

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



December 1, 2021

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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, for every day that this government and this Premier are not hiring a new nurse, the gap is getting worse and worse. Their mess is getting worse and worse every day. Yesterday, I asked the Premier whether there were any scheduled negotiation sessions or whether there were any offers beyond what was rejected on October 6. I received multiple, multiple messages from nurses around the province telling me there was never—never—a counteroffer. I think that today, the Premier needs to clarify the situation.

From what I hear from the nurses, there was never a counteroffer of the proposal that was rejected on October 6. Premier, can you clarify what you said yesterday? A lot of people are confused, and I think that you are confused as well.

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there is no real confusion. We have already sent out two proposals to the Nurses' Union. We continue to have discussions with the NBNU, absolutely. It will be carrying out a strike vote tomorrow—we know that. We will continue our negotiations. After sending out two proposals that were rejected, we are looking forward to a return proposal from the Nurses' Union. We are expecting that as well. We are in regular communication with the NBNU.

As I said in the news yesterday and as I will say right now, yes, we know that we have to step up. Yes, we know the valuable work that nurses do all the time, not only during COVID-19 but also especially during COVID-19. Absolutely, I am frightened, I am scared, and I am saddened. I am deeply, deeply bothered by the fact that I hear from nurses, young nurses who have been in the business for five years, who are thinking: Do you know what? Maybe this is not the business for me now.

They have wanted to be nurses all their lives. Absolutely, we know that they need attention. We know that they need a fair deal, and we are working toward that, absolutely.

[Translation]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance seems to have a lot more empathy than his Premier when it comes to the shortage of nurses in our health care system.

The reality today is that our nurses and licensed practical nurses are in an extremely difficult situation. They need more assistance. There are over 1 000 vacant positions. Unfortunately, a number of nurses are on work-related sick leave. That is not what they want; they want to be taking care of their patients.

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Two months after the latest offer was rejected, this situation remains unresolved. The problem gets more serious every day that new nurses are not hired. The Premier is making another mess. Can the Premier tell us how he is going to resolve this situation and clean up yet another mess he has made?

[Original]

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

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will clear up some confusion. It would not necessarily be the first time that we have worked on that topic.

In relation to the process of negotiations, two tentative agreements were reached with the nurses—two. To say that nothing was accomplished... We had two tentative agreements, and both were rejected. We have been waiting for a counterproposal. As the minister pointed out, the plan is to carry on with it.

If my colleagues across the hall realized the process, they would know that you do not keep negotiating with yourself. You put in a proposal—we have had tentative agreements, and we thought we were there—and then you wait for a counter to come back that says: Okay, this is what we do not like about your proposal. I am hopeful that is going to happen over the next couple of weeks and that we will get this resolved. Then, as part of this resolution, we are working on the big issues. If people do not like what they do, how do we change that? We need more nurses, not fewer.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, the Premier is a very confused individual. Yesterday, he said that he had sent a counteroffer. Today, he is saying that he is waiting for a counteroffer.

At the end of the day, you are supposedly in charge. You are the Premier of this province. We have a mess of your making in the health care sector. We have a significant shortage of nurses and LPNs. They need help. Our patients need their care. Leadership is about leading by example. You are waiting for them to come to the table. How about you show up at the table by inviting them to the table at a specific time and a specific place? That should happen right now. Stop playing games with our health care system and our nurses. When are you going to meet with them to negotiate?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat this. This is a familiar dialogue from a few weeks ago. The process is clear when you negotiate. My colleagues have been negotiating and the folks from the minister's department have been negotiating with the nurses for quite some time. The tentative offer was initially accepted, probably two months ago. Then another negotiation took place, and a tentative offer was accepted a second time. Both were



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ultimately rejected in the process by votes. The process is really clear. You then expect a counter from the parties that says: This is what we did not like about the offer that you presented.

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition knows full well that you do not just keep offering and offering and offering and hope you get it right. You ask for an explanation and a counter to what was proposed. That is the process. The Leader of the Opposition knows that process, but it makes for a good discussion here in the House.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, the Premier seems to be enjoying the messes that he creates. He wants to have a strike, I believe, with nurses in the health care sector.

