

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions



December 17, 2019

### CONTENTS

#### HEALTH CARE

Mr. D. Landry

Hon. Mr. Flemming

#### HOSPITALS

Mr. D. Landry

Hon. Mr. Flemming

#### PHYSICIANS

Mr. D. Landry

Hon. Mr. Flemming

#### NURSES

Mr. D'Amours

Hon. Mr. Holder

Mr. D'Amours

Hon. Mr. Holder

Mr. D'Amours

Hon. Mr. Holder

#### TRANSFER PAYMENTS

Mr. Melanson

Hon. Mr. Higgs

Mr. Melanson

Hon. Mr. Higgs

Mr. Melanson

Hon. Mr. Higgs

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

### COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Coon

Hon. Mr. Higgs

Mr. Coon

Hon. Mr. Higgs

### TAXATION

Mr. Austin

Hon. Mr. Carr

Mr. Austin

Hon. Mr. Carr

### COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. LePage

Hon. Mr. Higgs

Mr. LePage

Hon. Mr. Higgs

### TOURISM

Mr. J. LeBlanc

Hon. Mr. Gauvin

## Oral Questions

[Original]

### HEALTH CARE

**Mr. D. Landry** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, we can see that the Premier is speaking in the media about his plan for the coming year. One thing that caught us a bit off guard is that he is now promising what is being referred to as major, major reform in health care. This comes as a bit of a surprise to us, since there was no mention of major reform in the speech from the throne, which talks about the government's priorities for the coming year. There is reference in the throne speech to some things that we could not classify as reform or major reform. Can the Premier please enlighten the House in terms of what major reforms to health care he is planning?

**Hon. Mr. Flemming** (Rothesay, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have met with many, many stakeholders, and one thing that is abundantly clear and that everyone is in agreement with is that the status quo is not acceptable and the status quo is failing. We have had 21 service interruptions in this province in the past 12 months. The system is strained.

We are working with the health authorities to bring forth some changes to our health care system that are based upon three fundamental elements. The first one is sustainability: Our health system must be there for the future. The second is accessibility: The people of New Brunswick must be able to access health care on a timely basis. The third is quality: We must have and maintain the level of quality that we have in our health care today. With that, the health authorities have been directed to come forth in a manner because the status quo is, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, fatal.

### HOSPITALS

**Mr. D. Landry** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Often, when there is talk about major health reforms, people turn their attention to what the plans are for hospitals outside of our three major cities. With the exception of Bathurst, the recent capital budget sees most of the investment in the coming year being made in hospitals in our three major cities. I am sure that those projects have merit on their own, but people are nervous about what is going to happen in places such as St. Stephen, Sackville, Caraquet, and Saint-Quentin. The minister has promised not to close hospitals, but is it possible that these planned reforms could see a repurposing of hospitals in places other than Fredericton, Moncton, and Saint John?

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

**Hon. Mr. Flemming** (Rothesay, Minister of Health, PC): Again, thank you for the question. As the honourable Leader of the Opposition said, I have said in the past that there would be no closures of rural hospitals, and I reiterate that today. There is not going to be a closure. The buildings are there. There is a need. We own them. We paid for them, and they provide a service to the community. So let's be clear—no one is talking about taking a D9 dozer or a wrecking ball to a hospital and turning it into a vacant lot.

What we are going to do is meet the needs of that community so that in areas of primary health care, in areas of mental health, and in areas of many, many things, the community can achieve the highest and best use and service of our health care department toward the people in that community. It is serving the people and their needs, Mr. Speaker. That is what we are going to do.

[*Translation*]

## PHYSICIANS

**Mr. D. Landry** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to hear that there will be no closures of rural hospitals. At least that is good.

The elimination of billing numbers, although praised in certain regions, raised legitimate concerns about physician recruitment in rural New Brunswick. As we know, you cannot really have functional hospitals without physicians. Without them, it is difficult to keep your hospitals open.

