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EDUCATION

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, one of the greatest gifts that we can bestow upon our children is a high-quality education. Sadly, the youth of New Brunswick are struggling, and the government is not acting with urgency. The 2025 results of the Programme for International Student Assessment, or PISA for short, demonstrated that New Brunswick high school students finished at the very bottom of all provinces in every subject tested, including reading, science, and mathematics. For the past 25 years, Alberta and Quebec have stood at the top of this ladder. I was part of the project to look at Alberta's scores compared to New Brunswick's. Why do we keep reinventing the wheel? How long is it going to take for us to study success before we can make it happen here at home? It's a public policy catastrophe, and we must demand better. What is the minister's plan to stop this decline, get our students back on track, and get them to where they deserve to be?

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for the opportunity to talk about how we are focused on improving literacy and numeracy in our schools. How do we do that? First, we identify this as a priority, which we have done in both education plans. We target these as priorities, and we communicate that with the system. That is the first step, which we are doing. Then, we encourage teachers to have dedicated instructional time for literacy and numeracy. If it is not dedicated instructional time, then we encourage them to incorporate literacy and numeracy in every activity that they're doing. It's working. We're hearing examples of people in schools doing just that, whether they're the literacy doses at Cuffman that we've heard about or how we use numeracy and literacy when we make recipes with kids. We're hearing examples upon examples of how it's happening in our schools right now. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): I appreciate the well-rehearsed talking points, but we need real action.

CBC interviewed Louis Volante, a Brock University professor specializing in international achievement testing, who made the following sobering remarks regarding our students' math difficulties:

If you take a province like Quebec, they're 51 points ahead of you. Essentially what that would mean is the average 15-year-old student in New Brunswick would be two and a half grade levels below their same age peers in Quebec.

Madam Speaker, this can't stand. It represents a real threat to the future prosperity of our students as they advance toward adulthood. Our students need to be equipped with the skills necessary to succeed. Our teachers need to be supported and encouraged. These

statistics are demoralizing not to mention inhibiting to those considering entering the profession. How does the minister feel about our students being over two grade levels behind their Quebec counterparts? Will the minister commit to urgent action?

[*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 talk about our action plans. Our 12-year education plan contains specific, short-term action plans that are actually designed to see whether our current actions are achieving the intended results.

In the first step of the process, we are actually putting screening tools in place to identify the targets we need to focus on to improve literacy and numeracy results. So, we will proceed with assessments, and we will improve results. Those are the measures we have targeted in our education plan. Thank you.

[*Original*]

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, I didn't hear any real or good answer there, so I'm going to try again. Students are struggling, and they deserve better. These results are failing families, and they are harming the long-term success of the students. This government is over halfway into its mandate, and the time for action has come. I spent the weekend talking to teachers, and it isn't all sunshine and unicorns from their perspective. We need to reduce the paperwork burden weighing down our educators and increase the face-to-face opportunities between teachers, support staff, and specialists. Just as we must redesign our health care system to be more patient-centric, so too must we make our schools more teacher-student-centric.

Will the minister commit, right here on the floor of this House, to developing an action plan to help turn this tide? Get into the classrooms of our province and listen to the teachers and the administrators so that New Brunswick students can compete with the best and the brightest in the world.

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I could repeat once again that we have an action plan, but I feel as though I've mentioned that already. What I'd like to talk about are the conversations that I'm having with teachers. On a regular basis, I meet with the presidents of the NBTA and the AEFNB. We even have breakfast together twice per month. Recently, the President of the NBTA commented that teachers feel heard and understood for the first time in a very, very long time. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM

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

[*Original*]

Madam Speaker, the following is a quote from the Premier from September 3, 2025, concerning the Liberals' delay of their lunch program:

We want to do a rollout that is smooth, that is non-disruptive… We want to get it right. We don't want to blunder and trip over working out the kinks on the backs of students and teachers in the middle of a school year.

