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SENIORS

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, Horizon Health Network now predicts that 50% of its hospital beds could be filled by patients needing an alternate level of care.

[*Original*]

As of September 30, that number was already at 41%, representing enough patients to fill every inpatient bed at seven Horizon hospitals.

[*Translation*]

They are patients who no longer need intensive hospital care, but who remain in hospital because there are no suitable alternatives.

[*Original*]

Can the minister advise us of the government's plan to prevent ALC occupancy from reaching 50% of Horizon's hospital beds in the immediate future?

[*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 the question. Today, I rise in the Legislative Assembly to tell you that we are very aware, as a government, that some seniors are in hospitals now, and that isn't necessarily the right place for them. That's why we keep working every day with all partners in New Brunswick to find different solutions.

Earlier, for example, I met with representatives from Extra-Mural/Ambulance New Brunswick. We continue to work with all partners to find very concrete solutions.

I had the opportunity to visit the hospital here in Fredericton, for instance, and I saw with my own eyes that there are seniors there right now. We are really continuing to work. We also submitted an expression of interest to get new beds in the province to meet the need. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, the government's own long-term care strategy commits to adding 624 nursing home beds by 2030. Yet that same strategy acknowledges that, by the end of 2025, 1 076 New

Brunswickers were still waiting for a nursing home placement, with nearly half of them still in a hospital. Meanwhile, Horizon Health Network continues to experience significant hospital capacity pressures, with patients occupying acute care beds while awaiting appropriate long-term care placements. Can the Minister of Seniors confirm whether she feels that the plan's 624 additional beds will be sufficient to reduce the number of patients waiting in hospitals for nursing home placement?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister of Seniors; Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thanks again to the opposition member for the question. This allows me to add more things to my first answer.

In fact, the government continues to work extremely hard. There are also members of my team working throughout New Brunswick that I want to acknowledge.

We are working with the regional health authorities, Vitalité and Horizon, and the Department of Health to find solutions. There are also social workers participating in the process, and they are verifying the state of care provided to our seniors in hospitals.

One of the issues is ensuring that all available beds in the province are occupied. That's one action we have taken. Among the other actions, there is our work with New Brunswick nursing homes and special care homes to find strategies to see how we work together to, in fact, reduce the number of seniors in our hospitals who shouldn't be there.

[*Original*]

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, Madam Speaker, admittedly, I sent a letter to the Minister of Housing and the Minister of Seniors just this week. I was thrilled that they actually responded to me quite quickly, and they talked about the fact that they are considering options and would take my suggestions under advisement. That's good, but, meanwhile, New Brunswickers are waiting for hospital beds while patients who no longer require acute care remain in those beds because appropriate long-term care is not available.

[*Translation*]

In the news last week, Horizon Health Network indicated that, according to projections, long-term care patients could occupy half of these hospital beds. So waiting until 2030 isn't a solution.

[*Original*]

Can the Premier speak about the government's plan and whether it includes a funded, short-term plan to move patients awaiting nursing home placements out of hospitals and

into appropriate long-term care facilities within the next 12 months? Or can she speak about the alternatives she has planned?

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services; L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Leader of the Official Opposition for her question. We heard the Minister of Seniors talk about the important work she's been doing over the past two years. I applaud her. She has been to every corner of this province in the development of her long-term care plan.

We are working with partners. We are making the investments necessary to tackle this issue. I know the Finance Critic likes to stand up and come up with punchlines about finances. However, after six years of former government members not doing what was needed to take care of our seniors, we are making the necessary investments in health care and long-term care. We have a plan for 624 new beds. I don't know how many beds the former government members created. We have a plan to make sure that seniors have access to the care they need, whether it's in a hospital, in a long-term care facility, or at home with home care support. We are delivering for New Brunswickers, Madam Speaker.

EMERGENCY MEASURES

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Canada's first national security strategy in 20 years has just been released. In it, the Prime Minister lays out a very stark reality. He states:

The world is increasingly defined by contested borders, authoritarian aggression, and acute global threats. The long-held belief that the combination of our geography, interconnectedness, and a rules-based international order could substitute for Canadian sovereign capacity to protect ourselves is no longer tenable.

I will continue.

Threats once thought distant are now immediate and proximate. The international rules-based order is under threat. The open global trading system is deeply challenged. What were once strengths—our strong connections and deep integration with other countries—have become vulnerabilities.

