

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



May 20, 2022

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[Original]

COST OF LIVING

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, tonight at midnight, if the Premier wanted to—and he should do it—he could reduce the price at the pump. He could reduce the provincial portion of the gas tax at midnight tonight.

[Translation]

So, Mr. Premier, you have the authority; you should also be willing to reduce the price at the pump at midnight tonight by reducing the provincial portion of the gas tax. Mr. Premier, I am just going to ask you one question on that this morning. Will you do it at midnight tonight, yes or no?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting. You know, last-minute legislation would kind of be the typical mantra of the Liberal Party. So, okay, we bring something forward that is going to address a national issue, an issue that we know is facing our country. We know that we cannot chase this as the opposition would suggest. It is well beyond our means. It is well beyond the means of any province.

But there is a national issue at stake here. There is a global issue at stake here. There is an opportunity for us to be bigger than New Brunswick and to actually push, in a united way—as we did with COVID-19 before they quit—for a national policy that changes the game and fixes it, because we have the wherewithal to do so. But, no, instead, it is copy, me too, and a motion that just comes out because we were suggesting working together for a solution. Mr. Speaker, this problem is bigger than New Brunswick, but New Brunswick can play a key role in fixing it. That is what we asked for, and that is what the opposition refused to give us.

LEGISLATION

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, I want to shift to a very important issue and, quite frankly, a very constructive piece of legislation that was tabled this week: Bill 114, *Child and Youth Well-Being Act*.

[Translation]

The *Child and Youth Well-Being Act*.

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[Original]

I honestly want to commend the department that has, I suspect, worked very hard on this piece of legislation. I, to be honest, want to commend the government for bringing this forward at a time when we have way too many children who are being left unprotected and who are going through very unacceptable situations.

But I do want to ask something of the minister or the Premier for that matter. Given the fact that there are a lot of very positive or constructive suggestions and elements in this piece of legislation, I would like to ask the Premier whether he would consider bringing this to the law amendments committee so that we can have experts come and chime in some more on this piece of legislation.

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

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition's question, and I also thank him for his kind words. I want to assure him as well that, yes, this has taken many years of work, with many stakeholders, through the department. When I was Minister of Social Development, that work began. My colleague has carried it on and brought it to fruition, and a tremendous amount of input was received from stakeholders as this bill was put together.

I agree that there should be questions asked on this bill, and I think that the most appropriate thing is to get it to committee to see whether there are flaws in it. I think that is what committee is all about, and I think that it is a logical step in the progression of this very important legislation. Mr. Speaker, we are looking forward to getting this bill to committee, to hearing the questions that are being asked and to seeing what changes are necessary, if indeed any changes need to be made. So I thank the member opposite for bringing it up.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would never use the word "flaws" because I very much think that there are a lot of good things in this bill. But I would say that there may be elements missing in the legislation. I am no expert, and none of us here actually... Well, there may be social workers here. I am not sure. But that being said, there are probably people who know way more than we about how we can better protect our children and the children who are going through unacceptable situations in New Brunswick.

Some people listening would not know what the law amendments committee is. The Standing Committee on Law Amendments is a subcommittee of the Legislature that allows experts and stakeholders to come in to give their insight, expertise, and knowledge on a specific issue, and this is a very important one. So I would like to ask the Premier whether he would seriously consider having this go to the law amendments committee so that we can see what is actually missing in this legislation so that we can improve it.

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

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to reemphasize that New Brunswick is the last province to bring forward child protection legislation separate and apart from the *Family Services Act*. After all these years, there have been responses to the discussion paper. There have been almost 1 000 responses to the online survey. Approximately 20 organizations attended in-person stakeholder sessions. All the input, the feedback, was put into the development of this bill.

If the members truly want to identify whether there are issues that require this bill to go to law amendments, I think that they have the perfect opportunity to do that in committee. Maybe they will see that the homework truly has been done. I would really, truly encourage them to get this bill to committee. Let's answer all their questions. I know that they will have stakeholders in the community who will back them up and give them questions to ask as well, so let's get there and get this done.

