

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



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[*Translation*]

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform clearly told municipalities in the province that roads will remain a provincial government responsibility. However, the last sentence in the section of the white paper dealing with roads indicates that it will now be possible to invest additional local property tax dollars in roads.

[*Original*]

That being said, we are led to believe that the newly created entities will have no choice but to include road construction and maintenance in their annual budgets. If that is the case, it can only mean one thing for the people of New Brunswick—an increase in property taxes. Minister, you need to explain why you included in your white paper the need to invest additional local property tax dollars on roads.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To answer the opposition member's question, as we said, we will retain responsibility for road management. The new entities will never have to invest in road management if they do not want to. These are values. That is what we are trying to provide. We are trying to provide the municipalities with more powers so that they can decide where they want to put their money. They will be fully empowered to make this decision.

We are not telling people what to do. That is the difference. The member for Caraquet... I think there are a lot of little show-offs on the other side of the House. That is your problem: You have to manage the little show-offs.

At the end of the day, we are just trying to let New Brunswickers working in the municipal sphere have their say. The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure does a good job of managing roads. We will be retaining this responsibility in order to help municipalities provide better political governance. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[*Original*]

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the government tabled its capital budget. In 2021-22, it spent over \$200 million on roads. This year, it is down to \$181 million. That is \$20 million less that is going to be invested in the roads of New Brunswick. Now, is it a coincidence that it cut \$20 million off the budget for the roads and, at the same time, it is asking municipalities to invest in roads? Now, we know that with the

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designated highway program, the government cut the amount from \$25 million to \$10 million, yet it told municipalities that if they were willing to invest in the designated highway program, they would be at the top of the priority list. My question to the minister is this: Are the roads from the LSDs going to have the same fate as the roads from the designated highway program? Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the member opposite, there have been significant discussions between my department and the Department of Local Government. There will be no change in the service level that the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure provides to New Brunswick. There are some things in my budget that I will talk about tomorrow related to the Municipal Designated Highway Program, but I am not announcing anything here before I have my opportunity to speak tomorrow.

The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure has been working very closely with municipalities, local governments, and regional governments. We are listening, we are working with them, we are helping them to set priorities, and we are setting priorities in partnership with them. We are the new Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. We are working with the province and the province's communities. We are here to work with you, and I will tell you more details during my speech tomorrow. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Mr. Speaker, the regional service commissions have developed some expertise over the past eight years. They have become an indispensable resource for municipalities of all sizes around the province. However, we must remember that the RSCs are at the service of municipalities, and not the other way around. With a whole range of responsibilities being transferred at the local level, the RSCs will be called on to play a more significant role. My fear, Mr. Speaker, is that the RSCs will become another level of government, adding a new layer of bureaucratic complexity.

Knowing that municipal reform is essentially all about strengthening our local entities and making them more independent and more effective in the field, how does the minister explain hiring his own CEO to manage the RSCs? Also, how will he go about ensuring that the municipalities are central to this process?

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Mr. Speaker, we are going to take clear action. The member opposite was at the conference of the Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick last weekend, and he was fearmongering. He told the 350 people in attendance that the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure was going to make cuts. There are no cuts here. On this side, we are making investments. That is why I want to make this clear: The government is investing in New Brunswickers. So, we are going to make sure that the fact the member for Tracadie-Sheila is spreading disinformation is publicized.

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Mr. Speaker, I will get back to the RSC issue. These entities have been in existence for eight years. This is a good exercise, and all the leaders and mayors take part. In fact, with the transition leaders, we will be working with the existing advisory committees. We will certainly be sitting down with the elected representatives to ensure that we have strong leadership in each region. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. LePage (Restigouche West, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The white paper proposes 12 regional service commissions with entities including anywhere from 608 people in RSC 11 to 72 571 people in RSC 7. RSC 11 is made up of 13 entities and 1 rural district, while RSC 8 only includes 2 entities and 1 rural district. Obviously, the Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform has not consistently respected the basic criteria of a population of 4 000 and a tax base of \$200 million for the whole of New Brunswick.

