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COST OF LIVING

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): This government needs to understand the reality facing working-class New Brunswickers. We hear from New Brunswickers who are working hard, paying their bills, doing everything they're supposed to do, and they're still struggling to get ahead. People are afraid of what it's going to cost just to live. They're afraid of an unexpected expense and taking on more debt, and they're afraid that, no matter how hard they work, it's never going to be enough. Madam Speaker, this is not the New Brunswick we once knew, and it certainly isn't the New Brunswick we should be accepting. Our people deserve more than being told how much this government is doing for them.

A 10% rebate on electricity usage doesn't suddenly make life more affordable or even cover the taxes on your power bill. A school breakfast program doesn't help the working New Brunswicker who doesn't have children. When someone gets sick, they shouldn't have to worry about whether they're going to find an ER and then find that it's closed. We have higher debt, poorer services, and increasing government fees. To the Premier: Why are you just managing decline?

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, affordability is a priority for this government, and we have been focused on delivering real results through a coordinated approach for New Brunswickers. We hit the ground running in 2024 with a 3% rent cap. What was the first thing the Higgs-Allain team said they would do if they formed government? Put the 3% rent cap on the chopping block. If the members opposite really want to debate affordability in this House, then they need to get their leader—their elected leader—out of the balcony and down here onto the floor of the Legislature so that New Brunswickers can find out what a Higgs-Allain government would want to put on the chopping block next. What affordability measure, Madam Speaker, is going to be on the chopping block?

[*Translation*]

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

You know, this government is making short-term decisions with long-term consequences, and it's New Brunswickers who are going to be left paying the price. With the provincial deficit approaching $1.7 billion, this government continues to spend money without demonstrating that New Brunswickers are getting something in return.

Madam Speaker, it's not just about today's finances. It's about a New Brunswick we're leaving for 10 years from now. It's about the next generation of taxpayers—working families and young people—who will inherit the financial consequences of the decisions being made in this House today. Are the hard-earned tax dollars of New Brunswickers building a stronger province, or are they simply paying for decisions that are going to leave them with more debt and fewer options?

In the third year of its mandate, this government continues to ask New Brunswickers to trust its direction. Premier, this is about more than balancing the books. We all know that isn't happening anytime soon. It's about whether New Brunswickers will be able to afford to live in their own province 10 years from now. Premier, this is your time to answer the question. What is your plan to return to balance?

Hon. Mr. Hickey (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation, L): Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. Affordability is a top priority of this government. We know that it is on the minds of every New Brunswicker. We know it's on the minds of every New Brunswicker when they fill their cars, pay their rent, and buy their groceries. We are members of a government that is focused on delivering more affordability measures in the face of leaders of a would-be Higgs-Allain government that have said they would scrap the rent cap. The single biggest piece of tenant protection legislation would be scrapped. I hear one narrative on the floor of the House, and I hear another in the media. Which leader should we listen to? My real question is…We need to make sure… There are two probable scenarios. Either Daniel Allain doesn't have the support from a caucus on the floor here, without someone to show him some loyalty and give him a seat, or he's too scared to face us in the Legislature because he knows he can't—

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, that little diatribe made me forget what my question even was. What about homeowners, students, borrowers, and working New Brunswickers who are struggling just to keep up? Now, with the Bank of Canada raising the interest rate for the first time in three years, we are seeing another reminder of just how expensive the future could become. This isn't about yesterday's interest rate increase. It's about what the higher borrowing cost could mean for the next generation of New Brunswickers. Students borrowing to invest in their education, young families hoping to purchase their first homes, small-business owners trying to grow their businesses, and working New Brunswickers are already carrying a heavy debt load.

Madam Speaker, these are the very people we depend upon to build New Brunswick's future, yet we're announcing programs, spending money, and making decisions without clearly demonstrating how it will improve affordability. In the third year of her government's mandate—three years—what does this Premier have to say to the borrowers of tomorrow?

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. I listened to the member opposite, the Leader of the Official Opposition, speak about long-term strategies, and I was reminded of a sign I saw in my department recently: You can't eat the fruit the day you plant the seed. You have to invest time, resources, and care to make things happen. There's no better example than what we're doing in health. We're making generational investments, structural investments, right now, that are going to pay off in the future, for generations and decades to come. That's what we're doing. I'm sorry that the members opposite don't have the imagination or the foresight to see that, but that's what's going on. But then again, I'm not surprised. If you were to ask a member of the opposition where the fruit comes from, this would undoubtedly be the answer: The grocery store?

