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[Translation]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, PC): Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We ask the government to extend question period by 15 minutes.

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Do we have consent?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[Original]

COST OF LIVING

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. When we speak about affordability, there is no greater indicator than the cost of feeding families. This government continues to promote its school breakfast program, claiming that it's going to save families between \$900 and \$2 000 annually on groceries. That's laudable. But what about New Brunswickers who don't have school-age children? What about working people and seniors who do not qualify for income assistance but still struggle to put food on their tables?

In the past four years, food bank usage has jumped by 60%. The estimate is that over 3% of our own population is relying on this service. Our own Greener Village here in Fredericton reports seeing an average of 85 to 90 new families every month. Madam Speaker, New Brunswickers aren't asking for another government program. They are asking for relief from the rising cost of everyday living. My question is this: When will this government begin focusing on reducing the financial burden for all New Brunswickers, rather than pointing to programs that only benefit some?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to take the opportunity to congratulate the new Leader of the Official Opposition on being chosen for that role. I look forward to our questions and answers in the weeks to come.

On the subject at hand, the rising cost of living and the pressure that it's putting on New Brunswickers are top of mind for our government members, and they have been since before we got into power, actually. We were watching New Brunswickers struggle under the increased costs, with no action from the previous Higgs government. That's why one of the first things we did, in response to the issue the member is talking about, was to take 10% off of every single power bill in the province to provide relief to New Brunswickers, saving them hundreds of dollars per year. We also did things like changing the formula for gas, which saved people 7¢ per litre at the time. Today, it is saving New Brunswickers 17¢ per litre. Again, that applies broadly across the population.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. New Brunswickers are already struggling with the rising cost of groceries, housing, and everyday necessities. Yet at a time when New Brunswickers can least afford it, this government is increasing fees across the board, from Service New Brunswick way down to the tourism sector.

[Translation]

The government has increased fees related to driver's licences, the 911 service, vehicle registration, electrical and plumbing inspections, and driving records.

[Original]

Let's not even start with what's going on with NB Power rates. This Premier must recognize the irony of talking about affordability while her government makes everyday life more expensive.

[Translation]

My question for the Premier is simple: When will the government stop increasing the financial burden on New Brunswickers and start giving them real relief instead of making them pay even more at every opportunity?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much for the question. There are many things to say about that. That is why one minute is not enough to describe all the efforts our government makes every day to relieve the pressure on New Brunswickers.

First, let's talk about something else we did very quickly after noting that rent increases in New Brunswick were the highest in Canada. Increases were over 10% during the years when Mr. Allain and the Higgs team were in office.

We established a 3% rent cap to reduce the cost of living for New Brunswickers. Now, we hear that Mr. Allain and the team no longer want that protection. They want to increase the rent that New Brunswickers pay at a time when it is known that rent is one of the highest costs New Brunswickers have to deal with.

I would like to know if the opposition members agree with their new leader about eliminating the rent cap.

[Original]

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, the good news, Madam Speaker, is that we have three weeks straight to start digging out those questions and addressing the issues brought up by the Premier. Stay tuned.

Despite having a lower and healthier GDP ratio, New Brunswick motorists are still paying some of the highest costs for fuel in the country. On September 26, Prince Edward Island dropped its provincial fuel tax, which was 8.47¢ per litre for gas and 14.15¢ per litre for diesel. This offered its residents immediate cost-of-living relief. Meanwhile, in New Brunswick, we continue to point to regulatory amendments, claiming savings of 17.4¢ per litre.

New Brunswickers are still paying too much at the pumps, and they've had enough. Can the Premier explain to the people of New Brunswick why her government has chosen not to follow Prince Edward Island's example? Better yet, will she suspend the provincial gas and diesel taxes until further notice and give New Brunswickers the relief they're demanding? Or will she stand in this House and tell struggling New Brunswickers they've already received enough?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'll just encourage folks to take a look at the price of gas in Prince Edward Island and the price of gas in New Brunswick today. I must say that I greatly prefer our price of gas to theirs. This is in part because, not yesterday but in December of last year, our government took steps to reduce the price of gas for New Brunswickers, something that we had asked the former government and the member opposite to do during their time in power and that they refused to do and tried to block us from doing. However, we managed to change the formula to save 7¢ per litre at the time. It's now saving people 17¢ per litre at the pumps today.