In my opinion, the minister has missed some great opportunities to ensure the long-term sustainability of certain communities. Can a rural district with a population of more than 10 000 become a city, Mr. Speaker? Can a group of 4 LSDs with a population of less than 4 000 become a village, Mr. Speaker? Can the minister reveal to us the new criteria for establishing cities, towns, villages, rural communities, and rural districts in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the member's question is a valid one, all the same. As regards the basic criteria for the restructuring, we did indeed use a viability threshold of 4 000 people and \$200 million. We also used current boundary alignments and natural boundaries, linguistic profiles, communities of interest, school catchment areas, service reach, current cost sharing arrangements, urban and rural realities, and expressed local interest in restructuring.

Mr. Speaker, there are 12 regions. The current Minister of Social Development was the Minister of Environment and Local Government back then. It was decided at the time to have 12 regions. I believe there is a social consensus in favour of the 12 regions staying in place. So, on that basis, we put in place a bill with a universal format. We did the best we could with the existing criteria.

Mr. LePage (Restigouche West, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I wanted was not the past criteria, but the ones for the future.

In Bill 82—all 128 pages of it—dealing with local governance reform, 26 current Acts are being amended to give responsibilities to various individuals and entities. Since the government wants to limit our comments here in the House, can the minister specify, in one minute, the roles and responsibilities of the development officer, the planning director, the provincial director, the planner, the municipality, the rural district, regional service commissions, the transition team, the executive director appointed by the minister, the minister himself, and the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, in other words, the Cabinet?

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Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Mr. Speaker, if the member for Restigouche West had read the white paper, he would know that the criteria I just read out are the ones in the white paper. They are the criteria for long-term planning. I hope the member will be able to read the document in order to gain a better understanding of the white paper.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): I would like you to stop filibustering and do your job.

I was involved in the business world. In that environment, we go ahead and work. The members on the other side of the House filibuster so much... We have a great opportunity to work together on the white paper and debate the bill in committee, but you are unfortunately not doing that. You want to play politics at the expense of the public, and the Liberal Party continues to play divisive politics. One thing is unfortunate: You fearmonger.

As for defining all the objectives the member just listed for us, we will certainly debate that, and we could certainly...

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, minister. I would remind members to direct their questions and answers through the chair. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. LePage (Restigouche West, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For me, in the business world, we listen to the customer and not the boss.

On page 103 of Bill 82, subsection 9(1) dealing with restructuring local governments stipulates: "From the commencement of this section until August 31, 2022, inclusive, [...], the Lieutenant-Governor in Council may make regulations effecting incorporations, amalgamations, annexations or decreases in territorial limits of local governments".

The deadline for these changes is August 31, 2022, according to the legislation. Even so, the minister is currently negotiating with each municipality individually, and I dare say with the LSDs, and he is giving them two weeks to do this.

Can the minister provide a toll-free phone number, as his colleagues did at the Department of Health, the Department of Social Development, Service New Brunswick, and Opportunities New Brunswick, to give New Brunswickers some answers? Can he say what the deadline is for making changes to the territories?

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Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Mr. Speaker, we developed a process that is well known throughout New Brunswick. We consulted last year. We started by launching our website in January, and the green paper was submitted in April. In August, we shared everything that was heard during the consultation process. We submitted the white paper three weeks ago. It is a plan for the future. We have been talking about this for 25 years.

I would like to know where the Liberal Party stands on the white paper. Over the past year, not one of you sent me an email—not once—about your position on the subject. So, it would be interesting to know where you stand. Today, it is interesting to see the member for Restigouche West asking questions that were written by someone else.

Mr. Speaker, we have a plan for going ahead. You said it yourselves: This is a historic plan. Let's work together. Let's go into committee and work together.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. Bourque (Kent South, L): We certainly have an opinion about the white paper, but maybe not about white paper, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

My colleague the member for Caraquet spoke very accurately on some very troubling numbers regarding the number of schools and early childcare facilities that have been impacted by COVID-19 and the truly shocking number of cases in those facilities. It is very sad, and we are at the point where the majority of cases are impacting kindergarten-to-Grade 5 schools. Mr. Speaker, it is not as though the members opposite—the government—had not been warned that this would be the case.

How can the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development—who, by the way, was dubbed last year as the virus whisperer and who was lauded for his tough stance on the virus—now allow this untenable situation not only to happen but also to keep on going? When did the minister, with his team, meet with Public Health over the spring and summer months to develop this plan?

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

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition sucks, and then the opposition blows. In the springtime of this year, we heard loud and clear from the opposition benches that having schools closed for any reason was unacceptable and that hybrid learning in high schools was unacceptable. So I am not going to take any lessons here from the opposition.