[Translation]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, I find it quite unfortunate to hear the answer from the government, through the Minister of Health. You know, I read the bill following first reading. It is a 114-page bill, which is really rather large and significant. This bill will make constructive changes, I admit, but this Act has been around for 40 years. A few changes have been made along the way.

I read that the government consulted a number of stakeholders. However, having been on the government side, I also know that consultation is an important step. However, when we get to the real bill, in black and white, some elements may be missing, following consultations. So, all we are asking is that experts be allowed to come and tell us how we can improve the bill. I do not understand why the government is refusing to send this bill to the Standing Committee on Law Amendments.

[Original]

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

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, we have been talking to experts, not only in this province but also all across Canada. Every single province in this country has child protection legislation separate and apart from its family services Acts. We were the last to do it. It was incumbent on us to utilize not only all the expertise that has been grown throughout our country but also that which is specific to our province. There has been a tremendous amount of consultation. I know the people who worked on this, and I thank the Leader of the Opposition for acknowledging that the staff have worked very diligently on this file.

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It is a very, very important file, and we need to get it to committee to see whether the opposition members can identify areas in which more work is needed. I think that they might be pleased with what they see. If there are areas that need more work, that is when we would address it. But let's get it to committee, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point something out to you. I am doing this in a very constructive way, Madam Minister and Mr. Premier.

Next week, we will... First of all, there are about 30 bills before us. That is a lot of bills dealing with a lot of issues. Next week, we will only have two days in committee. Also, we will only be in the House until June 10 for regular business and committee work. There is a lot of substance, and a lot of issues will be dealt with by these 30 bills.

This particular bill is significant, and we believe it will have positive consequences. We want to make sure we take the necessary time. Experts and other people could come and give us their opinions. I spoke with the President of the New Brunswick Association of Social Workers. I spoke with the Child and Youth Advocate. They would like to come and bring other things to our attention. Why are you not considering referring this bill to the Standing Committee on Law Amendments?

[Original]

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

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Minister responsible for La Francophonie, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the Leader of the Official Opposition. We are taking this bill seriously. We understand that the opposition is taking this bill seriously. However, there are several ways or means to debate a bill. We can do it in committee. At this time, we are trying to find out whether it is possible to send this bill to the Standing Committee on Economic Policy for a week during the summer.

[Original]

If we can move that into the economic policy committee, we are looking to see whether we can do it for an entire week, just one straight, full week on this piece of legislation. That gives plenty of time for the questions that the opposition members have. This is a system that they created, Mr. Speaker, and we are trying to work with them to make sure that we can get this done. Thank you.

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

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): That is new, constructive information that the House Leader just offered.

At the end of the day, we do not want to debate this legislation, because we think that there is a lot of good stuff in here. We want to be in a position of having expert stakeholders come in and give us insight on how it can be improved. That is all. That is it. If the government wants to go to committee for a week this summer, why do you not make it the law amendments committee so that these individual experts can come in? If they are on vacation that week, they may change their vacation time. We will do the same, by the way. We will be there.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that it is too much to ask, to really make sure that we are going to protect these children to the maximum possible—the maximum possible—by having experts from outside come in and give us their insight. Honestly admit that you should do this and go to law amendments. You should.

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

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, I commented on the fact that the research into this legislation began back in, gosh, maybe 2019. It has been a very extensive and exhaustive consultation with stakeholders. I also want to point out that, importantly, this new piece of legislation includes a mechanism for a future review at five years and then every seven years after proclamation. That is important. We really need that. This is going to provide opportunities for regular maintenance of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, let's get it to committee. Let's ask questions. There is a whole week coming up where the research staff can find out what the concerns are. This is legislation that has been given a great deal of due diligence, and we are completely open to answering any and all questions that the members opposite have.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, this will be my last question on this issue for today. I think this is serious, obviously. This is very serious.

Minister, do not sell your piece of legislation. We are already sold on it. I think it is a matter of the Premier really thinking about it and—without being disrespectful, Premier—showing leadership on the fact that he should, I think, consider bringing this to the law amendments committee and bringing in some of these experts and stakeholders who, I think, want to offer some of their expertise and knowledge on how this can be improved.