By eliminating billing numbers, the province was hoping to have a higher-level system in place now. Part of the plan was to attract physicians to rural areas with financial incentives instead of billing numbers. Can the minister inform the House of the concrete measures taken to attract physicians to rural areas and rural hospitals in the province?

[*Original*]

**Hon. Mr. Flemming** (Rothesay, Minister of Health, PC): Most certainly I can, Mr. Speaker. First of all, with respect to billing numbers, they were an unnecessary level of bureaucracy that had no effect whatsoever on recruitment. For a physician without access to hospital privileges or the ability to order tests, things of that nature, a billing number, in and of itself, was of no value. It is the ability of a physician to interact with the health care system and have hospital privileges and test privileges that makes the difference.

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

We are entering into negotiations with the Medical Society early in the year, and financial incentives for rural physicians are certainly on our list. The incentives are there. This government supports them. They are necessary, and we will do it.

So we are getting rid of billing numbers, which do not accomplish anything, and we will bring in rural assessments and rural incentives that will give the rural people of New Brunswick the kind of primary health care that they need. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

### NURSES

**Mr. D'Amours** (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): We have all heard about our nursing graduates who leave the province because of the lack of serious intent on the part of the government, which is not offering them full-time jobs. Now, nurses from abroad are choosing to leave our province because the system does not allow them to perfect their skills here. We even go abroad to convince them to come work in New Brunswick. Where is this government's strategy? Clearly, the government has done half the job again. When will the Premier make sure his ministers are taking this issue seriously?

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important reality. We hear both of our ministers, the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour and the Minister of Health, announcing with great fanfare plans to save the day and ensure we have the workforce needed for our health care. They are here before us today. The reality is that we are losing potential candidates. When will our ministers and this government take the necessary action to ensure we have an effective workforce here, in New Brunswick?

[*Original*]

**Hon. Mr. Holder** (Portland-Simonds, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the member opposite that we are taking this extremely seriously. In fact, we have a Nursing Resource Strategy in place that is not just a government strategy. It is about the two government departments, the RHAs, the universities, the colleges, the nursing association, and the Nurses' Union all rowing in the same direction. Quite frankly, that had not been happening for years, and that is what led to the crisis that we are in. We now have everybody rowing in the same direction. Nobody is pointing the finger at one another, and we are getting results, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. D'Amours** (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, last July, the government announced with great fanfare this new strategy to address the

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

shortage of nursing professionals. According to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, this strategy was going to solve everything.

One has to wonder whether these two ministers were at the announcement only for the photo op. Where were they when it was time to ensure that the strategy would make it possible to find solutions to the problem of prior learning recognition? Where were they when it was time to ensure that the strategy would make it possible to find solutions to the problem of prior learning recognition?

In the end, I do believe these two ministers were only there for the photo op. They have done half the job again and have done nothing to solve the workforce problem. Here is my question: When will they take action?

[*Original*]

**Hon. Mr. Holder** (Portland-Simonds, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, PC): Mr. Speaker, a Liberal getting up and talking about photo ops, about just being there for the photo op, is as rich as a Boston cream doughnut.

Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you, we have a strategy in place with everybody rowing in the same direction. He said “action”. In fact, even before we released the strategy, we announced a bridging program for LPNs to RNs at UNBSJ. I made it very clear the day that we announced that, which, by the way, the member opposite was ridiculing the other day... The day that we announced that, I said that, if we had the uptake that we needed, we would expand it and turn it into a 10-year agreement, and we would work with the Université de Moncton to do the same there. There are going to be 50 nurses coming, each and every year, into the system through an LPN-to-RN bridging program in a two-year time frame rather than in a four-year time frame in a degree program. If that is not action, I do not know what is.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. D'Amours** (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, 13 months to get 35 hours of training, and 20 months to become registered, while, in Quebec, it is 75 days of paid training. In the meantime, other foreign professionals are still being told: Come to New Brunswick, we will make sure it costs you a lot, and you will not be able to work in your field, and then we will offer you and your family a one-way ticket to Quebec, a province where the government makes sure health professionals can actually get to work quickly.