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I do recognize that there absolutely is growing concern over the number of cases in our province's schools. There are ways that we can push back against this while doing our best to preserve face-to-face learning, which is best for our students. First, we can do everything that we can to increase the vaccination rates for 5- to 11-year-olds. Second, we can do everything that we can to increase the vaccination rates, which means booster shots, for our adults. And, third, we can follow the guidelines from Public Health. We know that as COVID-19 evolves, government responses evolve, and that can create confusion. But those plans from Public Health are the best way to get through this, and vaccines are the core of that process.

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

MENTAL HEALTH

Mr. Bourque (Kent South, L): I do want to remind the minister that the high number of cases is on the hands of government members, not on those of the opposition members. It is on their hands.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, to follow up on the minister's response, I want to say that we are well aware that COVID-19 has an extremely negative impact on young people's mental health, which is hardly surprising given that this is the third consecutive school year that all these disruptions have been put up with. What a pity that the government has reduced funding for excellent programs like Link NB, for example.

Despite the doubts and concerns raised with him by school psychologists, the minister has imposed radical changes on the education system, in particular by asking teachers to take training in order to be able to carry out certain assessments.

Mr. Speaker, good general health requires good mental health. We know that mental health problems have become the number one issue in our schools. So, can the minister tell us how many teachers have signed up to go ahead with this training? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for his question.

First of all, it is absolutely true that our side of the House has been in office during the pandemic. We are fortunate, because we know that, during the months preceding the pandemic and even during it, most opposition members voted against a measure aimed at ensuring that our young people are protected by vaccines. So, I have no lessons to learn from the opposition members.

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As for the issue of mental health, it is of the utmost importance. This is a file that will have to be worked on over the coming months, because we clearly need to manage the education system during a pandemic.

As regards the specific question about the number of registrations, I know it is high. I have not heard that we are having trouble signing people up. There was a certain amount of enthusiasm among teachers, with people wanting to take part in the program. I will get back to you with the details.

[*Original*]

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

[*Translation*]

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, over the past few months, we have not stopped pointing out that this government has lost control of COVID-19 around the province. Yesterday, in question period, the Premier confirmed one of my greatest fears, which is that hospital outbreaks were caused by the ventilation. Nonetheless, we have gone through weeks of silence during which the government, the Minister of Health, and this Premier never informed the public about this crisis.

Will the Premier undertake to provide the public and the House with information about the ventilation problems in each hospital, to say what has been done, and to table a report by an independent expert guaranteeing that this situation will be permanently resolved?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, the health authorities have told us that they went through their protocols in relation to patients with COVID-19 and treating them with ventilators and how to minimize the airborne diffusion of the virus. That was learned through different hospitals in the province and similar situations, and then it was implemented in Vitalité and later implemented in Horizon.

I cannot speak to the technicalities of it, but I can say that there was a situation in which it was determined that there was an airborne spread in the ventilation and that it was corrected in both networks. So I think that the message here today is simply that the health authorities have implemented changes to their protocols. They feel very comfortable now, and their patients should feel comfortable that when they go to the hospital, for whatever reason, they should be safe and not have to worry about any COVID-19 infection. Thank you.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): This is serious; we need to know the details about the ventilation problems. What is happening in the hospitals is really a crisis. The government did nothing when the time came to put the situation right.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker, while the government members were idly watching the outbreaks that were happening inside our hospitals, they were aware of the ventilation problems. It is shocking and inexcusable. Will the Premier publicly and transparently state exactly how many citizens have fallen ill with COVID-19 because of the ventilation systems in our hospitals? Will the Premier be transparent and tell us where else in the province the ventilation system has been identified as a cause of transmission? Will the Premier be transparent and tell us exactly how many New Brunswickers have died as a result of the outbreaks in our hospitals?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the member opposite, I am not a medical professional. I can only assume that the gentleman must be, given the fact that all these issues that he is reporting should be reported, and I should certainly be able to report on all of them.

My point is that I will ask the health authorities about any communication that we can make to reassure patients and to reassure the citizens in this province that the situation has been fixed. I will do that. I will ask that of the health authorities, and I will ask them to communicate to the public in an effective manner so that the public can be assured that this has been addressed. That, I think, will cover the issue.

