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LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, over the past 14 months, we have been very much focused on dealing with the pandemic, and rightfully so. It has been challenging at times, but we are getting closer to the end, with the vaccinations.

Over the past few weeks in this Legislature, we have been focused on health care services and on the shortage of nursing care and LPNs in the system. Now I think it is appropriate to start talking about long-term care. In October of last year, the New Brunswick Nurses' Union tabled a report identifying some of the most significant challenges in the nursing home system and in the long-term care system. Can the Premier give us any updates on the postpandemic planning in terms of the 38 recommendations that were put forward?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): Thank you very much. I am very pleased to rise and talk about this long-term care situation, because it is very important to us. On this side of the House, we care about our seniors. We care about the vulnerable. We have been the ones who have moved forward. This was a more progressive budget when it comes to senior care and the vulnerable in this province than that side of the House ever dreamed about when it was here.

I can point to a number of issues that are moving the file forward. Besides meeting with the association on a number of different files, we have gone through and replied to every recommendation. I can say that the increased hours of nursing home care for the seniors is one of the biggest—biggest—events here in the province and that those on that side never even thought about it when they were here. The only thing they thought about was going into the pockets of the seniors and taking money out. That is what they did.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, minister.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): You know, Mr. Speaker, I think it is quite unfortunate that the minister is getting political this morning about a very important issue such as this. I guess the truth hurts, from what I hear coming from those on the other side right now, because they keep complaining about it.

This is a very serious situation. It is something that we, not only as government but also as legislators and certainly as a society, have to deal with. Long-term care and our seniors—we have to take care of them. They are vulnerable, and they have contributed so much. They have contributed to where society is right now.

As these 38 recommendations were being made public, the federal government announced that it wanted to work with provincial governments to elevate the standards of long-term care and, following that, to provide some financial help. I would ask the Premier, as

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Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, whether he is having discussions with the federal government on this issue.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question. Yes, there have been discussions on this but not in the past week or so or in the last meeting.

The debate across the country was not only around the need and the opportunity to work on long-term care in a constructive way that maps out the next 10, 15, or 20 years but also around the requirements of each province in terms of what the provinces do. The debate was around it being a provincial jurisdiction, not a federal jurisdiction. The federal government was looking at imposing standards, and different provinces were very, very much pushing back on that.

I think there is certainly a standard level that we all aspire to, but we also have different philosophies on what is ultimately the best care. Is it the best care in a nursing home? We know that there is a requirement there and that there always will be. But is it also the best care to have people live in their homes as long as they possibly can and to provide that service to them where they live?

We are not interested in more buildings just for the sake of more buildings. We know there is a need there. We are interested in the best health care. That needs to be part of the funding strategy, and that is what we asked for from the federal government.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful to the Premier for rising this morning to speak about this issue.

On several occasions, the official opposition has proposed developing a plan to gain a proper understanding of our human resource capacity in the areas of health and long-term care. It is also necessary to understand clearly what our challenges and needs would be over a 10-year period. In addition, a clear understanding of the shortfall is needed in order to get there. Long-term care is certainly a very important component.

The pandemic has made us realize that there is a lack of human resources in our long-term care sector. There are still challenges, and the situation is serious. The federal government wants to discuss this with the provinces. The provinces also seem to want to talk, and that is the good news.

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Could the Premier explain to us this morning whether he actually intends to develop a 10-year plan for human resources in the long-term care sector?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think the point that the Leader of the Opposition is raising is that, obviously, we need a 10-year, 20-year, and longer-term plan. But it is an integrated plan with both Health and Social Development in relation to not only the housing aspect but also hospitals.

Together, at the beginning of COVID-19, we found a need—because of the threat that we were experiencing from the pandemic and because of not knowing how widespread it would be—to work together as health regions and health authorities in order to free up space in hospitals. That was done by having a concentrated view on how we move people, in their stage of life, to the right place at the right time. Mr. Speaker, it was done with the cooperation of all folks within the health network, and it was done to look at the big picture.