Predictably, the reality has been exactly the opposite. A year later, the program has started, and 56 schools do not have access—one fifth of the schools in our province. Will the minister admit that this rollout was anything but smooth, that it was disruptive, that the minister and the Premier did not get it right, that they did blunder and trip over working out the kinks, and that it was on the backs of students and teachers? Let's see whether the Minister of Education will get up and blame the mess on the Premier or whether the Premier will get up and blame the mess on the minister. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for the opportunity to talk about our school food programs. We are so proud of the universal breakfast program that we rolled out in every single school last year. That is 297 schools, Madam Speaker—not a single one was missed. A year later, we are rolling out the affordable lunch program. This is a very heavy lift. I was actually talking to a researcher out in British Columbia who studies school food programs, and this is what she said: I've never seen a province attempt this for K to 12 in one year. It's remarkable. You went from 0 to 100 in a year.

Those were her words. As of this week, there are 280 schools that have these affordable lunches.

[*Translation*]

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

[*Original*]

There you have it. Self-congratulation, backslapping, spin-doctoring, creating a narrative rather than speaking to reality, and word salad. However, kids can't eat word salad. This rollout has been another boondoggle. The government members promised it would be in

place by September 2025. It's a year late. They said it would cost about $26 million. We all know that will not happen, and I base that on everything we've ever seen from this government. They said it would be delivered with local, nutritious food. It is delivered with prepackaged food that comes from Quebec with expiry dates on the packaging as much as two to three weeks away. I didn't know that healthy, nutritious, locally sourced food could be packed with enough preservatives to last weeks. I have seen it reported that people said they would not feed this food to their dogs. Has the Minister of Education eaten any of this potluck of preservative-laced, prepackaged provender? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to talk about the nutrition programs in our schools. We visited several schools and served food to children, who were very happy. Then, we went around the tables and asked them if they liked their meals. They said they were delicious. We saw them eating spaghetti, broccoli, salad, wraps, and other good food.

I heard parents say time and time again that the mental burden of feeding their children had been lifted because they have confidence in the nutritious and affordable food their children get at school day after day. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, PC): That's a no. Where's the locally sourced, nutritious food? I remember the Minister of Education saying that it would be sourced from local farmers. I guess the minister considers Chartwells in Quebec to be a farm in New Brunswick. Did she consult the AI Microsoft Copilot on where to find local food producers in New Brunswick while she was writing her 12-year education plan? I have news for the minister: Food that comes from a production facility nine hours away in Quebec is not nutritious, locally-sourced food.

What about people with allergies and food sensitivities? Can the minister explain how these meals stack up against Canada's Food Guide recommendations for daily salt, sugar, and fat intake? Can the minister provide to the House a document with the salt, sugar, and fat content of the menu items furnished by Chartwells to prove she had this conversation with Chartwells and that the menu items meet or exceed Canada's Food Guide recommendations? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Hickey (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to talk about the impact of the school food program in ridings like mine, a riding with 50% child poverty that has seen the establishment of these programs build the dependable food security that our students needed. In the face of the affordability crisis that is gripping this province—an affordability crisis where we know exactly what the response from the opposition would be—we are

stepping up for New Brunswick students by establishing programs like this that make sure that, in ridings like mine, with poverty levels as they are, we are delivering for those students and that they are fed every day, all day. It seems to me that the only one hungry in this Chamber is the Opposition House Leader lusting after his old job. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

ENERGY

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Madam Speaker, in February 2025, Irving Paper permanently shut down half of its operations in Saint John, cutting 140 well-paying jobs. It also impacted about 300 suppliers throughout the region. During that closure, JDI explicitly pointed a finger at uncompetitive industrial electricity rates, citing them as the direct cause. According to the same release explaining the closure, the company said its electricity rates were 22% higher than the Canadian industrial average.

Fast-forward one year, and a small community is finding itself in a similar position with the closure of AV Nackawic, resulting in job losses for 350 people. That will have a devastating impact on families, the community of Nackawic, and the wider region. The only thing I hear from our federal and provincial governments is that we should keep our elbows up and prepare for tough times ahead. Can the Minister of Energy please give us a better plan than elbows up?