There are other issues that happen in hospitals that we in this House will not debate because we rely on our medical professionals to provide the safety needed. My request will be to the CEOs to have a communiqué that satisfies the concerns of the patients and the concerns of the residents of this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, there is a slow, slow train coming into New Brunswick today, because VIA Rail has announced that it is going to be running two trips per week through New Brunswick as of this week.

This is not meeting the needs of New Brunswickers for public transportation. We need a regional rail service. We need a rail service that meets our needs—one that enables people to get to Moncton from northern New Brunswick for cancer treatments and that enables people who cannot drive or who drive only during the daytime and in fine weather to

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travel safely back and forth between Campbellton and Bathurst or between Bathurst and Miramichi or between Rogersville and Moncton and Sackville.

The rails are there. We need to acquire them. Those are the kinds of bold investments that we should be seeing in the capital budget. We need to invest in them, and we need to run trains on them at a speed that makes sense. Has the Minister of Transportation met with the CEO of VIA Rail to discuss establishing a regional rail service in New Brunswick, as he himself had once proposed?

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wow, there was a lot encapsulated in that question. When I answered a question for a member opposite, I did say that I would not speak to what will be in my speech tomorrow, but I can say that there is no monorail planned in my budget for this year. I have been speaking with officials at VIA Rail about what they plan to do with its service to New Brunswick and with its service further on.

But this government is also listening to the concerns of the people of New Brunswick, and there are issues around getting people from different parts—the more rural parts—of the province to get medical service and to have meetings with Social Development. We, as a government, as an active multidepartmental group, will take a look at what the options might be to provide service to residents in rural areas to get them to medical appointments, to see social workers, and to do other things that they need to do. This is on our radar.

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

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of options, Maritime Bus has been doing its best to be our community connector, thanks to the commitment of CEO Mike Cassidy, but for anyone who uses the intercity bus service, they would know that its coverage is inadequate. For example, on Saturdays, there is no bus from Fredericton to Moncton or Sackville. There is no direct bus from Fredericton to Miramichi on any day.

Mr. Cassidy recently told the media that he would like to see a regional transportation plan developed. It is something that I have advocated as well. He sent a loud message to the government saying that he is committed to the region. His company is here to stay, but we need a plan. Incredibly, DTI does not have a specific policy related to intercity busing, never mind rail. When will the Minister of Transportation implement a policy on intercity busing and enlist her Maritime counterparts to develop a regional transportation plan? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To continue with what I was talking about in my last answer, we are working as the full government to look at opportunities for regional transportation in New Brunswick. You are correct that Maritime Bus would like to be involved in that solution. We are working with our counterparts in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia to



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talk about regional transportation because this is a regional issue. This is not just a New Brunswick issue.

We are committed, with our team. We have a great team at DTI that is working on intermodal transportation that also includes air travel. We are committed to working to find the best solutions for the residents of New Brunswick. We are working with our counterparts in Atlantic Canada to be able to get from Point A to Point B in the fastest, most economical way possible. We will continue discussions with our counterparts. We will continue working with the different departments, such as Education, Health, and Social Development, to make sure that our solution fits the needs of New Brunswick—all parts of New Brunswick and not just the municipalities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MOOSE-VEHICLE COLLISIONS

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Leader, PA): Mr. Speaker, over the past year, I have had many discussions with local representatives as well as citizens regarding road safety in relation to moose collisions. I have also had the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to talk about potential projects that could have mitigating effects on wildlife, including moose, adding to the number of injuries and fatalities due to vehicle collisions.

I was pleased to see an increase of \$78 million in the capital budget for this year, and I am curious as to how much of that would go to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure for new pilot projects. With that in mind, can the minister tell me whether there is any funding in the capital budget that is allocated for pilot projects relating to wildlife and vehicle collisions on New Brunswick highways? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today seems to be my day. As I said earlier in response to one of the questions, I am not going to give you any hints about what is in my budget speech tomorrow. You will learn about what is in there. There are some great things for all New Brunswick.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Yes, it is kind of like Christmas. You have to wait until tomorrow morning to open your presents.

I will say that the safety of New Brunswickers is definitely a priority. We do have wildlife mitigation projects underway now. We will continue with those projects. It is so hard to keep it in and not tell you what is going to happen tomorrow. Please be patient. I will tell you some really great news about some great transportation things tomorrow. Thank you.