Leadership is not about sitting on the sidelines and waiting for something to happen. It is about making it happen. We know what happened over the last year. We know that not much happened in the last three years, but yes, there were two offers. They were refused, and today they are still refused. How do you resolve it? How do you solve it? As a responsible employer, through strong leadership and through understanding the issues around nurses and our health care system, you lead. You take the bull by the horns, and you get it resolved. When are you going to call the president of the Nurses' Union to set up a meeting for a negotiating session so that we can get this resolved now?

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member started with, You want a strike. Of course, we do not want a strike. What a ridiculous thing to say. Do we want a strike with the nurses? No, absolutely not. We want them at work and satisfied with their jobs. We want them to enjoy going to work every day, and we want them to continue taking care of New Brunswickers, as they have been doing through the COVID-19 pandemic and as they have been doing for years.

As for meetings, I already said—I already said—that, yes, meetings are planned. Meetings are planned. You do not have to ask for them because they are already scheduled. Meetings are planned. The strike vote has to happen. We have two proposals out there that have been rejected. We know that, and we are looking for a counterproposal. That is what these meetings will be about, and yes, we will work hard—hard—to stop any kind of strike action from happening.

The nurses are unbelievably important to New Brunswick. Please, know that. If you are a nurse, you are unbelievably important and unbelievably valued. We know that we have to step up, and we will.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, nobody believes what any of these government members say, whether they be ministers, the Premier, or anyone else. Nobody trusts what they say, because, in the end, it is the results that count. In fact, it is a government's action, and the results of this action, that count.

The Premier is hiding behind a process he seems to favour. It is clear that the only things that make members of this government act are pressure from the official opposition, strike mandates, and strikes. They are looking for a strike by nurses in the health care sector. They support strikes because they like the mess they have been making since they took office. Why are we not trying to avoid this mess, so that hospital patients consistently get the quality of service and care they deserve? When are you going to meet with the nurses, Mr. Premier?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, no one wants a strike. As the minister said, no one wants a strike. Certainly, least of all, I do not want a strike.

But most of all, it is a point of how we manage to get through this together with changes that are going to work. They are not only financial changes but also changes in how we manage the workplace so nurses feel valued every day when going to work and when being listened to regarding the trials and tribulations that they have expounded on: the issues in the hospitals with aggression, as we have never seen before, the issues that are facing them, and the COVID-19 issues that continue. The nurses continue to face them. There is a whole lot of discussion on a number of issues—not on any singular issue.

Yes, we could use the opposition's help to build a new New Brunswick and to manage in many ways and to work differently, but we do not expect it, for good reason. But there is a challenge here, and it is not a matter of just saying: Okay, there you go; let's talk about wages. Yes, we need to talk about wages, and we are. We are making sure that we are competitive in our Atlantic Region. That is part of this mandate, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

FIRST NATIONS

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, there have been many different messes created by this Premier. He thrives on them, and I think he enjoys them. There is another mess brewing in this province. With the disrespect of this Premier and this government toward New Brunswick's First Nations and their leadership, we have a mess on our hands. The Premier has absolutely no respect in terms of having a meaningful dialogue with First Nations and their leadership.

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Yesterday, we had an announcement. Premier, as in avoiding a strike, the First Nations want to have a meaningful dialogue with the government of New Brunswick. Why can you not, at a minimum, have a respectful, meaningful dialogue with the First Nations that live in our beautiful province?

Hon. Ms. Dunn (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB, Minister responsible for Immigration, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question. I want to speak about this file. I would like to invite anyone on the opposite side of the House to come in and meet with me to review all the work that has been done with respect to First Nations. There is a perception out there that there is no ongoing dialogue, that there are no meetings, and that there is no relationship. That could not be further from the truth.

What we saw yesterday, I can tell you, came as quite a shock. I do not think that it is any shock for anyone to understand that there is litigation going on in the province, but I do not think that anybody expected a revised land claim in which private property would be claimed as part of it.

I can tell you this. I would invite anyone to come in and please meet with me so that we can talk about the First Nations file. We can talk about the work that has been done around the First Nations file. We can talk about the centralization of the Aboriginal Affairs Department. Thank you.

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

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Well, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the minister, it says a lot that the Premier will not even get up on this issue today. It just follows the theme of being disrespectful.

Based on the comments from the minister, if what was announced yesterday was a shock, that means that there has been no dialogue. There has been no dialogue, because when something is a shock, that means that you did not know it was coming. There was no idea that it was coming. To try to understand or to know when something is coming, you have to have a dialogue—a meaningful dialogue—in a respectful fashion.