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, last year, as part of its 2026 general rate application, NB Power submitted an application to the Energy and Utilities Board (EUB) to change the order in which it serves its customers. This was following a discussion in 2025 about interruptible rates. The EUB reviewed the information and ruled in favour of changing the dispatch order. That went through in a 2026 application. Right now, we're aware that JDI has made an application to the EUB to review that. There's a process that exists within the EUB. At this time, it would be imprudent for the government to comment on the process that's happening at the moment.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The minister talked about the application. Just this past Friday, JDI penned a letter, in conjunction with that application to the EUB, asking it to reverse its approval to allow NB Power to change how it interprets its ability to sell electricity to industries in New Brunswick as well as its ability to sell excess power to external regions, including the United States. I will quote exactly what the letter says:

This adjustment to rate calculations has caused millions of dollars in additional annual electricity costs for industrial customers.

No business can absorb such impacts

NB Power should not be able to sell its lowest-cost electricity to the United States and put New Brunswick jobs and communities at risk. Madam Speaker, with 26 000 jobs across this province, forestry is a massive part of our economy.

When will this minister get his head out of the sand, stop putting his elbows up, and start developing a plan for industry and jobs in New Brunswick?

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, the change that happened last year was about interruptible rates and firm rates and firm customers versus… Now, interruptible customers get preferred pricing because it's extra power. Before, they used to get a better benefit, but lately, there has been more demand. A firm customer, if you want to know who they are, is you. The member opposite is a firm customer. I'm a firm customer.

Last year, the order was made to change the order of dispatch to match lowest-cost generation to the adequate level of demand. This was to the benefit of all NB Power customers.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Madam Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Energy to talk to residential customers and see whether they think a 17.4% increase in their rates is a benefit to all New Brunswickers, or he can ask the industry itself. Businesses are moving out because they simply can't afford electricity rates. I'll just ask a very direct question: Is it true that NB Power sells electricity to our American counterparts at a cheaper rate than it does to our industrial businesses right here at home?

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 not about pricing. It's about matching rate generation with the customers that are there. The reality, and what the member is failing to understand, is that NB Power is a cost-of-service producer. The minute there is a change in dispatch, whoever gets the benefit does so at somebody else's expense. We could reverse this, and it could be changed, but somebody else would be impacted. There was a positive impact to NB Power customers, including the 17%, compared to the years when the official opposition members were in power, when the increase was much higher.

This was a clear benefit to NB Power customers. We will see what the process is once the EUB reviews what JDI has requested. We will not comment on the process until that is done.

VIRTUAL CARE

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It looks like it's time for the Health Minister to take another trip under the bus, courtesy of the Premier. At least the Health Minister knows his way under the bus. He's been there often enough. This time, it's

for another chapter in the Premier's Foundever boondoggle. As we learned on Friday, the 811 callback times have exploded from 12 minutes to over 3 hours. At least the Health Minister has had good practice defending this kind of poor service. He might still have his notes from the last time he got trotted out to defend the Foundever boondoggle. Just for the House record, will the minister please rise and defend, like he did with CTV, this unacceptable jump in wait times?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, thank you very much to the member opposite. The first time I was under the bus was under his direction. I had a good look around.

I am glad to rise today to respond about our 811 success story. We receive many more calls now that it's flu season. People have been funnelled to the 811 number. We are able to respond in short order. In fact, when we do surveys of our virtual care 811 numbers, our rate is in excess of 86%. People appreciate this. Our 811 service allows our clients to be sent to Virtual Care NB, to emergency departments, and to 811 pharmacists. This is a much safer and more consistent clearing house. Thank you very much for allowing me to get up and drive that bus.