[Translation]

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to go back briefly to what the Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform said in his first answer. He said that he did not want to tell New Brunswickers what to do. Nevertheless, he is forcing amalgamations, removing the plebiscite from the *Local Governance Act*, imposing his choice of CEO heading up the regional service commissions and forcing mayors to accept it, imposing new responsibilities on the municipalities, and now, he is requiring municipalities to invest in roads, as well as in the maintenance and construction of roads. Does the minister still believe that he does not want to tell municipalities what to do?

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am really looking forward to having an opportunity to go into committee. I challenge you: Stop your filibustering so that we can move into committee to debate a historic bill. I am imploring the member for Campbellton-Dalhousie to stop filibustering and debate Bill 82.

We are working collaboratively. The member for Tracadie-Sheila was at the conference of the Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick last weekend. There were 350 people in attendance. I did not tell anyone what to do. We collaborated, we consulted, and we will work together. We have a solution. We have a solution that is called the white paper to change the partnership between the province and the municipalities for the coming years, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

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

[Translation]

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is weird that the minister is challenging us to move into committee to question him, because his government is the one that imposed the gag order to put an end to discussion and debate about local governance reform. This is the most significant reform in the past 50 years.

The minister has been bragging right from the start about having taken the time to consult. He says he put 50 000 km on his car in order to consult the people of this province.

[Original]

(Interjections.)

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Yet...

[*Original*]

(Interjections.)

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Yet he tabled his white paper. A week later, he tabled the bill. A week after that, he wants to force us to pass the bill without even having had a chance to ask questions, Mr. Speaker.

So, I am asking the minister if he is prepared to talk to his Premier and withdraw the gag motion to enable us to debate the municipal reform bill properly. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Mr. Speaker, we have been here for seven weeks. We are here to work. What has the opposition done? It has passed two bills. Mr. Speaker, I am imploring the member for Campbellton-Dalhousie to go into committee and debate this bill. We have not had a chance to debate this bill.

Last weekend, at the conference of the Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick, the member for Tracadie-Sheila was fearmongering. I can guarantee you that we are working with the three municipal associations. We are working with the municipalities.

In fact, we held 36 public consultation sessions. Mr. Speaker, we have been talking about this for 25 years. The Equal Opportunity program was a good basis; we want to move forward, not only for the people who are here in the House, but also for our young people and our future generations. Mr. Speaker, I want to move into committee. I implore you: Let's go into committee.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Last question.

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, the number one concern for people in New Brunswick is that their tax rate is going to increase with this

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reform. Now, we have some LSDs that are joining some existing municipalities. The residents' main concern is what is going to happen to their tax rate in the upcoming years.

The government is giving more responsibilities to municipalities. It is forcing new expenses onto their backs, and now it is forcing municipalities to invest in roads, in the construction and maintenance of roads. We are asking the minister this: Will the minister put in place a cap to make sure that taxpayers in New Brunswick will not get dinged with all these new expenses that you are putting on the backs of municipalities? Will you put a timeline in place to make sure that taxpayers will be able to absorb the new costs that you are forcing on municipalities? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is great to see that we finally have some ideas. This is our objective—to debate Bill 82 so that the members opposite can provide ideas and solutions. This is what it is all about. So I am asking the member for Campbellton-Dalhousie this: We want to go to the committee, so please bring the bill to the committee so that we can discuss it.

Mr. Speaker, the fearmongering from the opposition is just beyond me. There is no way that we are going to raise people's taxes just like that. We are going to give entities, municipalities, the power to make decisions, to move forward, and to evolve. This is a white paper that is going to transform New Brunswick. Let's debate it. Stop being obstructionists. Stop it.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[*Original*]

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Order. I believe that the Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform has an answer to a question.

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

[*Translation*]

I had not heard the question clearly.

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[Original]

To the member for Fredericton-Grand Lake, I would like to respond to the question. The Farm Land Identification Program, which is called FLIP, is a voluntary program for farmers to defer property taxes, provided the land is used for agricultural purposes. In light of the proposed local governance reform, there will be no change in the eligibility for enrollment in FLIP. Approximately 49% of agricultural land in New Brunswick is registered under FLIP. I hope that answers your question, sir.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Leader, PA): Thank you, minister, for that response, through you, Mr. Speaker.

Sometimes, up in the gallery, we do not hear the questions that are raised on the floor. That is another reason that we have to get back to normal in this Legislature.

Nonetheless, I appreciate that answer. It does clarify what I had asked yesterday. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

