

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



May 13, 2022

CONTENTS

COST OF LIVING

Mr. Melanson
Hon. Mr. Higgs
Hon. Mr. Higgs
Mr. Melanson
Hon. Mr. Higgs
Mr. Melanson
Hon. Mr. Flemming, Q.C.
Hon. Mr. Flemming, Q.C.
Mr. Melanson
Hon. Mr. Flemming, Q.C.
Mr. Melanson
Mr. Melanson
Hon. Mr. Higgs
Mr. Melanson
Hon. Mr. Higgs
Mr. Melanson
Hon. Mrs. Shephard

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

Mr. D'Amours

Hon. Mr. Higgs

Mr. D'Amours

Mr. D'Amours

Hon. Mrs. Shephard

Mr. D'Amours

Hon. Mary Wilson

HERBICIDES

Mr. Coon

Hon. Mr. Crossman

Mr. Coon

Mr. Coon

Hon. Mr. Crossman

BRIDGES

Mr. Guitard

Hon. Ms. Green

CROWN LANDS

Mr. Guitard

Hon. Mr. Higgs

COST OF LIVING

Mr. Melanson

Hon. Mr. Higgs

Mr. Melanson

Hon. Mr. Higgs

Hon. Mr. Higgs

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Original]

COST OF LIVING

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, the Premier must be very disappointed this morning. Last night, his Maple Leafs lost in overtime, but do you know what? Many New Brunswickers are already in an overtime period by paying way too much for gas and for their groceries. In the meantime, the Premier is just looking at it and saying that he is hoping for the best. He is saying to New Brunswickers: We are not going to help you.

But over the last couple of days, Premier, in the polling period, you got your headline that you may be proposing a rebate for New Brunswickers who are paying way too much at the pump. Premier, you again have an opportunity this morning. As you were watching the hockey game last night, you had extra time to think about what this rebate will actually be all about. Can you give us the details regarding this rebate? Or do you have no intention at all of providing a rebate?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, the question that has come back over and over again is this: Is there a windfall that is being created by the high prices of gas, through taxation? What we said was...

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Well, I know. That would be the answer that would come out without any sort of analysis of any kind, but we would expect that from the opposition.

The idea is that... Are we seeing an increase in consumption? Are we seeing a decrease in consumption? Are we seeing a case where the costs of the needs of this province are also being challenged because, as we just heard from the announcement from our member about the case where the cost of fuel and the cost of service for contractors... We are recognizing that through a fuel surcharge.

So we are looking at every pocket and saying: Okay, how can we help with this? But first, we are trying to understand what is different, what is the case, and how we can add to this in a way that, yes, there is a surplus here that we did not plan on and we can direct that. Mr. Speaker, there are multiple programs in our budget—the largest budget in the history of the province—that we are also feeding, because every citizen deserves that budget.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): You know, Mr. Speaker, while the Premier waits and waits and waits and drags his feet, New Brunswickers are making very tough choices right now. If they put gas, which is quite expensive, in their vehicles, then they cannot go to the grocery stores to buy their food—essential food.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Mr. Premier, you know the numbers for the last quarter of the last fiscal year. You know the numbers. You could act right now, and you are choosing not to. You are waiting for another quarter, so it is going to be about six months before you actually make a decision. In the meantime, New Brunswickers are making very difficult choices, and it is hurting them, their kids, and their families, because they cannot afford to go to work every day or to buy their groceries. Make a decision now. Give them a rebate, if that is what you want to do, because they deserve it and they need it now.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, it must be a pleasure to sit and just flap on without any real, concrete evidence of any kind, but that is what we see. And that is why our province is in such a desperate state after every term of government that the Liberals have taken over. That is why there is such a problem. It is because there is never any real insight of any concrete value. There is just, oh, we will do this or do that because it looks good on a headline.

Well, the Leader of the Opposition knows full well that last year's numbers do not make any difference with regard to this year's numbers. He knows that. He knows that the fiscal year ended on March 31. He knows that. He was in Finance, so he knows that for this year's budget, all our money is going out to the departments. It is the highest budget in the history of this province because we know that people deserve more in health care, more in social development, more in education, more in highways—more in every category. So when the Leader of the Opposition sits over there and says that we are sitting on money, he knows better, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Yes, Mr. Speaker, we on this side know better. As you are being political, talking about Liberals and talking about politics, what we are talking about is all New Brunswickers. Liberals, Conservatives, and people of whatever political party affiliation. They are struggling. They are hurting right now. Stop being political and think about the needs of New Brunswickers. Stop. You got your headline. You got your headline, Premier. Now get to work. Get this rebate done, if that is what you want to do.