So, Mr. Speaker, when I talk about health opportunities and about us being better as a society, it is taking not just a piece of us but what we offer as a combined package and asking: How do we get better everywhere in this province? That is the goal, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, the Premier referred to not just looking at specific pieces of long-term care and the health care system. However, I would argue that human resources are the cornerstone—the heartbeat—and a specific piece of what the health care system and long-term care are really all about.

As we know, we have recruitment and retention challenges with our nurses in New Brunswick. This is not just about long-term care. We have recruitment and retention challenges with our practical nurses as well as with our long-term care workers. So, a human resource plan is the key component, because these staff members are the ones who provide services for our most vulnerable people. So, it seems to me that a 10-year plan has its merits. Would the Premier be prepared to reconsider this plan?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, there has been a 10-year plan in terms of what we have seen before in terms of construction, such as what we were doing most recently in the case of Miramichi

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and the big nursing home construction plan that was put in place there a few years ago. What did it do? It increased the number of beds by maybe about 30 in a 240-bed facility because it shut down two other facilities. Mr. Speaker, that is not a plan. That is just a project. Yes, it is a great facility, and now it is up and running and in service in that area. However, Mr. Speaker, it has to be broader than that.

Yes, the personnel plays a key role—a key role—in all of this, but the plan also means hospital administration. What we found when we were getting the hospitals ready for a potential COVID-19 pandemic outbreak was that as soon as the beds were opened up, they were filled right back up, because doctors admitted right back in those patients who had nowhere else to go. Mr. Speaker, there is the dynamic that we have to deal with.

We know that we have all kinds of special care homes for which we need to understand the assessment criteria and the personnel, but Mr. Speaker, it is a broad perspective.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time.

[Translation]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we discuss building new nursing homes or seniors' residences, we have to ensure that we have the appropriate human resources and staff to run them. That is why we, on this side of the House, as well as a significant number of stakeholders, are of the opinion that it would be totally adequate to gain a better understanding of our current human resource capacity, to gain a clear understanding of what we will need within the next 10 years, and to determine what tools are necessary to meet the human resource needs of the long-term care sector and the health care system.

The Premier has not really answered the question. The Premier is someone who always talks about the long-term perspective. So, I am giving him a chance to confirm that he wants to develop a 10-year human resource plan for health care.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think that we may be vehemently discussing similar issues because there is a commonality here. However, I think that what we have missed in the past is this: Where have we put the greatest resources to get the best results?

Mr. Speaker, when you create a nursing home as a construction project rather than as an addition to the overall requirements, that is not that plan, and where would you see more evidence of that than with the big facility that I just spoke of? There were petitions not to

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do it, but it went ahead anyway. And then the other facilities that had been there were shut down. It did not add to the situation and meet additional demand. It was just a project to build.

Having a long-term plan is more than a construction project. It is about dealing with and having the ability to manage the resources in a way that actually meets the needs of the people who need help the most—where they need it and when they need it. That is our purpose, Mr. Speaker. So, yes, a human resource plan and a building construction plan that adds to the element or replaces systems that need to be fixed and a hospital management plan that addresses all the factors...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, in *The Forgotten Generation* report that was tabled in October, there were many different recommendations. We talk about a human resources plan and having a better understanding of what are the needs moving forward and what is the capacity today. One of the key areas of the report focused on having appropriate levels of staffing for inspections. You know, we have heard stories, and it was documented in this report that there are nursing homes and special care homes where the level of care is not adequate—not because the people working there do not want to provide the care but because they are short of staff. The level of cleanliness in the buildings and in the rooms was, at times, problematic. We are not criticizing the people who work there. It is a fact that there is a lack of staff.

I would like to ask the Premier this: How many inspectors do you actually have in the department? Also, are you going to increase the standard level of inspections so that we can make sure that adequate services are offered?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this question. The member opposite is all over the map today, looking for a 10-year plan on this and a 10-year plan on that, and then he is getting into a report that was put out a number of months ago. Again, that went all over the place.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): I hear the member behind him chirping.