YOUTH

Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Yes, that's what the crew over there killing the farmers say. They know where their groceries come from.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, when the Department of Social Development appeared before the Standing Committee on Social Policy in June, officials acknowledged the serious deficiencies that were identified in the child and youth advocate's report. We heard heartbreaking accounts of vulnerable young people being neglected, being turned away from services, and falling through the cracks of a system that was supposed to protect them. The department identified the need for immediate support for youth being turned away, reviews of individual cases, a dedicated youth well-being team, and better supports to help young people complete high school and pursue post-secondary education. The minister committed to removing barriers. Madam Speaker, four months have now passed since those committee meetings were held. What barriers has the minister removed?

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 and new critic, thank you. I look forward to many conversations. As I hope most folks in this House know by now, this is an area that is very close to my heart. The member opposite is talking about Youth Engagement and Young Adult Services, more or less. I think that's a big piece of what the member opposite is talking about. What we're doing now is going back and looking at that program. We're in conversations and contracts right now, working with a community partner so that if, for whatever reason, a young person is not eligible for Youth Engagement and Young Adult Services, they will be immediately referred to a third-party community partner. First, the partner will look at why that happened. Was a mistake made? Should the young person be part of the program? Is there an opportunity for education or training? Are financial supports available? It's about looking at the whole picture, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to answer another question about that.

Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. During those same committee meetings, we heard serious concerns that the Department of Social

Development was placing too much emphasis on procedures and not enough on outcomes for vulnerable children and youth. Again, the government announced the creation of a child and youth well-being team. Madam Speaker, creating another team or adding another layer of administration does not automatically mean better outcomes for the young people who depend on this department. New Brunswickers should know whether young people in care have safe and stable housing, whether they are graduating from high school, and whether they have access to the education, training, and support needed to succeed.
Madam Speaker, has the minister established specific targets for these outcomes, and will she commit today to publicly reporting on the department's progress in meeting them?

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, yes, and thank you for the opportunity to remind the public about what we want for all our kids. We want all our kids to graduate from high school or the equivalent. We want all our kids who are coming through the care system to pursue post-secondary education or something equivalent at the same rate as their peers. We do not want any young person going into homelessness from the care system. We want well-being and connection for all our kids, and we have committed to measuring those outcomes and sharing the results. We already have the education numbers on our dashboard.

Now we're looking at how we can improve. We're working with the child and youth advocate's office on the best way for us to share that. As the member opposite knows, an evaluation of the *Child and Youth Well-Being Act* is coming up. It is to be evaluated after its first five years, so we're now working through an actions-to-outcomes plan that will support that evaluation.

Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm hoping the minister can confirm whether she's referring to the child and youth well-being team she committed to. I'm hoping she can answer that and this next question as well.

Concerns raised before the Standing Committee on Social Policy went beyond gaps in services and administrative barriers. We heard troubling accounts of vulnerable children and youth being denied support and serious questions about whether the Department of Social Development was consistently meeting its obligations under provincial legislation. Madam Speaker, these laws exist for a reason. They are intended to protect children, to ensure their needs are met, and to hold the system responsible for their well-being. Four months have passed since these concerns were brought before the committee. Can the Minister of Social Development confirm whether her department is now fully complying with its obligations under child protection legislation?

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, right now there is not a member of the team at Social

Development who is not super focused on making sure we're doing all we can to support the well-being of the young people who come into our care. We have a child and youth team. We're bringing in a third party to look at young folks coming through Youth Engagement and Young Adult Services.

We have created a minister's advisory team, which maybe sounds like another layer of bureaucracy to go through, but it's not. It's a direct line to me, the minister, to my deputy minister, and to all the assistant deputy ministers. When we look at programs and policies, we ask: Are there any unintended consequences? We bring those conversations back to the minister's advisory council. Right now, its members have just gone through and looked at the actions-to-outcomes to see whether those outcomes are enough. Are they going to do the right things? What more do we need to do? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

CRIME RATE

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Madam Speaker, over the past year, the Crime Severity Index in New Brunswick rose while the national average declined. New Brunswick has a 90.4 CSI, while Canada's declined to 75. New Brunswick's CSI is 14 points higher than the national average. As for violent crime, New Brunswick sits at a whopping 108. The crime rate is 6 200 per 100 000 people, which is 11% higher than the national average.