Do you know why I am upset? Because you guys are doing nothing to help New Brunswickers—nothing. You know the numbers. You could have acted last year, and you decided not to and to give a billion dollars to the bankers over the last two years. New Brunswickers have less money in their pockets. They are hurting and cannot buy the appropriate groceries. Premier, when are you going to help New Brunswickers?

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

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Flemming, Q.C. (Rothesay, Minister of Justice, Attorney General, PC): Stop the clock.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Flemming, Q.C. (Rothesay, Minister of Justice, Attorney General, PC): I gave the Leader of the Opposition a lesson in economics yesterday, and now I am going to give him a lesson in global politics.

This is caused by the ill-conceived energy policy of the federal government. If you concede climate change and we agree on everything, why do we not use our own energy during this period of transition? Why are we making Vladimir Putin rich? Why are we buying energy from the Ayatollah Khomeini, in a terrorist state? Why are we buying energy from a bunch of Venezuelan thugs? We are dying of thirst because we will not drink our own water. I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, this is an ill-conceived policy of the federal government. It is inflicted on the population because of ill-conceived ideas. I am telling you that it is Team Canada or Team Putin. That is what we have to decide.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Wow, Mr. Premier, please have him sit down. Yesterday, we lost two minutes of our lives, and it is three minutes now, for God's sake.

We know what the cause of the problem is—it is all of you. All of you are the cause of the problem. The real problem is that New Brunswickers are hurting right now. They are paying \$2.02 per litre at the pump again today. They are paying that at the pump. They cannot afford their groceries as much as they could before. It is affecting their purchasing power. Parents are paying more to bring their kids to day care every single day because of your inaction.

He is going to get up again. I know. He is going to blabber. At the end of the day, New Brunswickers do not want any blabber. They want action. They want solutions. Premier, bring them solutions.

Hon. Mr. Flemming, Q.C. (Rothesay, Minister of Justice, Attorney General, PC): We have an energy policy in this country whereby the federal government has attacked energy. It has attacked the production, the distribution, and the refining of our own product. It has intentionally taken government policy to increase the price of something. It is actually doing what it set out to do, and that is to raise the price of energy on the backs of Canadians. It is absolutely reprehensible that the federal government does this. It is hurting the poor. It is hurting the underprivileged. It is hurting businesses.

The federal government is driving this energy policy, and there is absolutely no reason for it. It is the intention of government. The federal government is doing this intentionally. Why are we buying, underwriting, and financing terrorists and thugs when we have our own energy right in this country? I say: Canada first, not Putin first.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, you have been here for some time.

(Interjection.)

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): You had your minute, which is another minute we have lost.

Mr. Speaker, you have been here for some time. Have you ever seen a member and minister so disconnected and out of control? He does not know what he is talking about. However, the main thing we take away from what he is saying again this morning is that he is assuming none of his responsibilities as a Cabinet member. The same applies to the Premier.

I will get back to the heart of this issue. There is a serious problem. The New Brunswick government could act. It could have taken action over the last month. It could still act to help people. The government does not want to help people pay less for what they consume, as other provinces have done. So, Mr. Premier, will you stop blaming others and assume your responsibilities by helping those who really need it now in New Brunswick?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): You know, this is likely the only program that the Liberals ever put in place that is actually happening in the way that they intended—to price us right out of the market, Mr. Speaker. That has been the philosophy of the federal government, and that is exactly what it is doing. It put us right out of the market.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the member talked about what other provinces are doing. What other provinces is he referring to? Alberta? Alberta, which has record-high costs for crude, can afford to do this because the royalties are so high that it can put money on the gas pumps. That is why Alberta can do this. Who else is doing that, Mr. Speaker? Anybody else? No.

But the problem is that the Liberals refuse—refuse—to take responsibility for a policy that is bankrupting our country. It is forcing people, big companies, to invest elsewhere. Big companies in British Columbia are moving to the United States. Big companies in Ontario and big companies everywhere are saying that Canada is no place to invest because there is no future in energy.

Let's just think about how we can fix this in the long term. How do we fix it now? How do we fix it for the future? Let's change the federal policy. Let's get one that works.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

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

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, in listening to the Premier over the past few days, something came to mind. The cutoff date to be the leader of the national PC Party has passed. You cannot run for that position. You are the Premier of New Brunswick. You will never become the Prime Minister of Canada. You are the Premier of this province. You have responsibilities for New Brunswickers. You have responsibilities for, at least, the most vulnerable.