However, we're not stopping there. As you've heard, Madam Speaker, we have invested in things like a rent cap and property tax reform. We've frozen New Brunswickers' property taxes. This year, they'll see the benefit of a stabilizer that will reduce their increases to far below what they saw under the previous government. We're not stopping there. We're going to continue to do things like making RSV vaccines free for our most vulnerable citizens, putting in place things like a universal breakfast program, helping families with the—

[Translation]

AI

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Madam Speaker, for this government's vaunted 12-year education plan, I'll remind you that we have a Premier and a Minister of Education who, at every opportunity, tell New Brunswickers that they believe in data, data that they would have us believe is based on undeniable and irrefutable facts. In someone else's hands, it can be trusted as such, but not in these government members' hands. In this education plan, the data comes from AI hallucinations. The data that formed the government's 12-year education plan was based on a digital brain fart by AI. Now, the minister will try to say that it only happened in the citation of references. However, this situation, caused by the government's own mishandling, will, as stated by Matt McGuire, make us "question the integrity of a document and the process that was followed". Can the minister provide any proof that AI was used only in the reference citations? Does she deny it was used anywhere else? Was the cited data properly interpreted? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, I can assure you and everybody else in this room that the education plan was written by staff at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. They wrote it based on the thorough consultations we had with 14 000 New Brunswickers who contributed to our plan. We consulted teachers, parents, and experts, a lot of people who care deeply about education. AI was used only to format the reference list. The rest was written by staff at the department. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Vincent Geiger wasn't especially surprised to learn that his work had been misattributed. He says the way the plan references some academic work is "'pretty shoddy' for a government document". Geiger's research in the field of numeracy is cited twice in the education plan, which is meant to lay the foundation of the province's public education from now until 2038. The professor gets an entry on the document's reference list, but the article attributed to him doesn't seem to exist. Geiger said he's never heard of the journal where the article is supposed to have been published. "It's a bit of a mishmash of things I have worked on in the past" he said. "It's as if something has just dredged through my records and picked out bits and pieces from the articles themselves rather than the title". The reality is that this error now calls into doubt the validity of the plan. How can New Brunswickers trust this now? Can the minister explain to the parents of New Brunswick's children exactly who wrote this document? How many people's hands did this pass through? Why were these mistakes not caught? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, the 12-year education plan, which sets out the vision and the road map for education for the next 12 years, was written by staff at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development based on thorough consultations done with over 14 000 New Brunswickers.

It sets out priorities for fundamental skills related to literacy, numeracy, and well-being. These are exactly the things that we should be focused on in education. In addition to the 12-year education plan, we set out action plans to make sure that, every three years, we verify that we are tracking in the right direction to see improvements in literacy, numeracy, and well-being. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

EDUCATION

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The minister obviously believes in rote learning because she says the same thing over and over and over again. It's just repetition. Like everything else this government touches, this has been handled poorly. After two years of bumbling, fumbling, and mismanagement, one thing is clear: Anything this minister and the government touch should be written in pencil, because pencil can be erased, and we already know they won't get it right the first time. This minister lowered the educational bar. The government fired librarians twice. Now it has brought its own education plan into international disrepute for citing documents that, in some cases, do not even exist. When is this Premier going to admit that her Minister of Education is in way over her head and remove her from this office? How many mishandlings, mistakes, errors, lapses, and questionable decisions will the parents of New Brunswick students have to endure before the Premier yanks the minister out of that seat? This government has never taken responsibility for anything. Who is the minister going to blame for this now?

[Translation]

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, we have a 12-year education plan in the Anglophone sector, but we have another one in the Francophone sector, entitled Together for Success!

Again, we have targeted the schools' priorities, as well as the priorities of parents, families, and students in New Brunswick. We will focus on fundamental skills in education, like literacy, numeracy, and chronic absenteeism.

That is precisely why we have invested directly in resources close to students. We have invested nearly \$20 million in educational assistants. We have also invested nearly \$6 million in educational support teachers, resource teachers, and guidance counsellors. In addition, we have invested in affordable lunches.