My question is for the Minister of Public Safety. Is he aware of the national security strategy, and can he tell us what part New Brunswick will play?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, Minister of Public Safety; Minister responsible for la Francophonie, L): Thank you very much for asking an extremely important question.

Since we took office, a presidential election was held in the United States, and we know what the outcome was. I have visited the western parts of our province that directly border Maine myself. We have had conversations. I have met with national authorities to talk about issues that I can't divulge here. The member is a former minister, so he understands exactly what I mean.

I have talked to my counterparts across the country. Every time there is a federal-provincial-territorial meeting, we have these conversations. Currently, New Brunswick is doing well. I can simply tell you that we haven't finished our work. We will make investments.

If there's one thing that we learned yesterday in Moncton, it's that we have been working with our partners. We will continue to do so. There are 25 new agents to ensure public safety in Moncton. We are doing the work, and we will continue to do so, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much.

[*Original*]

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Madam Speaker, it's not about what we're doing well today. This is about planning for what could come next. This statement from our federal government is not unique. As a matter of fact, in the past few months, over 30 countries have warned their citizens to prepare for worst-case scenarios. While it's normal for most nations to advise their citizens to be readily prepared in the event of extreme weather, these recent warnings have more teeth. Considering the ongoing war in Ukraine, the potential restart of operations in Iran, and the disruption of global oil supply, just to name a few, governments around the world are increasingly preparing their citizens.

New Brunswick is no longer an island unto itself. What happens across the globe directly affects us here, and I encourage anyone to look no further than the gas prices we pay here at home. Considering the global threats that Canadians, including New Brunswickers, are facing, what is this minister doing to ensure that our citizens are prepared for potential disruptions?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, Minister of Public Safety; Minister responsible for la Francophonie, L): Thank you again for the question, which is very important. If the member opposite had looked at what was broadcast in the media yesterday, he would have seen that the Premier said that New Brunswick should rank first with respect to defence.

The member also mentioned that New Brunswick is not an isolated island. He is absolutely right. That is why we are working with our counterparts across the country. An overall strategy is essential.

New Brunswick is at the table. The Premier mentioned that. The Minister responsible for Military Affairs mentioned it. Everyone is aware that we must protect ourselves. We are getting the job done for New Brunswickers. The important thing is to work with our partners across the country. We have experts looking into the issue. We are participating in the work at every opportunity. We are ensuring that New Brunswickers are protected.

New Brunswick is in a significant, strategic location. We are right next to the ocean. We are aware of that. Major investments in the military file, according to the Prime Minister, will continue in New Brunswick, not just with respect to money, but also with respect to human resources. So, New Brunswick will do its job. We have exceptional teams on the ground. We will support them. We will continue to work with our partners.

[*Original*]

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): I'd like to remind the minister that he's not in charge of the Canadian military. I'm talking about New Brunswick's safety. In the past two days, there were significant cyberattacks across Europe that affected approximately 850 grocery stores at a cost of over €50 million in food spoilage. Back in late August, a similar style of cyberattack affected at least six U.S. military bases on U.S. soil. While none of these incidents were catastrophic, they certainly highlight the importance. Just last year, Nova Scotia had a ransomware attack that affected over 340 000 customers. Let me tell you what the Nova Scotia Power CEO said just a year ago. He said:

This incident was an unprecedented, sophisticated and targeted attack… Based on expert assessments and intelligence, there is a high degree of confidence that the activity was closely associated with a Russian-based threat

That was in Nova Scotia. If foreign actors are attacking our neighbouring province, it would be foolish and unwise to think that we are immune. Are these discussions happening provincially within the Department of Public Safety, and is this minister taking it seriously to get New Brunswickers prepared for—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston—Vallée-des-Rivières, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs; Minister responsible for Immigration; Minister responsible for Military Affairs; Minister responsible for the Research and Productivity Council, L): Minister responsible for Military Affairs; Minister responsible for the Research and Productivity Council, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank my colleague opposite for rising and asking a question. You know, Madam Speaker, for almost two years now, we have worked very actively to build bridges. Even though there are often challenges close by, we are building bridges around the world.

In fact, Madam Speaker, we only have to look right next to us here in Fredericton, because a cybersecurity centre has been established at the University of New Brunswick. That shows just how important we consider an adequate defence.