Mr. Speaker, here is the reality: This government only wants to look like it is doing something. The government recruits people abroad and then sends them to a neighbouring province. When will this government and this Premier do their job?



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Holder** (Portland-Simonds, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, PC): You know, Mr. Speaker, we sit here, and the member opposite can grandstand all he wants. But the reality is, that is the bunch that, for four years, was putting \$8.7 million out the door each and every year with absolutely no results. A year in, with a strategy in place where we have a bridging program at two separate universities, we have a recruitment strategy going on both domestically and internationally. We are working to bring international students here to New Brunswick and internationally trained nurses here to New Brunswick as well.

For four years... The Auditor General clearly stated that from 2013 to 2014 is when we stopped getting results. What did they ask? Absolutely nothing. For years, they shovelled \$8.7 million out the door. If they think that is okay, then that is on them, but on this side of the House, unlike the Kevin Vickers crew, we are about getting results.

[Translation]

### TRANSFER PAYMENTS

**Mr. Melanson** (Dieppe, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker, this morning, we got some good news from the federal government. The Minister of Finance announced that New Brunswick's transfer payments will be increasing by \$219 million for the next fiscal year. That is probably why the present Premier of New Brunswick is cozying up to the Prime Minister. I think it is a good thing, to work with the federal government and the Prime Minister of Canada. New Brunswickers and New Brunswick need to continuously partner with Ottawa. It helps New Brunswickers to move forward.

The question today is to the Premier. The extra \$219 million that we will be receiving—is this going to be used to help New Brunswickers by creating more affordable housing, helping paramedics, and helping nursing home workers? Or is he going to use this money to please the people of Wall Street and Bay Street?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, one thing you can be sure of is that the money we receive will be used for something that you can actually measure and people can feel. We will not just say: Oh, we have invested another \$100 million, and we do not know where it went. Mr. Speaker, we have talked in this House about the issues in home care, we have talked about the issues in

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

senior care, and we have talked about the fact that we have waiting lists and people who cannot get into the hospitals. We are moving in a direction that will require more money down the road. I am pleased that the numbers are up a bit. We are working to utilize that.

But we also talked about other things with the Prime Minister that relate to flexibility in money currently being spent. That was like the \$75-million, 10-year deal for items that could be, let's say, less important than some of the huge health care items that we are dealing with. We talked about flexibility in infrastructure spending for things we actually need to build—a novel concept that was totally misunderstood on the other side of the House. Any money that comes into New Brunswick is well appreciated. We also talked about the aging demographic that is leading the country. Our expenses are going up in a dramatic way, and a wave is coming to New Brunswick. This money will help quell the wave.

**Mr. Melanson** (Dieppe, L): The Premier has to explain himself when he says that this extra money will be used down the road. He has to define “down the road” and what that really means. There is \$219 million of extra money coming from Ottawa, of which \$32 million is for health and social programs. The Premier needs to come clean and tell us this: Are these dollars that are coming from Ottawa going to be used as they are supposed to be used, which is to help New Brunswickers have equal footing in the quality of services that they get in New Brunswick compared to all other provinces? “Down the road” means what? When Wall Street is happy with your fiscal plan? Or when New Brunswickers will be able to get the appropriate level of service in New Brunswick as they are meant to with these dollars, for paramedics, for nursing home workers, for the aging population, and for all of the above?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I can understand why the member opposite brings up “down the road”. The only path they had down the road was straight over the cliff. There was not any plan there.

When we talk about the health transfers, there is \$25 million in this on a \$3-billion health budget—\$25 million. Not exactly a windfall. We are looking at major expenses in our health category, but we have to find where we can get the results. When we talk about having flexibility, it is about being able to use the money in the place with the greatest importance.