[Original]

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): The Auditor General's September report reveals a troubling lack of financial planning and accountability in the government's expansion of the collaborative care clinics. The AG found that the Department of Health has not assessed the full costs of the long-term affordability of the model. Even more concerning, the department could not reliably demonstrate how many patients actually gained access to primary care. At the same time, health care spending continues to place enormous pressure on the provincial budget, and New Brunswick is facing another projected \$1-billion deficit. Nobody disputes the need to improve health care, but New Brunswickers deserve evidence that their tax dollars are producing measurable results. Will the Minister of Finance explain how this government can justify expanding spending on programs when the AG has found that the actual results of their full costs and long-term affordability have not been properly established?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm really pleased to talk about the results that our government is seeing after a generational investment in a health care system that had been starved for years. When we came into power, we saw that there was a serious lack of nurses in the system. Now, we have filled those vacancies with the recruitment of 917 net new nurses who have been respected and retained and who have signed a contract that makes it attractive to choose to be a nurse here in New Brunswick. We're seeing the results, as those positions are now full. Retention numbers are up. That's making a difference in things like ERs, where we're seeing 20% fewer non-urgent visits. We also invested in a transformational contract with the Medical Society and a new model of collaborative care. That is resulting in more doctors than ever being recruited to New Brunswick. There are 179 net new doctors. That's actually—

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): Madam Speaker, the AG's findings raise serious questions about the financial oversight exercised by this very government. We have a Department of Health that is expanding clinics without a clear understanding of the total cost, their long-term financial sustainability, or whether they are delivering the intended results.

At a time when New Brunswick is facing a \$1-billion deficit, the Minister of Finance has a responsibility to ensure every department demonstrates sound financial management before committing taxpayers to additional expenditures. Will the Minister of Finance tell this House what financial controls are in place to prevent departments from expanding programs without first establishing their full costs, demonstrating value for money, and identifying how those commitments will be funded?

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Madam Speaker, I find it interesting that the member opposite has brought the subject of accountability in government to the floor. The Premier just explained all the results we are getting from collaborative care clinics. That is based on the AG's report on what we are getting. Compare that to another AG report about travel nurses from a couple of years ago. Do you remember that little aspect and how that was accounted for? What the previous government could explain was absolutely nothing. What we saw happen then was absolutely scandalous. To have the member opposite get up and talk about accountability, whether it be in health care or anything else... There is no substance here to answer to.

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): Well, let's hit the nail on the head. The AG's report raises very important questions about this government's approach. Clinics are intended to improve access to primary care. However, they should also help to reduce pressure on more expensive parts of our health care system, including emergency departments and hospitals. With New Brunswick facing a \$1-billion deficit, the government simply cannot afford to add new programs without a clear understanding of whether they are reducing costs elsewhere or are creating additional long-term financial obligations. Will the Minister of Finance stand up and tell this House whether his department has conducted any analysis to determine whether investments in these clinics are producing savings elsewhere in the health care system or are simply adding to the province's growing expenditures?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to remind people that, for six years, there was a one-way train for nurses and physicians to leave this province or retire. They were going to Alberta or anywhere but here. I'd like to remind people that we have a net increase in physicians and nurses that is way better than it has ever been. There is a net increase in this province of over 900 nurses, and it's similar with physicians, which are at 180.

We have evidence to back what we are doing. It has been well recognized around the world and by Jane Philpott. Here's a quote: "I think they are a good idea. They've been around for quite a while and they work well in the communities where they're in and up and running." Sorry, that's a quote from the member opposite, the Health Critic.

I would like to remind people that we have attached over 30 000 people since we started these clinics. We have significant, good data that accounts for this, is transparent, and shows we are attaching patients. We inherited a significant number of people who—

PLANT CLOSURES

Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak about the recent announcement of the idling of the AV Nackawic mill. Soon, the mill will be closing its doors. Hundreds of men and women will be without work. This will affect local truckers,

woodlot owners, forestry workers, contractors, small businesses, and large operations like the port of Saint John.

Madam Speaker, I am receiving calls from residents who are worried about how they will pay their bills and put food on the table. People who have built their lives around this industry deserve answers, support, and action. They deserve to know what is coming next. Madam Speaker, will the Premier please commit today to working with me, across party lines, to support the hard-working men and women of Nackawic and develop an urgent plan to address this crisis? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. I am happy to continue working with you, member, on this and was happy to be there beside you and the workers of the mill in Nackawic to let them know that their government wasn't going to let this province's forestry jobs go without a fight. We are using all the resources at our disposal, both at the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, to make sure that we're directly supporting workers and their families during this challenging time of the curtailment of mill operations.