In relation to urban areas, Saint John had the largest Crime Severity Index jump of any Canadian metro area, up by 20%. Moncton's went up by 11% and Fredericton's by 7%, while other Canadian cities, or most of them, had their numbers fall. Is the minister aware of this data, and what is he doing to clamp down on soaring crime here in New Brunswick?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, Minister of Public Safety; Minister responsible for la Francophonie, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am very aware of the numbers that the Critic for Public Safety mentioned. When I took office, I talked with the departmental officials. Crime has been increasing in New Brunswick for 10 years. No one has succeeded in lowering the numbers until now, because we are working with professionals on the ground. My critic knows that very well, because he was a minister himself.

When I took my position, I invited the former minister, now my critic, to come talk to me to try to see what programs we should maintain. We had discussions. Then, I went around the province, I visited police stations throughout New Brunswick, and I went on patrol with police officers to see the realities on the ground.

Then, I met with the 12 RSCs. The realities were not the same, as was mentioned, in cities compared to rural regions. We will make an announcement very soon because we have found gaps that need to be filled. A measure will be announced very soon to ensure that

workers are deployed to one of the three municipalities, and that could have a positive effect on the rest of the province. We won't stop there. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Madam Speaker, one way that governments and public safety officials gauge police response times, crime solving, and overall public service is called a cop-to-pop ratio. This metric helps us better understand the level of service to the public and the burden placed on police officers as they respond to calls. The average national cop-to-pop ratio is 1.8 officers per 1 000 people. Here in New Brunswick, it's 1.59 officers per 1 000 people.

We have the highest crime rate in the country and the second-lowest number of police officers in the country. Does this minister happen to think these two things may be related? Why isn't his government hiring more police officers to get at the crime issue here in New Brunswick?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, Minister of Public Safety; Minister responsible for la Francophonie, L): Absolutely, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much for the question. We are all aware of the situation. The Department of Public Safety is all about continuity. The previous government hired 81 additional RCMP members. We kept them. We did not change programs. We kept the programs that the previous government launched and we improved them.

All right, with respect to the things happening in different municipalities, there are different types of crimes. There are serious level 1 and level 2 crimes. These are serious crimes committed against people, violent crimes. There are also level 3 and level 4 crimes. These are not violent. So, we can use other resources to manage them and give RCMP officers and police officers in municipalities and throughout the province more room to manoeuvre and more time to, in fact, respond to the most serious crimes. That's what we're doing.

As we're saying, an announcement will be made very soon. Will there be more workers? Yes. There will be more workers. They will be the appropriate people to handle crimes according to their levels. Some of the most serious crimes are levels 1 and 2. Level 3 and 4 crimes must also be managed. That will enable police officers to do their jobs. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Well, the minister is correct. We did hire 81 new officers when we were in government. The government members created lobster police to

go after lobster fisheries. I don't know. I see violent crime, and I look at lobster fraud. Whatever. We know what their priorities are.

Madam Speaker, in the spring and summer of this year, Moncton saw a major spike in overdoses. In June alone, there were 720 overdose calls, with as many as 70 overdose calls in one day. In August, that number spiked again to 983 overdose calls, double the average of the previous year. Just two weeks ago, on October 19, in St. Stephen, there were nine overdose calls in one night. Madam Speaker, ambulances were backed up to the point where a police cruiser had to take one of the patients to the hospital. Firefighters aren't trained to administer Narcan. They're trained to put out fires. What is the minister doing to get after these illicit drugs and stop those who are pushing this deadly disease of—

Hon. Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, Minister of Public Safety; Minister responsible for la Francophonie, L): Absolutely, Madam Speaker. We understand this is not easy. It's not a subject to play politics with either. First of all, I want to say thank you to the people who responded quickly on the ground and helped with those overdose situations. It's sad, what happens every day. That was taken care of, and we appreciate the people who took care of it.