Unlike the members across the hall, we actually believe that there is an opportunity here to put a priority on what is most important. We recognize, as I mentioned previously, the wave coming through our province. We recognize the need for that. This is why we made changes to the assessment process—to expedite that. This is why we have greater coordination between Social Development and Health, because we must, Mr. Speaker. Talking about it and throwing money at it is not the solution. Fixing it is the solution, and that is our target. That is our goal, and we will achieve it.



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Melanson** (Dieppe, L): Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. My questions were respectful and quite clear. I am asking the Premier to also be clear in his answers. He does not have to try to attack anyone.

The question is about the fact that, effective April 1, New Brunswick will receive \$219 million more in transfer payments from the federal government. Of this \$219 million, \$32 million is for health and social programs.

Can the Premier tell us today whether this money will be used for the intended purpose? The goal is to provide New Brunswickers with services of comparable quality to those provided in other provinces. The goal is not to please Wall Street and Bay Street bankers. The goal is not to postpone the investments that are needed today either, like the government is doing with the housing plan.

[*Original*]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think it all comes down to what is the priority and what is important. We happen to think that health care is of primary importance. We happen to think that education is of primary importance. We happen to think that dealing with the mental crisis, dealing with the health issues in our society, and dealing with the drug problems are of major, major importance. We happen to believe that we have money in the system that will allow us to focus on priorities and get real results. I know that the member opposite would say: Well, let's announce another project; maybe we should build two courthouses because we could have two of those.

Mr. Speaker, we take a different view because we still believe that using taxpayer dollars to fund the economy is not a sustainable future. It does not matter whether we are up a little bit in our transfer payments. It does not matter. It does not mean that we are going to go out, throw it at the wall, and pretend that there is an economy that is brewing. Mr. Speaker, there is an economy that is brewing, and it is based on a stabilized future so that private industry can invest right here in New Brunswick.

## COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Care workers in our nursing homes are not actually part of our public service, so their collective bargaining is governed by the *Industrial Relations Act*. Yet the Premier, for some reason, is trying to do an end run around that law by implanting changes to the rules that guide collective bargaining into an unrelated law—the bill before the House, the purpose of which is to define essential

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

services in nursing homes. I do not see him trying to do an end run around the *Public Service Labour Relations Act* to, say, force New Brunswick Liquor employees to have their wages compared to those of minimum wage workers who sell alcohol in convenience stores. That is not happening.

My question to the Premier is this: Will he sever the bill before the House to remove the offending provisions that would change the basis for collective bargaining in this province for nursing home workers and keep the bill to its primary purpose to define essential services in nursing homes so that we can get that bill passed properly in this House and ensure that nursing homes and residents are secure in knowing that, in the new year, they will not be risking...

**Mr. Speaker** (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Member.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question. No, the fact is that Bill 17 in its current form is the only form that actually deals with the situation. I cannot consider severing it at all, Mr. Speaker. Let's face this. Eight municipalities around the province voted and said: We must deal with an unfettered binding arbitration. They said: We cannot manage our resources in our communities. The member, the leader of the Green Party, would stand up, ignore what the municipalities are saying, and say: Oh, but you can do it in government; you can do it in this fashion.

I do not believe that the taxpayers believe it is unreasonable to say this: You know, we should look at comparable salaries in the province; we should look at private sector and public sector; we should look at the total compensation package; we should be fair with the taxpayers in our province who are paying the bills. I do not believe that the people of this province would expect their tax dollars to be managed in any other way but to be prudent with them. Thank you.

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, New Brunswick is not in a closed market for the care workers needed to ensure that we properly care for people in nursing homes. All provinces are competing to overcome shortages. We must, at a minimum, be competitive with the other Maritime Provinces in wages and working conditions.

Interestingly enough, the doctors in Nova Scotia recently signed a new four-year contract with a government that will give them an 8% pay increase over the next four years. To stay competitive, the Premier will likely be looking to match that pay increase for New Brunswick doctors as they are in negotiations today. That is considerably more than the Premier's final offer to the nursing home workers. Why is the Premier insistent on imposing austerity on the working women and men in nursing homes? Is it because those women and men are working class, or is he just phobic about labour unions?