We're working with community leaders, the mayor, and the folks on council. We're also working with industry members to make sure that there are solutions in place for the wood and the supply chain. We're looking at options for the mill, including its assets and structures, so we can make sure that there are good jobs available for the people of Nackawic who have been impacted by the curtailment. I'm happy to continue working with the member opposite on it.

Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The government has a plan to help AV Nackawic workers access employment insurance. However, where is the plan to keep the mill running and the people employed? There is a buyer for the product. They've even said that. They know that, and we all know that. There are workers ready to do the job, but the high cost of operating in New Brunswick, including an industrial carbon tax estimated to cost this operation \$2 million annually, is part of the challenge. I recently asked the Minister of Natural Resources whether the province could possibly, in partnership with the federal government, help the mill run while a long-term plan and solution are found.

My question is for the Premier. Will she establish a task force with an experienced forestry industry leader, with staff from Opportunities New Brunswick and the Department of Natural Resources, and with union leaders to conduct a global search for potential operators and investors and to consider every possible option for this facility? These workers deserve a plan to keep the doors open. Will this Premier deliver one? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I sincerely thank the member opposite for his question. He's doing exactly what he should be doing in terms of standing up for his constituents during a very difficult time.

When I was first elected in 1997, I remember seeing a potash mill go down in Cassidy Lake, and it devastated the community. I saw something very similar happen in Penobscus when we eventually lost the Picadilly potash mine. This is a very serious issue for folks in Nackawic.

I want to share with the member opposite that, from a forestry perspective, there is no file more important in DNR than the wood basket around Nackawic. This is a major problem not only for the workers at the mill, although, obviously, it's more acute for them, but also for us. The value proposition of a successful, integrated forestry sector means we need to have a home for every piece of fibre. Nackawic is that home for hardwood.

Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, PC): Madam Speaker, more than once, I have reached out to the Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Training, asking for a briefing on the services and programs being made available to the hundreds of employees affected by the shutdown of the Nackawic mill. These requests have gone unanswered. I've also submitted a right to information request to the Premier's Office, seeking answers for the residents of Nackawic and the workers whose livelihoods are at stake.

Madam Speaker, the workers and families of Nackawic cannot afford to wait. They deserve transparency, prompt information, and a government that will take their situation seriously. My question is for the Premier. Why is she refusing to provide information? She told us that we will not receive answers until December 16, and if we have a problem with that, we should file a complaint with the Ombud. And is she directing her Minister of PETL to ignore me?

(Interjections.)

Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, PC): They laugh. Is she?

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

[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. I want to thank the member opposite for his question. You will understand, Madam Speaker, that the AV Nackawic file is extremely important to all provincial government and municipal

stakeholders. I have had the opportunity to meet with the mayor and municipal council to determine next steps. We want to go further. The objective isn't just to make sure people have access to employment insurance. The objective is to make sure people have a future in the Greater Nackawic region.

We are working with our partners to determine how, whether measures are aimed at workers or employers in the region, we can continue to move the Nackawic community forward. How can we identify employment opportunities for people? We are talking about progress in the short, medium, and long terms. Right now, the first step is to support the workers and their families. That is exactly what we in the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour are doing. Thank you.

[Original]

MACTAQUAC DAM

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. As we are all well aware, NB Power continues to have the highest debt-to-equity ratio of any public or private utility—not in Atlantic Canada, not in Canada, but in all of North America. I can't find any other utility that has a higher debt-to-equity ratio than NB Power has. Compounding that challenge of the debt-to-equity ratio is the fact that NB Power has removed all standards that were set to get that under control. Also, there's the fact that Mactaquac sits in the shadow of a major refurbishment that is projected to cost about \$9 billion—that's "billion" with a "b".

Madam Speaker, on October 13, there was an announcement made by the federal government about \$270 million for NB Power. Can the Minister of Energy give us a little breakdown of that \$270 million?

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Madam Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for the question. Yes, it was a good announcement. It is around pre-work that's being prepared for the Mactaquac Life Achievement Project (MLAP). It's a Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB) loan that will allow NB Power to reduce its interest costs over the life of the project. It is a first step in the first process of the Mactaquac Life Achievement Project. It's long overdue. Pre-work has been going on for the past couple of years. This should help reduce pressure on interest rates, which means a reduction in costs, which means lower rate applications. It was a very positive announcement. We were happy to have Minister Hodgson among us to make that announcement.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): That's a very interesting point of view that the minister gave. In reality, a reduction in interest rates is only current. They're just getting pushed ahead, just like the historic deficit this government is giving us. Government

members act like it's a multigenerational investment, but it's multigenerational debt that our kids and grandkids are going to be paying.