You said yesterday that you were working for the most fortunate. We know. But you need to start working for the unfortunate, people who are struggling, and even some working people who are struggling—single parents and people who work for minimum wage and cannot afford their food. Forget the gas. Some do not have a vehicle. Mr. Premier, I am getting sick and tired of trying to put ideas into your head because you are not listening. Please listen to New Brunswickers who need help.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I remember when former Premier Gallant used to always come around and say that he would like to ask the opposition a question. Now, we never answered it, so I do not expect that the Leader of the Opposition will; but Mr. Speaker, I would like to question him. Does he really believe in the federal government's policy?

The current NDP government in Ottawa basically has a policy to destroy the economy in the country. Basically, it has a policy to see every commodity rise to a point where people cannot afford it. A commodity... Basically, the government wants to say: Do you know what? We do not need our own energy. We are maybe 1% of the climate change problem in the world, but we are going to sacrifice Canada to prove that point. We are going to sacrifice every person in our country. We are going to sacrifice the people in New Brunswick directly because they will not be able to afford commodities, food, or energy. We have a policy that is going to make them really appreciate it when they fill up, cannot afford it, and run out of gas down the road.

Mr. Speaker, maybe the Opposition Leader should just ask whether that is a policy for the future of our country or whether that is a policy that sees no future.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, is this ever going to end? Is this meaningless messaging ever going to end? More importantly, this is not even helping all those who are having a lot of trouble paying for their groceries. For the fishermen going fishing, in the last few days, it is costing them a fortune to fill their boats with diesel. It is expensive and it will have an impact on certain things: The price of lobster

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

and the fishing they do are costs consumers will pay. Parents who take their children to daycare will pay more. It is difficult. For people who go to work every day and must fill up their cars, it is expensive, far too expensive.

Will the Premier start talking about the realities of this province? He could help immediately with his decision—his decision—and give us an explanation today about the rebate he is proposing.

[Original]

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

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition says that we are not helping New Brunswickers, and I think that is a bit of an unfair statement. This very progressive government has looked at ways to put more money into the pockets of New Brunswickers. We can start by saying that social assistance recipients are eligible to receive more income as a result of changes that we have made. We are committed to leaving more money in the hands of low-income New Brunswickers. The measures of the reform put in place so far represent an investment of \$22.6 million and is expected to impact the support provided to almost 29 000 New Brunswickers.

Among the changes that we have included, child support payments are now excluded from having to be claimed on income tax. The Canada—New Brunswick Housing Benefit and compensatory money for personal injury are excluded now. That is money directly in their pockets, tax-free. The wage exemption has been increased to \$500 for those on income assistance, Mr. Speaker.

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

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if, this time, the former Minister of Health will rise, because his work was as mediocre as the work done by the current minister. We will see whether it is he or the minister who rises to answer this question.

Mr. Speaker, the minister seems to be forgetting that we are not currently on vacation. It is not yet time for vacation, but, for her, it is like a vacation. As we also know, when workers are happy, they give 110% and often even more. I would like the Minister of Health to explain to us why the issue of the collective agreement for nurses working in nursing homes is not settled.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

At the moment, the minister must realize that it is not vacation time. However, if she continues to act this way, someone, Mr. Speaker, will show her what vacation looks like. She may not like that because it will be a long-term vacation. So, when will nurses working in nursing homes get a collective agreement?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Finance today, which I guess I am not supposed to talk about... He is at a funeral, Mr. Speaker, as many may know.

I will get the latest on the nursing home negotiations. I know that they are progressing. I know that there is progress being made, but I can give an update for the member next week.

[Translation]

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, we have known for a long time that the Premier is also the Minister of Finance. He just did not want to honestly tell us and everyone in the province.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker, the minister can repeat to us that she does not take vacations because she...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Member, I am sure that it was inadvertent, but you used the word "honestly" when referring to the Premier. Would you withdraw that remark?

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): I will, Mr. Speaker. I will.

The Minister of Health can say many times that she is not going on vacation, but the thing is that she is not providing what New Brunswickers need. Not so long ago, this government boasted about having settled the paramedic file. Can the Minister of Health—not the Minister of Justice or the Premier—explain to us why paramedics cannot get their retroactive pay? To my knowledge, they are also professionals in this government.