We need to hear from the Premier. What does he really think about how we should address the issues of the First Nations of New Brunswick? Does he believe that it should be through a meaningful, respectful dialogue or through the courts?

Hon. Ms. Dunn (Saint John Harbour, Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB, Minister responsible for Immigration, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, thank you again to the member opposite for the question. What I would say with respect to clarifying that it was a shock is that it was a shock because there actually has been ongoing dialogue with respect

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to this file and with respect to this litigation claim, not just with the department but also among legal counsel. I would also say this: My door is open at any time. We have had a number of meetings with First Nations, whether it be Elsipogtog or Pabineau First Nation.

My relationship with First Nations is very important to me. I know that the government, as well, feels the same way. But we have to have willing partners who come to the table and actually meet with us and want to talk to us. Relationships are built on two parties discussing, convening, and reviewing things. Relationships cannot be one-sided. We have to come together on this file, and we have to be at the table together to talk about it. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Mr. Speaker, in section 2.2 of the white paper, the government talks about creating a public safety committee administered, of course, by the regional service commissions. Among the services listed, we find policing, fire protection, and emergency measures planning. The person responsible for the latter will be tasked with working with provincial officials on emergency measures planning.

Since the New Brunswick Emergency Measures Organization already provides this service on the ground, through regional coordinators, and since the minister has said he wants to eliminate the duplication of services, is the government going to cut the regional coordinator positions that are currently part of the New Brunswick Emergency Measures Organization and ask the RSCs to assume the responsibility for all this?

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is really good to see that our legislative colleagues are reading the white paper. This is a good plan for New Brunswick's future. That also shows that people are interpreting this document according to their own wishes.

As the Finn report indicated, we are providing two services today through the RSCs. Mr. Finn had established that we could be providing many more services through these commissions. On our side of the House, we believe the regional service commissions do good work. All the community leaders are at the table, and we want to ensure that they are working on tourism and economic development.

In fact, the establishment of a public safety committee is something new. We have just done this, during the pandemic, with the resilience committees. We want to discuss policing, fire protection, and emergency measures planning. We want advice from these leaders. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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[Original]

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Mr. Speaker, knowing that the minister loves what the RSCs are doing, I see that page 18 of the white paper clearly indicates that when it comes to restructuring, “changes to the regional service commissions will be led and supported by... government through appointed transition facilitators.” Now, what is interesting is that these same facilitators will then be responsible for hiring “an individual to fill the new leadership role in each region”. So, in other words, that means the minister is going through the transition team to hire a new CEO and take control of the RSCs.

[Translation]

I am going to say it in the other language because it is important. The minister is going through the transition team to hire a new CEO and take control of the RSCs.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister this: Did he consult with the board of directors of each RSC before making this decision and imposing his will?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to see that. The volume is rising, but there are still no solutions coming from the other side of the House. There are no solutions. I see the temporary opposition leader. Maybe today he would like to be the permanent leader. I hear him raise his voice, so I will do the same.

It is incredible. Mr. Speaker, regional cooperation is happening. The regional service commissions were established to work with people. The name “transition teams” is apt. This is indeed about a transition. We want to make the transition to the 21st century. Right now, 30% of the people in this province do not have access to democratic voting in municipal elections. They want to have a say about their quality of life. That is why these people, 30% of New Brunswickers, will get an opportunity to vote on November 22, 2022. That is the important thing, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Mr. Speaker, the minister has contradicted himself. I spoke with the associations, and they are scratching their heads right now. They are saying: Listen, the government wants us to be more autonomous. It wants us to take on more responsibilities, yet it is going to impose a new CEO on the RSCs.

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Now, the boards of directors are the ones responsible for the RSCs. The executive director answers to the board of directors. So why would the minister and government want to impose their way on the RSCs? I ask the minister again: Did he consult with the board of directors of each RSC before making this decision?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Mr. Speaker, we are going to appoint... On the weekend, I will be attending the annual convention of the Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick. I will be there, and I will certainly be discussing this issue with the members there.

I have held consultations. I held 36 public engagement sessions. I put 50 000 km on my car. I met with over 200 municipal councillors. I can tell you that the regional service commissions will be equipped with the tools they need to move forward.

Mr. Speaker, we are not going to impose anything. On this side of the House, we discuss, we talk, and we work together. That is what matters. We are not imposing things or imposing our values. As for values, New Brunswickers want democratic voting and to have their say. That is what matters. It is so important.