Madam Speaker, we talked about this announcement, but in reality, it is a loan. That's one thing the minister said that stood out. It is a loan on top of the massive debt that NB Power currently holds. This only increases that debt-to-equity ratio.

Let's look at other provinces to see what they've gotten. Alberta, of all places, got \$152 million for its energy grid. That's nonrepayable. Let's look at Nova Scotia, which received \$71 million for its grid. Again, that's nonrepayable. We don't know when this New Brunswick loan has to be paid back, if the loan has to be paid back, or what the conditions are. We know nothing other than that we're adding debt for the ratepayers in New Brunswick. What does this Minister of Energy have to say about it?

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Great job at cherry-picking, but I'll also announce that there was a loan. Do you want a fact? There was a \$50-million grant for the Salisbury terminal. You compared...

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Well, pick and choose. Do you only want to talk about Mactaquac, or do you want to talk about Alberta? Do you want to talk about Nova Scotia? There's a grid. That's where you want your money. We have continued discussions with the federal government.

I will go back to a comment that the member made about the reduction of controls over the net debt-to-equity ratio. The previous government sent two letters—two letters—

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Absolutely. Those two letters created two rate increases of 9.25% or above for New Brunswickers. Rate increases were pressured onto New Brunswickers. Is the member opposite indicating that we should go back to that? I know for a fact that there was no thought or strategy behind those letters.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): You know, Madam Speaker, all that the members of this government have done all morning, in question period, is look at the past to what did or didn't happen. They have no accountability for what they're doing today in relation to rates. So, let me just give you a little snapshot.

NB Power is going to the EUB and asking for 5.4% per year for the next three years. That is a rate increase of over 17% that residential ratepayers are going to have to pay. I have constituents who are already struggling to pay their current bills. How are they going to pay the 17% increase in three years?

Madam Speaker, we also know from CBC this morning that there was a \$158-million question about what happened with the Point Lepreau generator repair. This government is not holding NB Power to account, whatsoever. It's continuing to waste money. It cost \$158 million for an eight-month wait for a repair at Point Lepreau. This Minister of Energy is not doing his job—

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Madam Speaker, this is another example of just throwing shade all over the place. Read the story and you'll understand it better. You want to talk about comparing rates. The last three years that the members opposite were in power, rates increased by 5.7%, 9.8%, and 9.8%. Since we've taken power, there's been nothing close to that. We found the one lever we had, which was to take 10% off of that to alleviate some of the pressures the members opposite had put on rates when they were in government.

Now, what the member is advocating for when he talks about rate increases... This is important to understand. NB Power takes nine months to look at all its costs. It looks at everything it will have to furnish for the next few years. It goes in front of the EUB and has to defend all those costs line by line. The intervenors look at every one of those line costs, decide what they're going to do, and come back. The EUB comes back and says: This is what it will cost. It can be used to set the rates. Is the member opposite advocating that we should step in and not allow NB Power to recover its costs?

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was quite surprised that the speech from the throne didn't include any specific items to address the affordability crisis, particularly when you think about how people can no longer afford their power bills. The 45% of New Brunswickers who make less than a living wage are struggling to keep their heads above water. NB Power has now asked for another big jump in power rates, totalling 17.4% over three years. By 2029, this will add a total of \$500 to the annual cost of a typical power bill today.

Last week, I joined ACORN, the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities, and the New Brunswick Federation of Labour to call for the implementation of an electricity support program for people with low, moderate, and fixed incomes. Will the Minister of Energy and Finance institute an electricity support program, which he promised to look into, to provide monthly credits to low- and moderate-income earners so that they don't go under?

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Miles (Hanwell-New Maryland, Minister of Social Development, Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, L): Thank you for the question, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

It's an honour to stand here today for the first question period back and to represent the wonderful folks of Hanwell-New Maryland.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker, we know that the people of New Brunswick are going through difficult times.