We are aware of what's going on. That's why I spoke to people in every place in the province. Announcements are coming to tackle some of that. It is very important. We need more people on the ground doing that work, and that's what we are going to do. We appreciate every good idea we can get. That's why we work with our partners. This is a four-partner approach. We need the federal government with the *Criminal Code,* provincial legislative help, boots on the ground, and municipalities. Municipalities need to have the budget to deal with that. Then, citizens have to continue to report. That is what…

My opponent brought up the crime index. This is very important. We are taking care of it. We have 14 actions that we've—

COST OF LIVING

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): New Brunswick families are facing an affordability crisis that continues to worsen under this deficit. Man. According to Statistics Canada, inflation in New Brunswick reached 5% in September, the highest level in 43 months and way above the national average. Gasoline prices have climbed above $2 per litre. Grocery prices remain 33% higher than in 2020, and housing costs continue to rise. Meanwhile, global pressures are contributing to inflation. This government has a responsibility to address the financial burden facing all New Brunswickers. What specific immediate measures will the Minister of Finance introduce to provide meaningful financial relief to families struggling with the rising costs of everyday necessities?

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

through you to the member opposite, thank you for highlighting that no one person experiences affordability the same way as their neighbour. Affordability looks different for everyone. It looks different if you're renting and are in need of a 3% rent cap. It looks different if you live in rural New Brunswick and drive a vehicle to get to your job or your appointments. You need a break at the pumps.

What we've done and what we are doing is looking at all the programs across the government that touch affordability and those affordability measures. How do they connect? Who are we missing? Are the programs doing what they are meant to do? Are we evaluating them? Is there something we need to do to boost them? Are folks accessing them the way they were meant to? This is important work. While we're doing that, we are still putting out a school food program that supports families across New Brunswick, even in hard-to-reach places, in getting universal breakfast. We're getting an affordable school lunch program out there as well, Madam Speaker. We can do two things at once.

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): Well, those are lovely talking points, but let me ask the question in a different way. The Minister of Finance knows that rising prices don't just hurt consumers. They can also increase the amount of sales tax collected by the province. New Brunswick's inflation rate has hit 5%, so everyone's paying a little something extra for fuel, for groceries, and for everyday living. However, the provincial government continues to face significant fiscal challenges, with growing expenditures and mounting deficits. New Brunswickers are being asked to stretch their household budgets so thin, while this government collects more and more taxes on goods and services that are getting so expensive. Will the Minister of Finance disclose how much additional HST revenue the province is collecting as a result of rising consumer prices and explain whether any of that revenue will be returned to New Brunswickers through targeted affordability measures?

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. The member opposite says we're using talking points. Changing the legislation to use E10 pricing and allow 17¢ per litre to come off gas is not a talking point. It's a real thing. Taking 10% off power bills is not a talking point. Check your bill. It's a real thing, and it costs money.

Now, the member opposite brought this up: Are we collecting revenue and not giving it back to residents? That would kind of denote that we're—what—in surplus. I think he's getting us mixed up with the previous government. That's what the members opposite did. They kept the money and didn't give it back in programs. We continue… We put in the rent cap, and we started a breakfast program. I could go on. There's more going on. We took the HST off multiunits to get housing built. We invested so that we could get boots on the ground and roofs over people's heads. These aren't talking points. These are real things.

They're not studies. That's what's happening right now. Don't get the two governments confused. We know what we're doing.

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): So, the answer, Madam Speaker, is no. New Brunswickers will be forced to pay more in spite of the fact that affordability is an increasing concern, and this government doesn't want to do anything about it. I definitely have my facts straight, so I don't need a lesson on previous governments and where this one's spending and the other one saved. It's affordability.

I'll get right to the question. This province is facing substantial deficits. We know that. It's also increasing borrowing requirements. Higher interest rates could also drive up the cost of servicing the provincial debt, leaving fewer dollars for essential services for all New Brunswickers. Madam Speaker, has the Minister of Finance assessed the financial impact of the potential interest rate increase and what this means for the province's borrowing costs? What contingency measures are in place to protect taxpayers from this additional debt-servicing expense?

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'm trying to follow the narrative here. Does the member think that we can eliminate the deficit by not spending more money to help with programs or that we can spend more money—imaginary money—on programs? It's either the deficit or help. We've chosen to put New Brunswickers first. That's why there's a deficit. However, we hear this back-and-forth narrative almost every day. We hear that our collaborative care clinics aren't working and that they're not real. However, then we hear somebody say: Where's mine? Where's mine? When's mine coming?