I am telling you, it is a very good first step. I read it once, but I think this has to be considered. Listen, if you change your mind—because it does not seem as though you want

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to go to the law amendments committee—we will not criticize you for changing your mind. We will actually congratulate you for going to the law amendments committee, for trying to bring this legislation to where it should be, and for doing everything that we, as legislators, can do to improve this legislation to protect the children. Premier, will you answer that question?

Hon. Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Minister responsible for La Francophonie, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This piece of legislation, as the minister indicated, has gone through an exhaustive process. We are the last ones in the country to get it done. We have gleaned a lot of learning and understanding from those pieces of legislation, and we have applied that to the New Brunswick situation. At the end of the day, it is common practice for the opposition to want everything to go to the law amendments committee. At the end of the day, we have a process here, and again, we are working on an opportunity to try to make sure that we give the opposition enough time to ask the questions that it wants to ask and get the information that it wants to get.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker—I talked about this yesterday—when this is passed and the regulatory process begins, there will be a period when people can ask questions about the regulations that are created because that is where a lot more information comes out. There are a lot of opportunities here. We are going to continue working on trying to get some time to give to the opposition, which it needs in order to ask questions on this piece of legislation, which is important. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

INQUESTS

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, I will go to a different subject matter. We have all listened at a distance to the proceedings of the coroner's inquest on Chantel Moore over the week. What we have heard is quite disturbing. I cannot put myself in the family members' shoes to know how they are feeling and what they have gone through.

There are some specific recommendations that have come out of this. There are some recommendations about how police deal with First Nations in their liaisons with them, about having complete training for Taser use, and about the availability of Tasers, and there are many other good recommendations. I want to ask the Premier whether these recommendations—all of them—will not only be accepted but also be implemented.

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Public Safety, PC): I would like to thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for his question. Yes, regarding the coroner's inquiry, which ended yesterday, into the death of Chantel Moore, my sympathies go out to Chantel's mother and to her family. I cannot imagine, for the life of me, how difficult it must be to lose a child, especially under these circumstances.

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There is a process in place when it comes to the recommendations from a jury at a coroner's inquest. These recommendations will be passed to the institutions that they are supposed to go to. The recommendations will also be forwarded to the Department of Justice and Public Safety. Each appropriate agency will indicate its ability to comply with the regulations, and if so, the response will include the details and the timeline for that implementation.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Through you, Mr. Speaker, my thanks to the minister. Given your reaction, it seems that you are taking this matter very seriously. My question will be very short. We will wait for all recommendations to be included in the annual report and submitted to the various agencies and departments. However, it is asked that all these recommendations be not only accepted but implemented within six months. I think a six-month period to ensure these situations never again arise is not too much to ask. Mr. Minister, will you commit today to complying with this six-month deadline indicated in the recommendations?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Hogan (Carleton, Minister of Public Safety, PC): Thank you very much for the question. As I said, these recommendations go to the specific institutions that they are directed at. We will await their reports on how and whether or not they can implement these recommendations. From the reading of the recommendations, I would agree that they look to be very good. However, I am not in a position to say whether or not they will all be implemented at this time or whether or not they can be done within six months. The report of the coroner will be tabled by the minister at the end of the year, and that will detail the recommendations, the findings, and what happens with those.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Mr. Speaker, as you know, the people of Southwest Miramichi-Bay du Vin have been without representation for almost a year. During this time when this riding had no voice in the Legislature, this government introduced and pushed through a municipal reform that will have generational effects on residents and communities right across the province.

The residents on Route 118 in South Nelson have been asking for some time to be part of Rural District 5 rather than the city of Miramichi. We are talking here of a 7 km stretch of road that has over 100 homes, and the people there want to keep their rural way of life. They were not consulted during this process, and they are now being forced into a situation that neither the city nor the residents of Route 118 have asked for or want. So I ask the

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minister: Why are you arbitrarily drawing the line on one side of the road and forcing this amalgamation on the people of South Nelson?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We take all requests seriously. Unfortunately, this is the first time I am hearing about this issue. It is nice to see the Liberal Party becoming aware of what is going on with the local governance reform. It will have taken a by-election. It will have taken a by-election.