[Original]

We know this, Madam Speaker. These affordability pressures did not start in the past two years. However, what did start in the past two years is the urgent need to address the affordability pressures that New Brunswickers are feeling. We know, Madam Speaker. That's why we looked at electricity bills when we stepped into office. That's why we kept the rent cap that the previous government decided should expire. That's why we in Social Development are looking at our disability support program and are working with our community partners right now to see how we can best support New Brunswickers in the way they need support and in the way they are asking us to support them. We are investing in New Brunswickers, we're investing in communities, and we're investing where New Brunswickers have told us they need it.

[Translation]

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

You know, the families who are fortunate enough to be enrolled in NB Power's enhanced efficiency program see a major cut in their power bills. However, such cuts to household power bills are out of the reach of the majority of people with low or moderate incomes because the energy efficiency programs are so woefully underfunded. By regulation, under the *Electricity Act*, the province's Energy Efficiency Fund is capped at \$25 million for energy efficiency measures. The Minister of Energy is the legal custodian of that fund. So, Madam Speaker, the question is very straightforward: Will the minister ask Cabinet to lift the cap on the Energy Efficiency Fund to make it possible for far more families who are struggling to pay their bills to realize the significant cuts their power costs would see with

access to the enhanced energy efficiency program, which is currently only available to a lucky few because of underbudgeting? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the question and for highlighting the fact that there are a lot of energy efficiency programs available in New Brunswick at the moment. Over the past few years, there have been record numbers in what we've done and of what we have continued to provide. As far as the cap goes, that's a budget discussion that we have every year to see where we decide to allocate our funds, including all the Social Development affordability programs that we're looking at, to make sure that we have the best possible case to help New Brunswickers in these difficult times. That's what we're going to do again this year.

DATA CENTRES

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, before we adjourned in June, the Holt government refused to allow a vote on my motion for a moratorium on AI data centres. That motion died on the Order Paper yesterday. The government members clearly felt pressure from the motion and the Lorneville community, but, instead of a moratorium, we got a completely inadequate framework for AI data centre development in the province. In a story published by *Your Saint John* in July, Lorneville resident Chris Watson said the Premier told him that "the legislature is not the place for these types of discussions" and that "the province is pursuing these talks behind the scenes". So much for transparency. Last week, NB Power confirmed that it has had 10 applications to supply power to data centres. Can the Premier confirm which communities are being targeted for these data centres?

[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 very much, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for her question. You know, Madam Speaker, over the past few months, the decision was made to be much more proactive than reactive about data centres. One of the things proposed is to establish a strategic framework that would enable us to regulate the eventual establishment of data centres here in New Brunswick.

We also established clear measures. People want spinoffs if such a centre, or centres, is established in our province. First of all, people want to ensure that there are no negative effects on those who currently use electricity. People also want to ensure a sustainable environment for a positive future. People want economic spinoffs from this, and not temporary spinoffs. People want communities to also be able to enjoy long-term benefits

from this. If these things are part of a project, that project will be reviewed and considered. Currently, establishing the measure will put us in a better position to make decisions on these projects.

[Original]

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, that framework is weak and inadequate. It says that there might be legislation. There might be enforcement mechanisms. It is completely inadequate and will not protect the people of New Brunswick. People across New Brunswick are demanding a say in the types of projects being planned in their communities, but they're being left in the dark. Yesterday, hundreds of New Brunswickers brought the voice of the people here to the Legislature because the Premier isn't listening. Citizens are having to file right to information requests just to find out what's happening in their communities. NB Power has confirmed that it has 10 data centres, with a total of about 900 MW of power consumption, in its power connection queue. Madam Speaker, New Brunswickers have a right to know if a hyper-scale data centre and possibly an accompanying gas plant are being considered in their community. Will the Premier be transparent and tell them?

[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 very much, Madam Speaker. What it is important to consider in all of this is that the time was also taken for consultations with people to find out their opinions. Over 3 700 people gave us their answers. That is extraordinary, because that is exactly what was wanted.

However, let's be clear, Madam Speaker; the goal is not to automatically have data centres setting up in New Brunswick. Right now, the desire is to establish a framework and look to the future. That does not guarantee that no projects will be started in our province. The desire is to consider all measures, but being proactive and establishing frameworks are necessary. Time will tell, but, currently, Madam Speaker, the priority is New Brunswickers. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

HOMELESS SHELTERS

Ms. Bockus (Saint Croix, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. This past Sunday night, the health care resources of Charlotte County were stretched to the limit as four ambulances responded to the Lighthouse Lodge, a homeless shelter in St. Stephen, for not one, not two,

but nine overdoses among the residents there. The mayor of the community has told me that six of those treated required hospitalization.