Look at the defence strategy we announced yesterday. The announcement was extraordinary. We have the opportunity in New Brunswick to help the world, and the world can help us, too. We have what the world needs here in the province. Everything starts with our human resources and our post-secondary education capacity. You know, Madam Speaker, we have wonderful opportunities before us. We will continue to build, to look to the future, and to take care of our people.

[*Original*]

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last week, I informed this House that AV Nackawic had put 105 000 acres of land up for sale. According to Forest NB, 1 in every 17 working New Brunswickers is directly or indirectly employed in the forestry sector. There are 24 000 people employed in the forestry sector. There are 900 plus companies that operate directly in the forestry industry. My question to the Premier is this: What is the government's plan to protect New Brunswick forestry industry workers, specifically those in Carleton-York, to ensure continued access to this timber resource if the province is not the successful bidder on this property? What will happen to our forestry industry workers if this ends up in the hands of a buyer whose interests don't align with the long-term future of New Brunswick's forestry industry? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I thank the member opposite for his question and for his defence of what I would suggest is clearly the most significant sector that we have in the economy. Forestry still drives our economy in that regard. A couple of questions that were mentioned there are that… The member opposite is aware that we have submitted a bid, an offer, for that land. We need to make sure that private land, which is the fourth-largest freehold in the province, with 44 000 ha, is associated with that wood basket. We want to make sure that there's a forestry future in Nackawic. That land needs to be attached in that regard. I cannot speak any more on the bid itself. We are under an NDA, and the bid itself has gone in. The member opposite is also aware that we've engaged AFRY to ensure that we can identify all possibilities to ensure that Nackawic has a forestry future in the facility where the AV—

Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last week, Premier Holt told CTV News that the owners of the mill should maintain a warm idle, suggesting that failing to do so could trigger an environmental impact assessment (EIA), potentially costing the company additional money. However, the union president has indicated that the company made it clear from the beginning that it had no intention of maintaining a warm idle. This is

my question to the Premier: Can the Premier clarify exactly what concerns she has regarding the potential EIA, what her government intends to do if one is triggered, and how she believes this could affect the long-term viability of the mill and any potential efforts to open it again? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have just a couple of points. One is that we are not the owners of that asset. That's one point. However, we've made it very clear that we would have more optionality if there were a warm idle over the course of the winter. We've also suggested to the company that, if it doesn't do that and is in a cold idle, that could very well trigger an EIA, which would be abundantly more expensive. Since that time, officials at DNR have heard mixed messages, not clear messages, from the management at AV Nackawic. Management has not made a final decision as such.

In the meantime, AFRY group will do its analysis and work in terms of what the art of the possible is with that wood basket and that facility. The honourable member is fighting for his constituents. He's doing a great job in that regard. I want him to know that the members on this side of the House and the folks at DNR want to work with him and with the people of Nackawic.

Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The AV Nackawic mill has shut down, leaving hundreds of men and women out of work. Over 105 000 acres of forest land are on the chopping block and are expected to be sold to the highest bidder in December. If the mill is not maintained in a warm idle state, an environmental impact assessment could be triggered, potentially creating another significant hurdle to any effort to reopen the facility. Madam Speaker, people are losing faith. This is my question to the Premier: What have the Premier and her government done to ensure that this mill could continue to run and keep New Brunswickers employed? Does the Premier believe she has done everything in her power to keep this mill operating? Does she have any regrets about the outcome of her government's decisions? How does she feel about the hundreds of men and women who have lost their employment on her watch? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The member opposite is aware that I toured that facility back in May 2025. At that time, it was abundantly clear that there was an immense amount of deferred maintenance at that facility, that there was a lack of investment, and that the mill was only being managed to exhaustion. That's not the workers' fault. The workers did the very best they could do with the limited capital that the parent company actually allocated. We need to do better. We need to make sure that we transition that facility and that location for a forestry future. That's why we've engaged AFRY group to lean in and to see what the art of the possible is with the infrastructure at AV Nackawic and in terms of other opportunities that can get under way with respect to Licence 8 and that private woodlot area. That is the wood basket itself. What species can actually unlock wealth? We

have to be able to solve the issue of 600 000 cubic metres of hardwood. We're not going to give up on working on a solution.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. With every new boondoggle in health care, New Brunswickers are left wondering who is in charge. First, let's consider the nursing situation in Campbellton. The head of Vitalité moved nurses from a primary care clinic to emergency care, keeping the ER open. The Health Minister says he told the head of Vitalité not to do that and to move the nurses back. The Premier told the head of Vitalité that they had to get more creative about staffing the ER, move the clinic nurses back, and not employ travel nurses. Then, the Premier went a step further, replacing the Chair and board members of Vitalité. Meanwhile, like everyone else, the people of Restigouche just want health care, emergency care, and primary care. They wonder who's in charge. Would the minister care to rise and tell us who is the boss when it comes to health care? It clearly isn't him.

