care crisis in Fredericton? Why is the capital region, home to our Legislature, our public service, and thousands of families, being left behind while other zones see much stronger attachment rates?

When will this government present a real plan to ensure that every New Brunswicker in Zone 3 has access to a family doctor?

**Hon. Ms. Townsend** (Rothesay, Minister responsible for Labour, L): Like my colleague, Mr. Herron, I would like to change the tone a little bit for Christmas. In November 2024, much to everybody's surprise—even, quite frankly, to my surprise—I was elected in Rothesay. Then, even more surprisingly, I was asked to be a part of Cabinet, and I became the minister of PETL.

I won the lottery. I want to thank Dan Mills. I want to thank Mike Murray. I want to thank France Haché, Dany Coulliard, and all of the staff. They are fabulous. Everybody told me that I won the lottery and...

**Mr. Cullins** (Fredericton-York, PC): Madam Speaker, this Liberal government promised New Brunswickers that 86% of the people in the province would be attached to a primary care provider. That was the commitment. Yet, in Zone 3, the capital region, attachment sits

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at just 63.5%. This is the worst rate in the province. It leaves nearly 65 000 people without a family doctor.

Madam Speaker, through you to the Minister of Health, how does this government expect to reach its own target of 85% when Zone 3 is in such a horrible state? What is the real plan to fix primary care, specifically in the Fredericton region? When will the residents finally see action, timelines, and results instead of recycled promises?

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Randall** (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for the question. I'm really excited to be able to talk about health care on the Northside—actually, in the member opposite's own riding. We have recently opened an expanded collaborative care clinic there. We're starting right here in Fredericton. We're starting right here in Fredericton.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk about restrictions for a second, too. When this government took office, the very first thing that my CEO and deputy minister, Traci Simmons, put on my desk was the fact that the team at Opportunities New Brunswick was restricted in its ability to help New Brunswickers. That gave me insight as to what may have been happening in health care. It gave me insight as to why that clinic didn't open until we took office in Fredericton North. It gave me insight as to why this government took possession of an economy that was delivering the worst GDP per capita in North America.

We have removed those restrictions. We have reinvigorated the team. We're relying on an amazing group of people at ONB and across government to deliver results and remove restrictions in this province to deliver for New Brunswickers in health care and across the economy.

**Mr. Cullins** (Fredericton-York, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to remind the member from Fredericton North that the clinic was supposed to be new, not an existing clinic moved next door. Oh, you're—

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Cullins** (Fredericton-York, PC): This government says it wants to improve access to primary care. Yet, its actions do the opposite. We know the Liberals cancelled the very successful pharmacy care program, a program that was delivering real results for New Brunswickers who couldn't access a family doctor. We know that 79% of New Brunswickers support giving paramedics a greater role in our health care system, something this government has been painfully slow to act on.

Meanwhile, Madam Speaker, I hear serious concerns that the emergency room at the DECH in Fredericton may be dangerously understaffed during the busy holiday season that is

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now upon us. Madam Speaker, through you to the Minister of Health, what is the plan? When will Zone 3 finally get the attention and the resources it desperately needs?

**Hon. Ms. Miles** (Hanwell-New Maryland, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite. Every community in the province has different and unique needs.

We can't forget that as we go into this holiday season. I want to take this opportunity to thank the team at Social Development and the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation.

Data matters on this side. We won't ever forget that. Data tells us what is happening, but just as important are the stories. The story tells us why the data matters. The stories are from the people we are here to serve, from every community in this province. Each community is unique and different and has very different needs. Their stories guide our teams—all our teams. As a team, that is how we work to address challenges for New Brunswickers. Stories guide our team at Social Development.

When people reach out to our team at Social Development, it's not always because they're having the best day. It takes heart to support every single New Brunswicker. I'm proud of our team at Social Development, our team at the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, and this entire team—

**Mr. Hogan** (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm enjoying the... Well, I'm enjoying the advertisements, and I join many of the ministers in complimenting their staff. I've worked with many of those fine folks, and I know they do a quality job.