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Well, I think the Health Minister has about two million reasons to like the bus. As I said, the Health Minister has my sympathy for being made to defend something he knows is so clearly wrong. Again, the Health Minister is the one defending the 811 mess and being made to defend it with a weak line like this: 60% of the time, we get it right the first time. Maybe he needs a slogan, something catchy, like this: 60% of the time, it works every time. It's like that cologne in *Anchorman*. What was the name of that stuff? That's not my question for the minister. My question for the minister is this: Do we have an escape clause from this Foundever boondoggle, or will New Brunswickers be cursed with this poor service for years to come?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, you don't understand the statistics. When people call, 60% of those calls are answered at that time. Some require a little more depth, a little more understanding, or maybe even redirection. However, those people are called back. Guess what! Instead of waiting on the phone for 5 hours or 12 hours, you can leave a callback number. If you have a problem that can't be dealt with immediately, you can leave your number, and we'll call you back within a reasonable period of time. This is not McDonald's health care. This is good health care. Thank you very much.

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Madam Speaker, that's a typical government answer: Don't worry, we'll call you. If the Holt government members continue along this path, pretty soon the 811 wait times will match emergency room wait times. To echo the message of the Executive Director of the Coalition for Seniors and Nursing Home Residents' Rights: Seniors are "not going to sit on the phone and wait for four hours or five hours." The result will be predictable. When seniors don't get the care they need, they wind up in the hospital.

This whole mess is the creation of the Premier, and the Minister of Health is responsible for explaining it and accepting the beating that comes with an unacceptable explanation. Can the Health Minister at least tell us whether his government has asked Foundever when it expects to get acceptable staffing levels?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, perhaps you should write your questions after you've listened to my response. I'm very glad to report that we have 126 nurse practitioners employed by Foundever. I am happy to report that we have 9 bilingual nurse practitioners. I am happy to report that we're seeing 300 people per day. There are openings every day.

To the member opposite: If you have a problem, you should call 811 now. We will get back to you in record time. We're doing better than we ever have before. New Brunswickers are happy with our service. It has an 86% satisfaction rate. If people have urgent problems and are unable to wait that length of time, they can go to the emergency department. If they think they can wait, we will call them back and give them a proper word of advice. Our care is safe, directed, and nuanced. It's putting people through the same area. Thank you very much for allowing me to say that.

[*Translation*]

SENIORS

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, what quality of care do we want for our parents and grandparents? What importance do we place on the people who raised us and who contributed so much to our society? They were our teachers, our nurses, our farmers, our forestry workers, our fishers, and much more. They helped build our province and paid taxes for decades. Today, the government needs to respect its part of the deal.

Will the Minister of Seniors commit to increasing the number of funded daily care hours to 4.1, as experts and the New Brunswick Association of Nursing Homes recommend, to ensure that retirement home residents get the care they need?

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister of Seniors; Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the opposition member for the question. Certainly, as a government, we have the wellness of every New Brunswick senior at heart. That's why our budget for this year includes record spending for seniors and long-term care compared to 2025-26. The budget has increased by 19%, or $162 million, to reach a record $993 million. That is what we announced this year, and we are very, very proud of it.

As announced after the budget was tabled, when the plan was launched, we are adding $2.6 million in 2026 to increase the number of hours of care for nursing home residents.

Starting in January 2027, we will ensure that every resident gets an additional 0.1 hours of care. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, why can't we get transparency and answers from this government? I didn't hear a clear answer from the minister. The staff at the Association of Nursing Homes have been waiting over three months for a written response. They haven't received one either.

Members of the Holt government have bragged about increasing hours of care this year. However, they have really only increased care by minutes—six minutes, to be exact.

Increasing hours of care is good for nursing home residents, and it's good for our economy. Investing in 4.1 daily hours of care would create an additional 1 240 jobs. These are the kinds of jobs we want: union jobs providing care for seniors in our communities and ensuring that seniors in our communities live with dignity. Will the Minister of Seniors answer my question and commit to increasing the funded daily hours of care to 4.1 to help seniors live with dignity?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister of Seniors; Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the opposition member for asking me my second question of the day. In spite of the definition we just heard, in our opinion, the 2026-27 investment really is a good first step. It shows that we are certainly always prioritizing the file, in spite of the hard decisions we have to make with respect to our fiscal year.

Increasing care hours in nursing homes is an important multiyear process. There are also labour challenges in the sector. We are always continuing to work closely with the New Brunswick Association of Nursing Homes and the talent recruitment division within the government of New Brunswick to meet labour needs. I want to assure you that all New Brunswick seniors and their wellness are important to us. Thank you very much.