(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, if they're not real, why are you asking for them? Why are you asking for them? I don't understand. It's back and forth.

Do you want creativity? How about the member for Woodstock-Hartland talking this morning about SBITC as if we were taking credit for it when the member for Fredericton-Grand Lake voted against it and led the party to vote against our changes so we'd be put in a position to defend a program the members opposite had brought in? It's very hard to follow this group.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, I asked the Minister of Health how he planned to connect the more than 260 000 unattached New

Brunswickers to a doctor or a collaborative care practice. At the same time, he needs to work upstream. Every year, 2 000 New Brunswickers die from causes that could potentially be avoided, according to the New Brunswick Health Council, through either preventative health care or better screening and disease management. The number of people who fall ill with avoidable diseases is much greater. Among the top 10 leading causes of avoidable deaths are colorectal cancer, alcohol-specific disorders, breast cancer, and suicide. Adjusted for age differences, the Restigouche region has 42% more avoidable deaths than the Canadian average, yet we're not even keeping up with Prince Edward Island, with its focus on preventative health care. What is the Minister of Health's plan to reduce the rate of avoidable deaths and both preventable and treatable illnesses and diseases in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite: The worst-spent health care dollar is in the treatment of disease. Think about it. If we can prevent diseases, such as hypertension, heart disease, cancer, and many of the things he listed, then those will be better-spent health care dollars. That's why we are investing $30 million in collaborative care clinics, with 22 announced, 8 more to come, and many more to come in subsequent years. That's where we will practice preventative health care. I think the member opposite knows that we shouldn't invest excess amounts of money in the treatment of disease when, really, we can prevent disease, so I'm glad that he brought this up in the Legislature today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Madam Speaker, while there are many questions to ask about what the minister has done to reduce the number of avoidable deaths in New Brunswick, I will focus on the colorectal cancer file today.

We see a 250% increase in colorectal cancer cases among young people compared to previous generations. We know the risk factors include a diet high in red meat and deli meats and low in fibre, fruit, and vegetables, as well as moderate or excessive alcohol consumption. Prince Edward Island has taken immediate action, lowering the screening age for colorectal cancer to 45. Will the minister immediately do the same in New Brunswick?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, I continue to look at ways that we could improve prevention, as I said earlier. When you lower the screening age, whether it is with colon cancer or some of the other initiatives that we're looking at with respect to identifying lung cancer… We had to look at the cost and benefit of all that. How much endoscopy time do we have? How many gastroenterologists do we have? Whenever you trade off and you change screening ages, I'll accept that there's value in that. However, we have to have the resources to do that. Right now, many of our caregivers are looking after people who already have a disease, and they need to do

endoscopies on people who already have bowel cancer and other significant problems. We've done this before. We've had screening programs for bowel cancer. The member opposite is challenging us to change those thresholds. We feel challenged. We're looking at these. We're looking at a number of different initiatives that will change the thresholds for screening—

NURSING HOMES

Ms. Bockus (Saint Croix, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before we begin, Madam Speaker, I'm very pleased to hear that there may soon be a positive announcement in Elsipogtog about a new nursing home there. Congratulations to that community. Madam Speaker, in December 2024, the Department of Social Development's nursing home wait list included 1 088 New Brunswickers. The government of the day seems content to manage the decline. The goal should be to stop any growth of that wait list. The goal should be a marked reduction in the number of individuals waiting for a safe, secure, and appropriate place of care. Will the minister commit here and now to a new, identifiable target that actually compels the government to improve outcomes for some of our most vulnerable?

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, our seniors in this province deserve everything that we can give to them. They have built our communities. They've looked after our loved ones. They've raised their children. They've done all the right things, and they deserve to spend their final days with the utmost dignity and respect. That's why this government is making record investments in long-term care and nursing homes, and we're looking at doing this a little bit differently, Madam Speaker. We're also looking at our partners and community partners to see how we could do this differently. How could we expand Nursing Home Without Walls? How could we support families and caregivers a little more? How could we continue to offer those opportunities in communities for seniors to be able to stay in their communities? That's why you'll hear the announcements that are coming. New Maryland is an example. We just announced long-term care beds in New Maryland, Madam Speaker.

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

[*Translation*]

Question period has now expired.