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Health, PC): I appreciate the question, albeit a little sarcastic, from the member opposite, Mr. Speaker. It was unprecedented—unprecedented—that we solved so many contracts at once. It is unfortunate because we know that people are waiting for their retroactive pay. We know that they need it. The staff are working diligently to clean this up. Service New Brunswick has been working straight-out, hiring extra people to complete a very complex process. We value every single human resource individual in our health care system. Every single one of them has worked diligently throughout the past two years, and many of them have been

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

without vacation as well. We are on it. We are processing as quickly as possible, and every single penny will be returned to every individual very soon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health can also blame everybody else but, at some point, the government must assume its responsibilities. It must ensure that workers receive the money coming to them.

In that regard, I wonder why the minister only rises in the House to repeat that it is someone else's fault. Somebody has to take responsibility, and the Minister of Health is the one who must do it. What nurses in nursing homes and paramedics in this province deserve is to know that the Minister of Health is not asleep at the wheel. She must act and ensure that employees are treated with respect.

Can the Minister of Health tell us whether the retroactive pay of the paramedics in this province is in danger? Will they really receive all of the second portion that they are owed? When will they receive this portion? That is what paramedics want to know. We talk about solving problems in the hospital system and health system, but we are not able to pay our employees. When will this be done? When will you actually do it?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mary Wilson (Oromocto-Lincoln-Fredericton, Minister of Service New Brunswick, Minister responsible for Military Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. So far, roughly 22 000 employees have received retroactive pay. Certainly, at Service New Brunswick, we are working diligently to get everybody taken care of. It has been an unprecedented time with having this large number of back pays to be settled. We have actually hired 21 new employees to get this done. Manual retroactive pay calculations are required for thousands of workers. We received an extension from the Labour and Employment Board to May 9, 2022, and we are awaiting further details. We hope to have all retroactive pay issued for all CUPE agreements for active employees by the end of June or shortly thereafter. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HERBICIDES

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was just about six months ago that the Standing Committee on Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship tabled its first report to the Legislative Assembly. It made 20 recommendations concerning the use of herbicides, including glyphosate. Among its members is the Minister of Environment. Like all committee members, he agreed that NB Power should phase out spraying pesticides under its power lines.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

The Minister of Environment is the one responsible for administering and enforcing New Brunswick's *Pesticides Control Act*. NB Power can spray glyphosate under its power lines only if the Minister of Environment gives his permission by issuing a permit under that Act. Mr. Speaker, has the Environment Minister denied NB Power a permit to spray under its power lines this year? 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 for the question, member across the way. Everything is under review from our meeting earlier regarding the Climate Change Plan coming up. That may be included. I do not know, but just before the summer—very soon, this month or next—I am hoping to have things looked into. A review may be part of that. I will certainly be speaking to my department and, as well, to our secretariat as to where that stands. Thank you.

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, the minister seems to be a little confused about what legislation he is responsible for. One of the super-important recommendations found in the report to this House from the Standing Committee on Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship is to protect the sources of our drinking water supplies from spraying. Recommendation 13 is to ban the spraying of pesticides in watersheds designated as drinking water supplies under the *Clean Water Act*, which is another piece of legislation that the minister is responsible for, and like pesticides, it has nothing to do with the climate crisis.

(Interjections.)

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

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): That legislation actually delineates the specific boundaries of the many drinking water watersheds that have received legal recognition under the Act as drinking water supplies.

Has the minister banned the spraying of pesticides in the watersheds designated as drinking water supplies under the *Clean Water Act*? Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, PC): As you know, from our meetings with the secretariat and all our meetings with the groups about what we have heard, that is still in the process of being put in place. We are planning, and we will be moving ahead with regard to our plans for this year. Thank you.

BRIDGES

Mr. Guitard (Restigouche-Chaleur, L): My question is for the Minister of Transportation this morning. During estimates, in answer to a question regarding some of the bridges in

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

the Miramichi, she said that the abutments at the Pineville Bridge are crushed and that the bridge is kind of holding itself. She also said that the department is reevaluating the solution. We all know that the Premier was on-site and visited the area. Has there been any discussion between her department and the Premier's Office since that visit? Will there be any changes to her department's solution for the Pineville Bridge?

Hon. Ms. Green (Fredericton North, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are a team on this side of the House. We talk to each other regularly, so, of course, I talked to the Premier after he had a visit in the Miramichi region. We all talk to each other regularly.

Now, we are talking specifically about the Pineville Bridge. This year, we have planned work on both roads leading to the Pineville Bridge to improve the access on both sides of the river. We have done an analysis around the Pineville Bridge and its structural capacity. We have also hired an outside engineering firm to take a look at what the options are for that bridge and what possible solutions we may have in the future. That is happening right now, as we speak.