[*Original*]

COLLABORATIVE CARE CLINICS

Mr. Russell (Miramichi West, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The failure of the Holt government to staff the Blackville clinic is felt up and down the Miramichi. Now people gather in hockey rinks, school gyms, and everywhere else they can gather. You just know the topic of health care will come up. Almost all the stories will be about people—families—who don't have a doctor and are suffering. I'd like to quote one of those suffering

families: Rural communities like Blackville are being left behind. Telling rural New Brunswickers to travel miles for basic care or wait endless hours in overcrowded ERs is not a plan. Blackville desperately needs a permanent health clinic fully staffed with dedicated nurses, practitioners, and doctors who know our community and can provide consistency, reliability, and care. Madam Speaker, to the Premier: Is this too much to ask?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite: I would like to thank him for the time that we have spent in Blackville speaking to people in the three local communities—Boiestown, Doaktown, and Blackville—about their needs. You know, the solution, the collaborative care clinic in that area, requires some nuances. For example, there isn't one town there that would warrant an entire collaborative care clinic with physicians, nurses, and everybody else for one town, but when you bring three towns together… The member opposite was party to these discussions with our local politicians. We agreed that we need to bring clinicians together to create a collaborative care clinic that works for that town. I am very thankful that he invited me to attend that meeting. We are both going to attend the next meeting during which clinicians will be in the same room. I think that we can work together to come up with something that will help the residents of Blackville. Thank you.

Mr. Russell (Miramichi West, PC): Madam Speaker, I have had several conversations with the Minister of Health to try to fix this for the people of Miramichi. It seems like if I don't get the right direction, it's hard for me to help. I expect he is swamped with calls from my colleagues from other rural ridings telling him the same thing. When it comes to health care, it appears the Holt government has forgotten half the population. What makes it even more frustrating is the number of announcements the Premier makes about health care. Everyone agrees that it is getting worse in every way, yet hardly a week goes by without a photo op for the Premier. The other day, we watched her big announcement claiming that 1 000 doctors and nurses were hired, but no one was from Blackville. My question is for the Minister of Health: What does he believe it will take to get the message through to the Premier?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite: Yes, we have worked together. We do have a plan for moving forward. We are bringing in clinicians so that we can bring the right people there. I'm glad to reference another member opposite who resides in a riding where we just announced our 22nd collaborative care clinic serving over 30 000 New Brunswickers in his backyard. I think that we are making progress. We started this. We've been attaching more people on a very regular basis. We've brought in significant numbers of family doctors, nurses, nursing assistants, and nurse practitioners. We are on the right path, Madam Speaker. I'm very glad that the member has allowed me to stand to speak to that.

Mr. Russell (Miramichi West, PC): Madam Speaker, I believe the message has been received by the Health Minister. The frustration expressed by the people of Miramichi is

heartbreaking. When someone tells me I don't have a doctor and I can't travel, so I guess I will just stay home and die, that is about as frustrating as it gets. As I said, I expect that I am speaking for many of my rural colleagues when I ask: When will the Holt government start getting some doctors and nurses to rural New Brunswick?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the sentiments behind the member opposite's question because our government has heard directly from New Brunswickers about how much they want to see health care improve after years of it being underinvested in and after a previous government, the Higgs-Allain team, telling nurses to go to Alberta and telling doctors to take on more patients. Our government had a lot of rebuilding to do, and that's what we've done.

We signed a great agreement with nurses that has seen the stabilization of their recruitment and an addition of 917 nurses. We signed an agreement with doctors that has specific incentives for rural practice. Then we went out and opened collaborative care clinics in rural areas of this province, 22 of them so far. We've recruited more doctors than the previous government ever did, and we're seeing those doctors come, locate in rural areas, and start to take patients off the wait list. The minister has a plan for Blackville. We're going to work on getting that clinic staffed, and we're going to continue to make sure that every New Brunswicker is getting what they didn't get under the previous government.

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

[*Translation*]

The time for question period has now expired.