[*Original*]

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Order. Order, please.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Mr. Speaker, the past few years have shown us that the climate crisis is upon us. In 2017, we had the devastating ice storm on the Acadian Peninsula. In 2018, there was massive flooding of thousands of properties along the Wolastoq, also known as the Saint John River. In 2019, tropical storm Dorian toppled more than 150 trees at Murray Beach Provincial Park in my riding.

Projections for the decades to come show flooding in Memramcook, Dorchester, Sackville, Port Elgin, and Baie Verte, in a large part of my coastal riding, and across the province. We are one major storm away from disastrous flooding that would put my riding underwater, not to mention that heat waves and drought cause hay shortages, threaten food security, cause wells to run dry, and threaten drinking water.

Climate change risk assessments are used to inform decision-making by identifying, evaluating, and ranking risks. Prince Edward Island recently completed an assessment that

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shows the risk of future droughts, storms, and heat waves. Has a climate change risk assessment been completed for New Brunswick, and if not, when will the minister responsible for climate change ensure that one is done?

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, for the question. It is always great to stand up on climate change initiatives. There is lots of funding on the go, and I will bring you up to date on the latest.

You mentioned flooding. Lots of work is being done as we speak. You will be hearing more in the near future. To help protect New Brunswickers and their properties from flooding, which you mentioned as being down your way as well, member, the Department of Environment and Local Government has updated and expanded its Internet-based maps, and you will see more in the very near future. As predicted from past storms, those maps are important for people who are going to mitigate, adapt, and either sell or purchase properties.

Roads and networks through DTI have come a long way. I should mention that in the last couple of years as well, in the southern part of the province, with the culverts being replaced, bridges being replaced, Bailey bridges going in... Those bridges may not be permanent, but they withstood the crazy rains that we had last week in Saint John and in the southern part of the province and in the southeast too, I believe.

Anyway, there will be mapping coming out. It will provide valuable tools for you and for others who may want to purchase land and make it safe to build on or to adapt to...

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

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Mr. Speaker, I am still wondering whether a climate change risk assessment has been completed for the province.

As we experience more intense heat waves, we need to ensure that all our housing is properly insulated, not just to keep the heat in during the winter but also to keep the heat out during the summer. The Higgs government is collecting \$127 million in carbon tax revenue this year, and \$22 million of that is being spent on subsidizing natural gas and on speculative nuclear technology, with only \$26 million being dedicated to climate change initiatives. As the minister mentioned, some of that is being spent on operational things such as culverts and replacing light bulbs, which should be funded through regular budgets.

Imagine what we could do if more of this money were available to help people save on electricity bills while also reducing emissions. It would be a win-win situation. Nova Scotia is getting more bang for its buck and is reducing electricity demand twice as much as New

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Brunswick. We need to save more people more money. Does the minister responsible have a plan to insulate everyone's home to reduce emissions?

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a big plan for a big province and for a lot of people, but I thank you for that. We are doing a really good job, and there is some more to come. You covered a number of subject areas there, as you normally do. They are all important, of course.

DTI did an assessment recently. We are discussing flooding on a regular basis—even today. We are discussing the area of your part of the province, which needs to be addressed. It is important. I am aware of the dyke system down there. I am not sure how many kilometres or miles long it is, but it is huge. It is big. It does need to be looked at for future transportation in order to keep those roads open, for example.

There is some government funding available regarding low-income housing, and hopefully, there will be more to come. It is climate change money, but it is going back into NB Power to help those with low incomes and others to insulate their homes, to provide heat pumps, and to make their houses ready for the winter months when it is cold. It is sad. That money is important to help these people to live comfortably in their own homes throughout the winter.

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

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Leader, PA): Mr. Speaker, after hearing from many citizens throughout my riding of Fredericton-Grand Lake and in other areas of the province, I know that there are growing concerns in relation to the white paper on municipal reform. Two of those concerns that continue to dominate the negative feedback are in relation to merging smaller communities and what that will mean for the local autonomy. Another area of concern is whether a significant bump up in taxes will be seen with the amalgamations of LSDs and adjacent communities.