Do I have all the answers about the Pineville Bridge? No, Mr. Speaker, I do not, but we are working diligently with our engineering team at DTI and with an outside engineering consultant to take a look at the bridge. But we are fixing the road on both sides of the river. Thank you

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

CROWN LANDS

Mr. Guitard (Restigouche-Chaleur, L): My second question is for the Premier. I know, Mr. Premier, that you interfered with the Minister of Natural Resources regarding a letter. You probably interfered with him lately concerning the transfer of Crown land to a previous candidate in my riding.

Are you now trying to play into one of your, I would say, ministers with the most integrity? Are you trying to interfere in her work? Are you trying to interfere in the work of the employees of that department? Are you trying to destroy her credibility? You have one of the most credible ministers on your side. Her answer was not too, too clear, and I feel that you are playing games right now. Would you please let me know what you are doing with that department?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): You know, it is, I do not know, an extremely interesting and intriguing question. As my colleague the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure said, we speak on many files. I speak on many files with every Cabinet minister, Mr. Speaker. It is part of the job. We have discussions on specific issues in any area. I am not familiar with what the member is talking

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

about in terms of a land transfer or any of that. I do not know about that issue. Maybe the member would like to clarify that further, and we can discuss it more. I do not know the issue there.

There are a lot of insinuations going on. But, Mr. Speaker, do we speak regularly as Premier and Cabinet ministers, colleagues, and MLAs about the issues in ridings? Absolutely, we do, and we will continue to do that.

COST OF LIVING

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to ask the Premier again. You were here on Tuesday or, actually, Wednesday. We asked you many different questions regarding the initiatives of your government to try to help ease some of the pain of the cost of living. You did not say anything about any ideas.

You ran down to the media and talked about a potential rebate. Obviously, at the last second, at the last minute, you decided to throw out an idea without even thinking it through. That is pretty obvious because, since then, we have been asking more questions and the media has been asking you questions and you cannot define your idea for this potential rebate. It tells those of us here and many of the New Brunswickers who are struggling that you have no intention of having this rebate. It was just an idea for which you were going to get a headline during the polling period.

Here is another opportunity, Premier. Can you at least give us, at a high level, your ideas regarding a potential rebate?

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

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, the difference between the opposition and me is that we will look for ideas, we will look for solutions, and we will look to target in the areas that make the most difference. The Opposition Leader would have gone down to the media and said: Hey, guess what! I am going to throw in \$100 million. I have no idea what it is going to do, where it is going to go, and whom it is going to help, but make that a headline.

That is all there would have been to it because there would be nothing deeper. I know it is tough for the opposition members to go much deeper than to throw money, because that has been their mantra for years and they cannot equate it to how we really help people. Our budget really helps people. Our budget helps people in every category, and they know it. Do you know how many hard questions they had on the budget? Mr. Speaker, you can count them on one hand. They could not complain about the budget, yet they voted against it. They want to help people, and they want to make a difference. They do not know what makes a difference. All they know is how to create a headline and how to create a news story. End of story.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, if people take the trouble to listen to what the Premier has said today and over the last few days, they will see that he is not bringing forward any ideas for a solution. He has blamed everyone, even the Russian President. He has blamed the federal government and he has blamed us, on the opposition side. However, not once did he propose solutions for people struggling daily in New Brunswick.

Our responsibility is to give you an accurate picture of the situation. What are the issues? More people are going to food banks. More people cannot afford rent. More people have empty refrigerators. More people cannot afford to fill up their car. Meanwhile, the Premier is blaming others, including the Russian President in his solution, if he has one.

Mr. Premier, please, be serious. Explain to us whether you really have a solution regarding the rebate you talked about. Thank you.

[Original]

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

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is tough. When we see a province that has been expanding and growing as it is today and we see people recognizing it and coming here, it is tough to be in opposition. I know that. That makes it very difficult, so the opposition members have to think of something else. They have to think: Well, why are we in this position? We are in this position, number one, because the province is growing as it has never grown before. We have investment and people moving here like never before.

Mr. Speaker, we had a run through the COVID-19 pandemic. We had a COVID-19 team that worked together in everyone's best interests. Then two members quit because the going got tough and it was time to get out. We have a province that now has unique challenges that we have never seen before, unique challenges that have been thrust upon us because of an ill-conceived policy in Ottawa, a policy that, like any other thing that the Liberals ever put forward, is...

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Nothing in it is concrete. Throw it out there. We are going to shut down our economy and hope that we can survive. Well, do you know what, Mr. Speaker? There are people who are not surviving, and we need a new change in Ottawa.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Thank you, members. The time for question period has expired.