To the point of the inspections, Mr. Speaker, we have adequate staff right across the province in every jurisdiction, every location, to do these inspections. When it comes to the protection of seniors, we move very quickly if there is a complaint, and we move very quickly to make sure that the inspections are done.

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If the member opposite wants a detailed diagram of all the human resources within the department, my door is always open and he can come in. There is not just one person responsible for that. There are various departments involved in inspections. We have the Fire Marshal, we have Public Health, and we have extra-mural. We have more people...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, minister.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, I will go back to the Premier because the minister is so defensive about this issue. I do not know why he is so defensive.

We had a report tabled by an association outside of government, the New Brunswick Nurses' Union. The report highlighted some of the concerns, some of the issues, and inspection is a key part as we try to improve, all together here, the quality of care for our seniors. To make sure that this is done adequately, inspections are needed and we need inspectors. These inspections need to happen unannounced, where inspectors come into these buildings and make sure that everything is running appropriately based on the standards. And I would argue that the standards should be elevated, but we will see where that is going to go.

Premier, could you please tell us whether inspections are being done appropriately in these establishments?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): Absolutely, without question, the standards in our area, in our province, are among the highest right across the federation. Mr. Speaker, we have some of the best staff who are dedicated to making sure that vulnerable residents in those establishments are protected.

As the member opposite knows, I am not being defensive here today. I think that the member opposite is trying to make up for the four lost years that his party had when it was in power and was looking after the vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite know full well that if there is a complaint, if there is an issue within a home, we will move very quickly. I know that some of them like to allude to a very vague view that seniors are being ignored or neglected. Well, we will move inspectors in the next day. You tell us where, when, and who, and we will move ASAP.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): You know, Mr. Speaker, I listened to the minister, and I think that he should sit down with one of his constituents, Cecile Cassista, who is an advocate for better care and quality services in the special care homes and nursing homes.

There are a lot of great recommendations in this report, and I have not heard the Premier or even the minister say that they actually have read this report and are looking into

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implementing some of these recommendations postpandemic. We know that the pandemic had a lot of the government focus, and we and society in general understand that. But now, the pandemic is going to be behind us sooner rather than later.

This report is well done and well documented and contains specific recommendations that would improve—improve—situations in some of these establishments and result in better care for our seniors. So, Premier, could you look at these recommendations to see whether any of them could be implemented in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the leader of the opposition party has been absent from understanding what has been going on in the long-term care sector within the province over the past year. When you look at the report that was sent out, you see that many of those recommendations were federal and many of them have been looked after. Just look at our budget that was passed here in the Legislature not even a couple of months ago. During the estimates, I announced a number of initiatives that addressed the issues that were put forward in that report.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the members opposite are mad because I really gave them a tongue-lashing on some issues during the debate last night.

I can assure the people who are listening that we appreciate the vulnerable population that is here and the people that we are looking after. We also appreciate the staff who have worked so hard during the pandemic to make sure that the folks in the long-term care facilities are safe.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, minister.

[Translation]

Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the recent history of humanity, very few things have affected the entire population simultaneously the way this pandemic has. No matter who you are or on which side of the House you sit...

[Original]

This side, that side, inside, outside.

[Translation]

Everyone has been affected by the pandemic. Unfortunately, the people most affected in New Brunswick and all over the planet are our senior citizens. Indeed, some seniors unfortunately died in our long-term care facilities due to this pandemic. So, my question for the minister is very simple and honest: When we are finally able to get back to a more-or-

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less normal situation, will the minister commit to carrying out a postpandemic review to determine how senior care in our long-term care facilities was affected?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, without a doubt, the sympathy that we share with the families who have lost loved ones, especially if they were in long-term care, is astronomical. We all feel from our hearts for the families who have lost loved ones.