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, this is just for clarification. I know it does not matter much to the Leader of the Green Party, but comparators are very important. So let's look at the doctor situation in Nova Scotia. They are the lowest-paid doctors in the country. That is why they made that step change. They are the lowest-paid doctors in the country. But do you know what happened in Quebec about a month or two months ago? They reduced their salaries by 10% because they were the highest-paid doctors in the country, or very nearly so. I think Alberta might be higher. That is the reason these things are done. They are done not in isolation. It was a comparison with other jurisdictions and where they fit. It is a novel concept.

That is exactly what this concept is, Mr. Speaker—exactly. It is looking at the comparators and saying: What is right for New Brunswick? What are the comparators around our region? How do we land at the right number and be fair to workers and fair to taxpayers? That is what this is all about, being fair. I know that it is convenient to say just half of a story or throw out half of a truth, but the idea here is to put all the facts on the table. Let's look at all the relevant information, and let's make a decision based on the facts. That is exactly what this bill does, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

## TAXATION

**Mr. Austin** (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Leader, PA): Mr. Speaker, with the previous Liberal government's insatiable appetite for higher taxes and frivolous spending and borrowing, we are now placed in the undesirable position of trying to right a sinking ship. As part of our efforts to push government to balance the books without deep cuts to spending, the People's Alliance committed to no new taxes. Another party that pledged no new taxes was the Conservative government. My question is for the Minister of Environment and Local Government. How is Bill 2, which indeed raises taxes for rural residents outside the city of Saint John to pay for facilities in Saint John, not considered to be new taxes?

**Hon. Mr. Carr** (New Maryland-Sunbury, Minister of Environment and Local Government, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. Really, the crux of the problem here is talking about how we find success in regions. How do we find a new way of doing business so that regions are successful? We know that with the current situation in the southern region of New Brunswick, there are some real challenges down there, Mr. Speaker. We have five facilities down there in that region, and we know that the viability of a region depends on what attracts people to those regions and what keeps them in those regions. It is an economic development faction of our society. It is a tourism piece. It attracts people to live in those areas, grow those areas, and make them sustainable. So, Mr. Speaker, as we embark on a different way of doing business in these regions, we have to look at all the options for how we remain viable in certain areas of the province.



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

**Mr. Austin** (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Leader, PA): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would say that I appreciate the answer, but I am not sure that it was an answer. I will ask the minister again. We campaigned on no new taxes. The Conservative government campaigned on no new taxes, but Bill 2 has new taxes for rural residents. I guess that I will ask the Minister of Environment and Local Government this: If Bill 2 passes for rural residents around Saint John, can we expect rural residents around Fredericton, Moncton, and other places in the province to have more new taxes to cover services inside these cities as well?

**Hon. Mr. Carr** (New Maryland-Sunbury, Minister of Environment and Local Government, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, the *Greater Saint John Regional Facilities Commission Act* is unique to the Saint John region. It is a piece of legislation that was brought in in 1997. It is 22 years old, and three communities in the city's area have been contributing to the operating expenses of these facilities for 22 years. It is not a new concept. It is not a new idea. It is not new legislation. We are expanding that legislation to include more people in the region. It is not a new tax when local taxes are already in place.

If we are really going to have a serious discussion about municipal reform in this province and if we are going to have a serious discussion about regional success in this province, we have to take down the silos between communities and thrive as one. Mr. Speaker, our province and our regions are way too small to decide to work in silos. We must start working as teams.

[Translation]

## COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

**Mr. LePage** (Restigouche West, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know the government made a dubious deal with the People's Alliance of New Brunswick, which could lead to a considerable step backward for workers' rights in this province. Whatever the details of this backroom deal were, we will move forward and try to make our own amendments to the bill to make it fair for nursing home workers.