[Original]

(Interjections.)

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

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): It will have taken a by-election for the party to become aware of what is going on with the local governance reform. Mr. Speaker, we will certainly review all requests. As you know, we had tight deadlines. We have implemented a bold plan. March 4 was the deadline for boundaries. March 30 was the deadline for community structures. May 30 is the deadline for toponymy. Mr. Speaker, as we can see now, we are still getting requests from the opposition on May 20. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is funny that he is saying that it is the first time he has heard of it. His deputy minister has already had a Zoom meeting with them, and supposedly, the Conservative candidate is meeting with them tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, the minister is trying to convince us that this municipal reform is based on principles and not on politics. Yet the people of Stilesville, who were in the exact same situation as the people of South Nelson, were able to get out of their amalgamation with the city of Moncton and remain in the rural district. The only differences between these two LSDs are that one has a Cabinet minister who ate lunch every day with and played golf with the minister of municipal reform and the other had no representation.

Will the minister commit to sitting down, in person, in South Nelson with the residents so that he can get a better understanding of the area and why it makes no sense to rezone these folks to be part of the city and to designate them as part of the rural district?

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Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Mr. Speaker, again, it is a false narrative that the member from Tracadie is saying in this House today. Stilesville is not a community. Stilesville is a neighbourhood.

Day in and day out, as the member from Tracadie knows, I travel this great province.

[Translation]

I was in Edmundston last week with people from Haut-Madawaska. I spent three hours with the municipal council members from Haut-Madawaska. I have confidence.

[Original]

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): I have confidence in these communities. Great, great things are happening in New Brunswick.

We are going to Gagetown and Petitcodiac this afternoon to talk about a new name for the new area. Mr. Speaker, we will discuss at any time with anybody. As I have indicated, we met some people yesterday. However, I am asking the members from Tracadie and Madawaska Les Lacs to talk to the community of Haut-Madawaska also. It goes both ways. Do your job.

[Translation]

FISHING INDUSTRY

Ms. Thériault (Caraquet, L): Mr. Speaker, the fishing industry in New Brunswick is currently going through some big changes. For example, spring herring fishing and mackerel fishing are suspended back home, and many crews are obviously greatly affected.

Another industry in deadlock is the shrimp fishery. You see, Mr. Speaker, for three years now, the shrimp market has been struggling as stocks available to our fleet have diminished. We are talking about hundreds of jobs linked to the shrimp industry in the Acadian Peninsula.

First of all, I would like to know if the Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries is aware of the gravity of the situation and if she has created a strategy to avoid a catastrophic season for owner-operators, obviously, but also for deckhands, processing plants, and plant workers.

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[Original]

Hon. Mrs. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Thank you for the question, member opposite. This is something that we are taking very seriously. I have had meetings with the shrimpers. I have had meetings with the Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels (FRAPP) and with the crab industry. We are very, very, very clear that they are suffering, and we are working with DFO to get a resolution and to find support for our fishermen. If nothing else, we have to see about getting them some financial support for the suffering that they are going through. In our herring fishery and our mackerel fishery, we are very clear on the fact that we have people who are suffering and need support, and we are working with our federal partners to make sure that they get it. Thank you.

PESTICIDES

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Mr. Speaker, we already know about many of the effects that clear-cutting and the spraying system have had on our forests. Earlier this month, a study led by New Brunswicker Matt Betts found that clear-cutting has caused between 33 million and 104 million bird deaths in the Maritimes between 1985 and 2020.

This Sunday is the International Day for Biological Diversity. What better time for the Minister of Environment to make a big announcement here in the Legislature! The very least that this Minister of Environment can do is to start by protecting our drinking water watersheds by phasing out glyphosate use in them, as was recommended by the environmental stewardship committee, of which he is a member.