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services; L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Key components of that question are primary care and emergency room care. People from Campbellton and the Restigouche region need and deserve both.

The solution that was put together by Vitalité was to steal from Peter to pay Paul. What we've asked it to do is to go back to the drawing board and look at creative solutions to ensure that both the primary care clinic and the emergency room can stay open. That's what we are focusing on, Madam Speaker. We have made record investments in health care. We've opened 22 collaborative care clinics across the province. We have a record number of net new doctors—179—and 917 net new nurses, and we will continue to work with the regions to ensure they have the health care workforces they deserve. We will ensure that people get access to care in their communities. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Creativity—you don't know what that means, exactly, because I didn't hear it in your answer. You know, we have 50 000 more people on the wait list, so we need to get creative. I think that the people in Restigouche would really like to see some action. Last week, we learned that the Premier made almost no time for one-on-one meetings with the Finance Minister. Apparently, he's not the only one. When we looked through her calendar from January 1, 2025, to May 12, 2026, we found only two one-on-one meetings with the Health Minister. Both were in December 2025, and the last was on December 9, for a review of his mandate letter. From the look of things, his mandate is to do whatever the Premier and the unions tell him to do.

Have you seen the latest in the nurse saga in Campbellton? The head of the Nurses' Union is attacking the management of Vitalité. Timing is everything, Madam Speaker, and this is

coming while the Premier is at odds with Vitalité over nurses. New Brunswickers might think that this looks like the head of the Nurses' Union—

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services; L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, we are making the investments necessary to ensure that all New Brunswickers get access to the care they need close to home. The Campbellton Regional Hospital in the Restigouche area is no different. I know that the two MLAs from the area have met with local authorities. They will continue to do so to ensure that we come up with a solution that meets the needs of both primary care and the emergency room. Unlike the former government, we don't want to see emergency rooms close across this province.

Forgive me for being reluctant when we talk about travel nurses. We know what happened with travel nurses under the former government. They want to bring in a handful now. We know that, under the former government, travel nurse costs ballooned to hundreds of millions of dollars in expenses for the taxpayers of New Brunswick. So, yes, we will work with local authorities. We will work with Vitalité and come up with a solution that ensures that both primary care clinics and emergency rooms stay open.

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Well, Madam Speaker, it's not just Restigouche. You know, the Stella-Maris-de-Kent Hospital in Bouctouche is still waiting for its emergency room to open at night. People have been asking for that, and I think they're getting tired of waiting.

Some New Brunswickers are asking whether the unions are running health care for the Premier or the Premier is running health care for the unions. The Premier gave both unions everything they asked for and more when she signed their latest contracts. Of her $211-million generational increase in health care spending, $170 million went to doctors as part of the $270-million deal she signed with them. The Holt government still has not told New Brunswickers how much the nurses' contract will cost. How many hundreds of millions might that be? I bet the Premier knows how much, and I bet the head of the Nurses' Union knows how much. But I would make one further bet: The Health Minister has no idea. On behalf of New Brunswickers, I'll ask him this one more time: In New Brunswick health care, who's the boss?

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services; L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very happy to speak again about the issue of health care in our province. That was our number one priority in the last election campaign. It was the number one priority for New Brunswickers, and it continues to be. That's why we've invested record amounts in health care. We want to deliver for New Brunswickers and ensure that they have access to care close to home, whether they're in Restigouche, Caraquet, or Woodstock. We are continuing to implement our provincial health plan. At the one-year anniversary, 42% of the 33 initiatives have been completed. We've seen a record number of net new doctors

recruited—179. There are 917 net new nurses, and 22 of our 30 collaborative care clinics are already open. We will finish that goal one year early, and we will continue to build on it to ensure that everyone has primary care and access to health care close to home.