We still believe in unrestricted binding arbitration. One of the conditions imposed in this bill, namely the ability to pay, is not defined at all. We have asked the Minister of Social Development about it, but we did not get any answer. We asked the Premier, but we still did not get an answer.

[Original]

Let's try this again. In the context of the clause in Bill 17—with facts now, as the Premier likes to call them—what does “ability to pay” mean to the Minister of Finance?

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question. You know, I think that in looking at any of these conditions, we are saying to the arbitrator that we want to understand exactly what the relevance is of the situation of the province. I mean, if we have a province that is growing at 1% or 1.5%, you could say: Well, all right, how does it pay? What impact does this have on the number of unions? We have roughly 46 000 union members, but then that translates into 53 000 total employees. So what does that mean to the province if we do this? It is not a one-off situation, Mr. Speaker. It is not rocket science. It is just basically a consideration. What is the state of the province? Does it mean higher taxes? If it does, lay it out there. These are going to be the taxes that are going to be required in order to pay for this. What does it mean? Does it mean fewer employees? What is the impact?

Mr. Speaker, in this whole process, we do not want anything considered in isolation. I think that if the member was to think about what the municipalities are asking... The very municipalities from the region that many of the members opposite would be from are saying: Fix this for us.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. LePage** (Restigouche West, L): Again, this is a very vague definition.

[*Original*]

Mr. Premier, we are looking for factual statements, factual conditions. Ability to pay is not the same from my perspective as from yours. Again, we need some critical details within that statement. Hopefully, I understood incorrectly. He is talking about comparing unions with other unions, but the bill also states that we have to compare nursing home to nursing home. Is that the approach that he wants to take, comparing one to the other every time that he is negotiating with the unions?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs** (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the ability to pay is a very difficult concept for the members opposite to understand. I mean, they never gave it any consideration on how we pay for things. It was just spend it, tax more, spend it, and tax more. Well, you know, that is what has driven the economy of our province and it has stagnated. That is what has driven the private sector out of our province. That is why we are matched in the public and private sectors, because the private sector cannot afford to set up here.

That is why we stabilized the economy. We stabilized our tax system. We stabilized our growth in spending, and we are showing to the world, to the citizens in other provinces who might invest here, that New Brunswick is getting its house in order. New Brunswick is making decisions based on facts, Mr. Speaker, not based on the next emotion or the next idea that would help the election. So, Mr. Speaker, an example of that was our capital budget. It is the same as last year. They wanted continuity in capital spending. It is the same



## Oral Questions

process as last year, the same number as last year, because predictability brings stability and brings investment, Mr. Speaker.

### TOURISM

**Mr. J. LeBlanc** (Shediac—Beaubassin—Cap-Pelé, L): Speaking of tourism, my question is for the Minister of Tourism. The Premier hired a hand-picked friend to a very lucrative position in the Tourism Department. Her job was to come up with a new tourism strategy for the province. It has been over a year and all that we have seen are cuts and promises of a bleak future for the sector that relies on the province to help bring visitors here. The short-sighted vision on tourism is now allowing Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia to absolutely crush us in tourism marketing. We were promised a strategy, and we have seen nothing, Mr. Speaker. My question is: Where is the strategy, and when will it be unveiled?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gauvin** (Shippagan-Lamèque-Miscou, Deputy Premier, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Minister responsible for La Francophonie, PC): I thank the member for Shediac—Beaubassin—Cap-Pelé for his question. We will highlight certain areas of New Brunswick to attract tourists. For too long in New Brunswick, we have been dependent on gas prices, the weather, and other external factors over which we have no control. It is absolutely essential to regain control of our tourism infrastructure and build more infrastructure that people will have to visit.

We have wonderful areas here in New Brunswick, but the infrastructure has been scattered here and there. When I arrived at the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, some employees told me that the previous government had allocated so much money that nobody knew where to spend it. Well, those days are over. We are going to identify fantastic places, and we will focus on those. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.