My question is for the Minister of Health. I hope they let him out of the penalty box to answer the question because the people in my riding are extremely concerned. This morning, I was very pleased to look at the NB Health Jobs opportunities online and to see that there was a listing for a general surgeon for the Upper River Valley Hospital in Waterville. I would like to see two because I think we need to have a good team there, but it's a great start. I want to compliment and thank the minister for that.

However, I want to know about the fee-for-service payment. Some of them are fee-for-service physicians, and some of them are on alternative funding models. What's the difference? Is this—

*[Translation]*

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to rise. During the holidays, I would like to take a little time to reflect on the year we have just gone through and highlight our accomplishments. I would like to remind everyone that education is the starting point for the future surgeons we're trying to recruit in our health care system.

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I would also like to take a second to talk about the breakfast program, which reflects many of our teams' values, including fairness, non-stigmatization, compassion, and a sense of belonging. This is very important during the holidays.

I would also like to take a moment to talk about the retention strategy and the respect we show to people in our system. Yesterday, we announced our strategy for looking after people in the system and stabilizing our classrooms. I want to wish happy holidays to everyone and—

*[Original]*

**Mr. Hogan** (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, the people in my riding are trying to figure out the census data that suggest the requirement for a Francophone school. That's a mystery when we're looking at a 45-minute radius for bus rides to the Francophone school.

This is a serious question, and I want the Minister of Health to answer. If he doesn't want to... If he's not allowed to get up on his feet, that's absolutely fine. I'll let my constituents see that so that maybe they can write a few more letters. I really want to know. There's the fee-for-service advertisement for the general physician, and then there's a combined model with alternative funding for other physicians in the province. What's the difference? What does that mean? Why was only fee-for-service payment chosen for the Upper River Valley physician in a surgeon's position?

**Hon. Mr. Hickey** (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On this side of the House, we are squarely focused on making sure that government service delivery is better for every New Brunswicker in every community. Whether it's in health care or housing, we are making sure that access to service is front and centre.

Going into the Christmas season, we are reminded of the work this government has accomplished: 320 new public housing units open this year. We are making sure that we open affordable housing in every community across the province. I'm going to ask for a little audience participation here.

Let's remind the official opposition members of how many public housing units they built during their six years in government. How many were there? There were zero—zero. We are making sure—

(Interjections.)

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): Order. Please continue.

**Hon. Mr. Hickey** (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): We are making sure that we deliver housing for every New Brunswicker. That is our focus. The members opposite can continue to stand up—

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**Mr. Hogan** (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I dressed up in the holiday spirit, and I'm trying to behave today. I haven't said anything to those across, as tempting as that is.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Hogan** (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Yes.

I'm going to ask again. Hopefully, the minister's penalty is up and he can get up and answer the question for my constituents. What is the difference between a fee-for-service model and the alternative funding model for surgeons? Some positions have both. Some are fee-for-service. The position in Waterville is listed as fee-for-service. Why is it just fee-for-service? Is that the best way to attract a surgeon to this hospital? Should it be a combination of both models?

[Translation]

**Hon. Ms. Thériault** (Caraquet, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, L): Madam Speaker, allow me to remind you of the dramatic turnaround that has taken place over the last year. After six years of conflict and tensions on the ground, we now have a Premier who respects minorities and supports differences. We have Cabinet and caucus members who are everywhere on the ground, in the northern, southern, eastern, and western parts of the province. We're talking to Anglophones, Francophones, and Indigenous peoples.

The previous government told staff at the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture not to answer telephone calls or talk to stakeholders. We're now giving staff the liberty to talk to stakeholders, and we have confidence in them. We're allowing departmental staff to do their work.

I'm going to remind you of the work we're doing at the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Madam Speaker. We're working on the 10-year review of the *Parks Act*. The former government, whose members are now sitting on the opposition side, was supposed to do the review in 2024 when it was in office. It didn't do it because its members weren't able to hold discussions with First Nations.