[*Translation*]

SENIORS

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, it is regrettable that seniors and patients are deprived of their dignity because successive governments refuse to act with urgency.

The report by the Child, Youth and Senior Advocate entitled *What We All Want,* published over 30 months ago, called for an action plan to reduce the number of alternate level of care patients that is clear and costed, with specific targets every six months, to be presented to the Legislative Assembly. His follow-up report revealed that nothing had been done and that the government's actions did not reflect the urgency or scale of the problem.

The Holt government is going around in circles, while seniors' health and quality of life are deteriorating in hospitals. Can the Minister of Seniors tell us what the government's plan is?

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 today. I think I must point out right away, from the beginning, that we have the safety and wellness of all our New Brunswick seniors very much at heart. I have heard that this was not always the case with previous governments.

In fact, I took my position as Minister responsible for Seniors. Then, the Premier put her trust in me by appointing me Minister of Seniors. What that means is that, from the day I was appointed, we have been working closely with all partners. You're talking about the report that was released about Alice's unfortunate fate. Since then, we have been working very, very hard. We presented a plan last March 26. The initiatives that have been put in place are incredible. There are also strategies that have been proposed through this plan. We have also established an advisory committee to the minister to positively support our initiatives for seniors. Thank you very much.

[*Original*]

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, I've been asking this question for over a year, but, unfortunately, the situation keeps getting worse, not better. Horizon recently revealed that alternate level of care patients, or people who are forced to live in hospital, could occupy 55% of their acute care hospital beds in the next two to three years.

I remember that, when I was first elected, the percentage of these patients was about 30%, and it was a crisis then. The crisis of overcrowding in our hospitals is actually revealing the

crisis in long-term care. According to the seniors advocate's report, *What We All Want,* published over 30 months ago, a "clear, costed action plan, establishing hard targets each six months for reductions in the number of patients in Alternate Levels of Care, should be presented to the Legislative Assembly". In his follow-up report, he identified that no action was taken. I hear the minister saying that action is being taken, but I have not seen this plan presented to the Legislative Assembly. Will the minister tell us why she won't complete this recommendation?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister of Seniors; Minister responsible for Women and Gender Equity, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thanks again to the opposition member for the question. We know precisely all the numbers and all the data regarding what's happening in our hospitals, where, of course, there are a number of seniors who don't necessarily want to be there. We're continuing to implement our initiatives.

The other thing I want to point out is that our senior population in New Brunswick is rising. Our government is trying to do everything possible with respect to the current situation. We are working very, very hard. I have meetings to work very closely with all the members of my team to fix the situation.

We are working with the Horizon Health Network, Vitalité Health Network, and the Minister of Health. With respect to the plan, yes, in fact, we have concrete initiatives to reduce the number of seniors currently in hospitals. We're also working very closely with social workers, for example. We're also working with families to provide them with options, including not necessarily opting for a nursing home that is close to the hospital, but one that is a little farther away…

[*Original*]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Oliver (Kings Centre, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Holt Liberal platform said that all New Brunswickers deserve equal access to critical digital infrastructure. On October 1, 2024, the Liberals committed "to improving cell phone coverage and high-speed internet in the province to ensure access to digital healthcare, education, and economic development opportunities". That is a quote from the Premier. She also said:

It's unacceptable that in 2024, some regions of New Brunswick can't count on quality, reliable cell phone service

The Premier also said that her team would prioritize working with all available partners to get New Brunswickers the access to cell and internet coverage they deserve.

I'm quoting again:

A Holt government will take advantage of federal programs to ensure

—high-speed access and—

work with experts and industry to put a plan in place to ensure wireless cell coverage across the province to reduce public safety risks, which may include building and or enhancing telecom towers.

Premier, it's now two years later, and we are waiting for these improvements. Tell us your plan and why it has not yet been completed.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. LePage (Restigouche West, Minister of Environment and Climate Change; Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the member opposite for the question.

[*Original*]

I'm well aware of the cell coverage problems. I travel all over the province, and there is awful cell coverage just from here to home. We are aware. That's why we've already implemented 10 new cell towers in this province that will be online early next year. We are doing our part, and we are working very diligently with all the service providers that need to be added to those towers. We can build the towers, but if the proponents are not there to put their service on those towers, that is where the dilemma is. That is where the negotiation is starting. Our plan is to put up more towers if we have a provider to put on them. Thank you.

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