My question, Mr. Speaker, is this: Has the Minister of Environment safeguarded our drinking water supplies by banning the spraying of pesticides over protected, legally designated watersheds? Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand in the House to talk about the great work—work to protect our environment and to expand the areas where diversity can thrive—that the Department of Natural Resources, in conjunction with the Department of Environment, has been doing since 2018, when we came into government.

When it comes to the issue of reports from Mr. Betts, I am very pleased to say that the Department of Natural Resources has spoken at several points with Mr. Betts, and we have talked an incredible amount about the work that we can do collaboratively, together. He has been in my office. I have been on the phone with him. I am excited about the work and the research that he has done.

What is really exciting is that Mr. Betts' research and his work are affirming the direction in which we in the Department of Natural Resources are moving. We have put significant

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work together to expand protected natural areas, and we have done unprecedented work to provide mitigation strategies for species at risk. I would love to have the member opposite ask some more questions related to the good work that we are doing for biodiversity and ecological sustainability here in New Brunswick.

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Yet, Mr. Speaker, the forest continues to be degraded.

We asked this question to the Minister of Environment last week and did not get an answer. I asked again today and did not get an answer. I am going to ask another question.

Over 35 000 New Brunswickers have signed a petition calling for a ban on the spraying of glyphosate on Crown lands, the largest petition in New Brunswick's history. The Minister of Environment is a member of the environmental stewardship committee that made 20 recommendations about glyphosate use, including a ban under power lines. The Minister of Environment is 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 issues it a permit under the Act.

So, my question, Mr. Speaker—and I would like to hear from the Minister of Environment—is this: Has the minister signed NB Power's permit to spray under its power lines this year, yes or no? If he cannot remember, then I would ask him to take it under advisement and come prepared next week.

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

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I missed the last part. I could not quite hear what you were saying.

Regarding your question last week and your question today, we believe strongly in protecting the land and the water. The Standing Committee on Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship, as you know, was created to address the concerns that you mentioned. Regarding a number of issues, including the use of pesticides, we are reviewing the report of the Standing Committee on Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship now.

For your information, NB Power has submitted an application for a pesticide permit, and that is currently under the review of the department. The permit has not yet been issued. NB Power has committed to not spraying pesticides under transmission lines that are located within areas designated as protected watersheds. Also, the department has not issued permits for the spraying of pesticides on Crown land that is located within areas designated as protected watersheds. Thank you.

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[Translation]

FISHING INDUSTRY

Ms. Thériault (Caraquet, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was predictable that the Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries would throw the ball back to the federal government, even though, to a certain extent, I understand her reasoning. It is true that quotas fall under federal jurisdiction.

However, anything to do with product processing and the hundreds of jobs that it creates is the responsibility of the provincial government. The New Brunswick government has a role to play in defending an endangered provincial industry.

I question the minister's comments when she says that she will do everything she can to help, because the market has been struggling for three years. In a letter sent last month, she suggests a marketing plan to boost sales and stimulate the market. Do we agree that, in this situation, the shrimp fishing fleet, which has not yet gone to sea, needs more than a marketing plan?

So, this is what I would like to know: When the minister carried out consultations—that is what she said—did she take the time to meet with stakeholders and sit down with them to develop a strategy that would lead to the survival of this critical industry for the Acadian Peninsula?

[Original]

Hon. Mrs. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Thank you to the member opposite for the question. This is a very complicated and layered issue. We have been working on it, and as I have said, we are defending our industries here in the province and working with our federal partners.

The shrimp industry is also being affected by the number of redfish that are occurring within the gulf and that are consuming the shrimp at an alarming rate. We also have an opportunity to work with our federal partners to look at creating a redfish industry where we could actually use the redfish for bait, which would help alleviate the stresses on the herring industry. We are looking at the seals that are overpopulating Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick and that are consuming vast quantities of our herring. We are working with our industries in trying to come up with alternatives, such as improving the catch of the redfish, which would take the pressure off the shrimp and increase shrimp stocks.

I continue to defend our shrimp processors and fishers to our federal partners to try to come up with a solution. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): The time for question period has expired.