The neighbours around the shelter have reached a breaking point. They deal with fights among the homeless shelter occupants, the constant screaming of insults at all hours of the day and night, and the uproar created by the arrival of emergency personnel at 11:30 p.m., when most of them are in bed trying to prepare for another workday. I'd like to ask the Minister of Social Development or the minister of addiction services when exactly the people of St. Stephen can expect the shelter to start producing the results for which it was created.

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 member for Saint Croix for bringing this issue forward. We also heard about the situation in Saint Croix. I had a personal conversation with the Mayor of St. Stephen last night. I also had a conversation with the MLA for Saint Croix this morning. We are fully engaged in this process. We have engaged our partners at Social Development. We have engaged our partners at the Addiction and Mental Health Services Branch, our partners in the surrounding areas, and the not-for-profit organizations that work in this space, even those in Saint John. We are going to be able to coordinate a response to ensure that the community gets the services it needs to get through this situation.

I know personally that, back home, we went through a similar situation this past summer. We are pulling from the lessons we learned from that crisis. We will implement a plan to help the community get through this process as we continue to monitor the situation. Thank you very much.

Ms. Bockus (Saint Croix, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's all well and good when the government says resources are being supplied to the shelter and its residents or that work is under way to help many of them move on with their lives. However, I know for a fact that many of the shelter guests, and that's what they are called, have been living there for three years.

I asked the operators of the shelter whether there is a timeline for the length of time a guest can stay, expecting to be told that, after one month, a certain goal must be achieved and that, after two months, another level must be obtained, perhaps all the way up to a six-month period, during which help would be offered and lives would be changed. I was told there is no time limit or goals for residents.

The support the government has been supplying just enables those residing there to continue with their unhealthy lifestyles. When will resources be put in place or changes be made to help the guests? When can the neighbours around the shelter expect some relief from the hellish conditions they are living in?

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, before I answer, I will say that I understand where the member opposite is coming from. I want to first thank the first responders, the shelter staff, and the residents who have stepped in to help the folks in St. Stephen.

Homelessness is a complex issue. We know this, Madam Speaker. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and St. Stephen is no exception to that. We've met with the community members. We are working with the municipality. There is a whole multi-department response to this. We know that the numbers are climbing, and we know, Madam Speaker, that we can't support folks unless they are housed. That is what we are building toward. We don't want to create more shelters. We want to see folks housed with the dignity and supports they deserve. That's why Social Development is working hard with New Brunswick Housing to get those supportive housing spaces in place. We need the land, Madam Speaker.

Ms. Bockus (Saint Croix, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. On Tuesday, I expressed my concerns about the latest overdoses at the homeless shelter in St. Stephen, face to face, with the Premier, the Minister of Social Development, the Minister of Public Safety, and the minister responsible for housing. Today, I spoke to the minister of addiction services. All were aware of Sunday night's massive overdose situation.

I told all of them that the people of St. Stephen have reached their tolerance limit for the illegal activities and the outrageous behaviour of those who live at the shelter. Paramedics have responded to 19 overdose calls in St. Stephen in the past month, and 16 of those have been in the past eight days. What happens when we have other emergencies requiring ambulances and paramedics and they are tied up on an overdose call? The residents want the shelter gone.

Premier and ministers, when are you going to fix this situation? The community deserves a plan, not just lip service, and real action to fix this problem.

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, there is no quick and easy solution. Believe me, I wish there was. If there were, then we would have it done already. Every single resident staying at the shelter in St. Stephen deserves our utmost respect and to be treated with dignity as we get them the supports and services they need and deserve. This is not a conversation for a single department, which is why we have the Ministerial Task Force on Homelessness. We know it's complex.

Madam Speaker, you have government members committed to working with the people of St. Stephen to find a path forward so they can get the supports and services the shelter residents need and deserve and to support community safety for the rest of the residents of

St. Stephen. I've sat in the living rooms of folks who live around the lodge. They want to see the right supports in place, too. We've met with the mayor and municipal staff. This team is committed to finding a path forward that supports St. Stephen.

[*Translation*]

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