I must say that from the standpoint of the ones who have been protected, it was because the staff leaned in and did a great job, making sure that the virus did not get into the homes. Also, Mr. Speaker, this government acted very, very fast when an outbreak occurred. We formed the Provincial Rapid Outbreak Management Team (PROMT), which was a management team that was mobile and that would go to the outbreaks at the height of the pandemic, when the outbreaks were occurring. PROMT was made up of various departments—Health; long-term care, Social Development; and Public Safety—and I think that the results speak for themselves. As sad as it is when we hear of someone passing away, I think that when we compare ourselves to other jurisdictions, our results have been exemplary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, L): Mr. Speaker, throughout the pandemic, human resources at our long-term care facilities have been sorely tested. Nurses and health workers have had a hard time meeting seniors' needs.

As a result, does the minister believe it would be beneficial to do some analysis or a critical review in order to find out how we can better prepare to cope with a similar situation? The minister and all members are aware of the staff shortage in our nursing homes, and that is a fact.

So, will the minister make a commitment speedily after the pandemic is over in order to avoid any recurrence of this kind of unfortunate situation? Staff shortages must be avoided at nursing homes and long-term care facilities, and there needs to be a review of the situation.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): Thank you very much. Again, Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot learned already, and there has been a lot implemented as the pandemic has been going on. We are not waiting until the end of the

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pandemic to improve the system. We are not waiting for the end of the pandemic to make sure that the people are protected in the utmost way.

There are 70 licensed nursing homes here in New Brunswick and another 500 special care homes, and they take care of roughly 11 000 seniors. All during the pandemic, the Department of Health, the Department of Public Safety, and the public were moving and adjusting and learning as we went. So there has been a great deal—a volume—of information that has been learned and a volume of information that has been adjusted all the way.

I really appreciate the people who have been on this 24-7 over the pandemic. They have really done a great job to make sure that the seniors of this province have been protected, and I appreciate that.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Thank you, minister.

ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow is World Environment Day, and the United Nations has chosen as its theme Reimagine. Recreate. Restore. It asks us to be bold, not timid.

Earlier this week, a coalition of New Brunswick public interest organizations presented a model bill for an *Environmental Bill of Rights: An Act to Protect Children, All New Brunswickers and Nature* in order to entrench in law a right to a healthy environment. The communities of Sackville, Bertrand, Gagetown, and Tracadie have already adopted declarations in support of entrenching in law a right to a healthy environment.

New Brunswickers are reimagining how legislation could be written to secure our well-being. Will the Minister of Environment join them and table a bill to establish a right to a healthy environment to safeguard our children? Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, PC): Thank you very much to the member opposite for the ideas to move ahead with. We at Environment are certainly open to ideas for moving bills ahead, and we are certainly all about the environment.

Regarding some of the accomplishments this past year, there is a lot on the go, including the climate change money, which is coming up and which you will hear about soon. The member opposite and others will be very happy to hear about that. The \$36 million will be spread across departments, and part of that is education. So, yes, we will look at all ideas and take them into serious consideration. Thank you.



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Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Well, so much for reimagining, Mr. Speaker. How about restoring our environment? A 2005 study found that almost 300 industrial chemicals are found in infant cord blood. In January, a study found microplastics in human placentas, and we know from many studies that glyphosate is found in our urine.

Many New Brunswickers feel that we have a cancer epidemic. What used to be primarily a disease of the elderly and smokers has become more common in nonsmoking adults and children. Why do we not just prohibit the release of cancer-causing pollutants into people's workplaces and out into the wider environment? That would be bold. That would be restorative.

During the 1970s, Premier Richard Hatfield boldly enacted most of the environmental laws still with us today, but they have not evolved in order to protect our children and adults. Will the minister amend the *Clean Environment Act* to end the release of cancer-causing agents into our environment, at work, over our forests, onto our food, and into our air and water?

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, PC): Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for the question from the member across the way. As he knows, we are meeting at the end of June with our climate change committee. Part of that—actually four days, I believe—has been set aside for discussing that exact topic. I look forward to having the member's input at that time. Thank you.