We established the *Status of the Artist Act* after six months in office. The former government had six years to do it, but never did. We introduced a tourism strategy, an arts action plan...

[Original]

## CAPITAL PROJECTS

**Mr. Oliver** (Kings Centre, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm not sure whether I should ask the question or turn it over to the Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries. However, I will try.

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Madam Speaker, the 50-bed treatment facility the government has announced is in the Fundy rural district, which is not currently regulated by the rural plan regulation. Therefore, there are no zoning regulations that affect the property as of today. Great? Well, I don't think so, because the government of New Brunswick has required every community to have such a plan in place by 2028. As of today, for the Fundy rural district, this plan is in the early stages of development. Once complete, it will include zoning provisions, which will set out what uses are permitted, any required setbacks, and public consultation.

To date, no permits have been issued for this project, and it's required that one be issued before construction can commence. So, Madam Speaker, what is the real status and timeline of this high-priority facility? Which stage—ready, aim, or fire—is it at?

**Hon. Mr. Gauvin** (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, Minister of Public Safety; Minister responsible for la Francophonie, L): I feel weird getting questions about health care from this official opposition team. Do you know why? It's because I left their government because they wanted to close ERs at night all over the province. Look at us this morning. This is what a team looks like.

The members opposite have been asking the same questions day after day. There were nine questions for the DTI minister, the same question that's been answered. There were nine questions about the Energy and Utilities Board. By the way, do they want to take the credit for the 7¢ per litre? They have taken credit for everything else. They have done better work in their one year as the official opposition than they did in their six years in government.

One thing the opposition members need to know is this: Arsonists don't get credit for calling 911. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Oliver** (Kings Centre, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. You might think I would have all the answers based on the correspondence from my constituents. I'm being told that the minister and the Premier's Office are telling them that they should be calling my office to get answers. Constituents in other ridings are calling my office, as I said. Now, I'm not saying I would turn the role down if offered, but they probably should be doing their own jobs. When will public consultation be scheduled? When will anyone on that side have any of the answers? After all, I'm only one person. I look after my riding. I would like to see them look after their projects. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Kennedy** (Quispamsis, Minister of Local Government; Minister responsible for Service New Brunswick, L): Madam Speaker, it's like *Christmas with the Kranks* over here listening to these people. I have to speak today, and it behooves me to correct the record after all the nonsense about property taxes that has been perpetrated by the member for Oromocto-Sunbury. News flash to her: municipalities all over the province are holding the tax rate in 2026. That means property taxes will be frozen. Maybe she should let it go. The Saint John common council, don't forget, Madam Speaker, cut the tax rate in 2026. The interim Leader of the Official Opposition's actual property taxes, much like his approval ratings, are going down.

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**Mr. Oliver** (Kings Centre, PC): Well, Madam Speaker, unfortunately, it looks as though it really is a ready-fire-aim situation. How can the Premier stand in the people's House bragging about a 50-bed treatment facility for which no permits have been requested, no public consultation has happened, and all questions to the minister and Premier have been directed to my office? Part of me wants to tell my constituents that it's nothing to worry about. This government hasn't followed through on anything it has promised so far, but this issue is too serious to remain unresolved. Potential clients want answers. What concrete assurances can the government provide about the commitment of Edgewood Health to our community? Given the lack of transparency, how can we trust that this centre won't just become another source of frustration for local residents?

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. I can appreciate why New Brunswickers have low expectations for the members opposite regarding consultation. Those expectations from the public were earned by a government that didn't consult with them until after it made decisions, whereas our team is out there on the ground engaging in communities, not afraid to show up to any meeting, and not afraid to show up in any community in this province.

*[Translation]*

You have seen that our team is very excited about issues. Team members are on the ground throughout the province and working with New Brunswickers. They listen to them and work for them. I know that doesn't make sense to opposition members, because they didn't know how to leave their offices. However, our team works wonderfully.

*[Original]*

New Brunswickers have never seen a team like these people. They are so passionate about this province and so passionate about the work their departments are doing that they are fired up to share the accomplishments they have made.

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