Mr. Speaker, I have said this before, and I will say it again: I am not asking the minister to can the white paper. There is a lot of good information, and there are a lot of good changes that we see in that white paper. What I am saying is simply this. The minister needs to take the time to allow the white paper to sink in for local leaders' understanding and to allow for simple amendments to make it a win-win plan. This white paper can be a win-win plan for New Brunswick.

My question is for the minister. What assurances can he give to the residents of these areas that taxes will not skyrocket as a result of their being amalgamated with an adjacent city, town, or village?



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

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member across the way for the question. Again, we have been talking about local governance reform for 25 years. We have a white paper, and we are moving forward with a plan. The next process is definitely still to have consultation. We are still discussing with certain communities. Some communities have evolved a lot sooner than others. But we are still getting questions because there is some misinformation out there and people have questions. Again, I will be tabling the bill today, so we will have an exercise for the next couple of weeks to move forward with this bill. We will have that discussion now and throughout 2022. Transition will also be a part of it.

However, on taxation, sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 of the white paper says that we want to have variable tax rates. So when LSDs merge with municipalities, as you indicated—and that is a prime example—there are going to be variable tax rates, and people...

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

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mrs. Conroy (Miramichi, PA): Mr. Speaker, I also received multiple messages last night from coworkers of mine. The President of the Nurses' Union stated that they have not actually received a counteroffer from the government, as stated in question period yesterday and again this morning. There has been a back-and-forth about who created this mess. It did not happen only with this government in the past couple of years. It has been happening for many years. The nurses are growing very frustrated. As you can imagine, the morale is very low and it is dropping rapidly while we sit and play the blame game.

Nurses are crying out for help. They are pleading with the government to give them the recognition and the help that they deserve and need. It is just heartbreaking to hear about coworkers who are dropping out of the system and out of the profession after so many years. This needs to be settled. Nobody wants a strike, and we should be working together to make sure that it is done and that it is the primary thing that is done. Can the Premier please tell us: Which one is it? What is the plan moving forward to get this settled before the nurses need to go on strike?

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for Miramichi for the question. If we said that there was a counterproposal, then we were wrong. What we have done, Mr. Speaker, is we have given two proposals, which have been taken by the leadership to the



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union and which, ultimately, have been rejected. If you are looking for a counterproposal, it would not be from us. It would be from the union at this time.

The strike votes will be happening late this week, and we will continue to work with the union. We have meetings scheduled. Absolutely, we want to get it settled. We absolutely want the nurses to know that they are so valued and so important to all New Brunswick. Mr. Speaker, they are without blame in anything. They have been working crazy, crazy amounts of time before and during COVID-19. We absolutely want to do what is right for the nurses.

[*Translation*]

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Mrs. Landry (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, a number of people living in regions where amalgamation is proposed—where the population has increased by at least 15%—will not have the right to elections before November 2022. That means they will have no voice until a general election is held in 2026—five years from now. By the way, I am one of those people.

For a minister who wants to give a voice to all New Brunswickers, I ask this: Mr. Minister, who will be representing these people until the next election? Will it be a councillor at large, a councillor for a ward, the whole municipal council, the ED of an RSC, or the chair of an RSC? Who will decide who represents these people?

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): As you heard, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite just listed the different representatives to whom people will have access, whether or not an election is called. For the people the member referred to, the white paper explains super well that these people will have access to representation by the existing council and will be part of this community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): The time for question period is over.

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Yesterday, I had taken a question under advisement. I would like to read this to the member for Tracadie-Sheila, since it was his question.

[*Translation*]

The member for Tracadie-Sheila had questions about policing. Mr. Speaker, we will be working with the Department of Justice and Public Safety to ensure policing costs are



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calculated the same way they are now. Our reform is about giving power to the local level, which is what we are doing. Also, we have established safeguards by maintaining responsibility for highways and guaranteeing different tax rates for different places according to the services provided. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This discussion is evidently about policing, but the minister is spending his time talking about costs. Basically, what concerns us is the funding that will be provided to regional service commissions to ensure people are well protected. Evidently, the cost of policing is a lot higher in rural areas than in urban centres.

This is what I want to know: Has the minister sat down with the regional service commissions to specifically discuss possible funding to help communities deliver the best service possible?

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Mr. Speaker, regional service commissions do not provide public safety services. Unfortunately, what the member for Tracadie-Sheila is saying is not correct, unfortunately. People get services, so they have to pay. Just like the 41¢ for highways, they pay 27¢ for policing. After restructuring or amalgamating, the same will apply. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.