NURSING HOMES

Mrs. Conroy (Miramichi, PA): Mr. Speaker, it seems that it is getting harder and harder for seniors in nursing care homes and senior homes. The people who shaped our world and gave us everything they had deserve to spend their last few years being stress-free and being visited by the families that they raised, but it is certainly not the case. I got a call from a friend who said that her 78-year-old mom was given an eviction notice at a care home and that she had only 15 days to pack her stuff and get out.

According to the *Nursing Homes Act* of New Brunswick, operators need to give the next of kin only 15 days' notice before discharging residents. Fifteen days, Mr. Speaker, is not a lot of time, especially with the waiting lists that we now have in New Brunswick. Also, not everyone has somebody to advocate for them and to find them somewhere to live.

My question is for the Minister of Social Development. Are there not regulations in place that can protect these seniors? Can legislation be changed so that they have more time, if needed, to find a home so that they are not left on the street?

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Social Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious matter. Without a doubt, again, long-term care facilities across the province provide



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a very, very important service to vulnerable people in the province. I have mentioned the numbers before. We make sure that these people have the highest quality of care.

I cannot talk about a specific case due to confidentiality rules, but in every case where a discharge from a long-term care facility is anticipated, the staff of the department are involved to support the resident and the home in exploring all possibilities, all options, for the resident and/or the substitute decision maker. Typically, transfers are arranged. Mr. Speaker, a great deal of effort goes into ensuring that the client's needs are met and that the notice of discharge is given only after all options have been explored.

POINT LEPREAU

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Mr. Speaker, late last year, NB Power undertook the planned shutdown of Point Lepreau to do maintenance and upgrades. These upgrades were supposed to allow Point Lepreau to operate uninterrupted for two years. Since that upgrade, there have been two unplanned shutdowns on top of the fact that the planned shutdown took longer than it was supposed to.

What caused these shutdowns, and what is the estimated cost for them, including the cost of replacement power?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for the question related to Point Lepreau. Specifics, as they relate to the dynamics of the shutdown, I do not have with me. I certainly can make them available and provide them to the member opposite.

It is important to understand concerning recent shutdowns that we need to look beyond them and see the significant and longstanding running time of Point Lepreau prior to the shutdowns. We certainly are working with Point Lepreau to make sure that we get the maximum efficiency from the facility that provides us with nonemitting electricity.

Based on Point Lepreau's efforts, New Brunswickers can proudly stand and say that we generate 80% of our electricity from non-carbon-emitting means. Nuclear is a significant part of our clean power generation. That being the case, we work very hard to ensure that that is a means and a mechanism to provide nonemitting power. We do have shutdowns that are planned and unplanned.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Thank you, minister. Time.

Mr. Legacy (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Mr. Speaker, I share your frustration. I am getting a nonanswer.

There was a planned shutdown that had an unplanned extension to it, and then there were two more unplanned shutdowns in the span of six months. And the minister still does not



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have a handle on what happened. Clearly, nobody at NB Power seems to be concerned about informing him about the impact. He represents this Crown corporation. It is time for him to step up and get some answers.

Will the minister finally start adding some oversight so that New Brunswickers can know what is going on with Point Lepreau?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder at times whether the member opposite wonders about or reads his questions before he brings them to light in the House. When he talks about the shutdowns... He mentioned planned shutdowns. That is part of an ongoing process. An unplanned shutdown? Well, what would the alternative be?

I think that we all should stand here and be very proud of the fact that we have high-quality, well-trained people to ensure that the means and the mechanisms are in place to protect the safety of New Brunswick. I am thankful that we have that level of maintenance and preparedness so that in the event that a shutdown—planned or unplanned—needs to happen, New Brunswick is protected as a result of it. As I have said many times, the oversight is done on a regular basis. We are working incredibly closely with our folks at Point Lepreau. In fact, significant efforts have been taken over the last while to move us forward into an SMR age and bring us to zero emissions with our...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, minister.

