

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



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CONTENTS

NB POWER

Mr. McKee
Hon. Mr. Holland
Mr. McKee
Hon. Mr. Holland
Mr. McKee
Hon. Mr. Holland
Mr. McKee
Hon. Mr. Holland
Mr. McKee
Hon. Mr. Holland
Mr. McKee
Hon. Mr. Holland
Mr. K. Chiasson
Hon. Mr. Holland
Mr. K. Chiasson
Hon. Mr. Holland
Mr. K. Chiasson
Hon. Mr. Holland
Hon. Mr. Holland
Hon. Mr. Holland

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

AGRICULTURE

Mr. K. Arseneau

Hon. Mrs. Johnson

Mr. K. Arseneau

Hon. Mrs. Johnson

Hon. Mrs. Johnson

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

Mr. Bourque

Hon. Mr. Higgs

Mr. Bourque

Hon. Mr. Higgs

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. LePage

Hon. Mr. Crossman

Mr. LePage

Hon. Mr. Crossman

NB POWER

Mr. McKee

Hon. Mr. Holland

HEALTH CARE

Hon. Mr. Fitch

Mr. McKee

Mr. McKee

Hon. Mr. Fitch

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Original]

NB POWER

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. NB Power has asked for the largest rate hike in 41 years. If it goes through at 9%, it is going to be very, very difficult for New Brunswickers. This is at a time when New Brunswickers are seeing skyrocketing rents, which will come in January, and skyrocketing property tax assessments. There is the cost of living—food is up by 10%.

I am wondering, here, out loud, whether NB Power is jumping the gun. I know that when NB Power fired its CEO, it undertook a study with PricewaterhouseCoopers to review operations and find efficiencies—a significant undertaking. I am wondering whether NB Power is jumping the gun by coming here with a significant rate increase application. This has not been seen in 41 years. To the minister responsible for this Crown corporation, I want to know why NB Power has taken this route.

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an exciting time when a political party gets a brand-new leader. I am sure that the Liberals are no exception and are enjoying the fact that they have just elected a new leader. You should have an exciting period of time to reflect on that.

But maybe you would like to take a little time to get together and get your stories straight with your new leader, because we have seen some conflicts within the caucus and with the new leader, whether it be on the Liberals moving forward with the SMR file and investing in it and then having the leader make confusing comments about the commitment to that after the fact or whether it be on the question here today from the member opposite and then the recent story that came out where your leader is standing there saying that this process should unfold. She stands in support of the fact that we are following a process. Also, the member opposite must have been in the House when we incorporated the legislation that puts forward the requirement to go forward with a rate increase. I am a little confused. Maybe you need some time to get things together between you and your new leader.

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

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Again, Mr. Speaker, when this government has its back against the wall, all it can do, all week, is throw insults across the floor. We are just trying to be constructive.

I am wondering: What has this minister done with respect to giving direction to the Crown corporation for which he is responsible? When it fired the CEO, it undertook a study with PricewaterhouseCoopers. Yes—NB Power is mandated to bring forward rate applications. Last year, it took one for 2%. I am wondering what direction has been given for NB Power to come forward with a significant rate increase, which has not been seen in 41 years,

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

while, at the same time, it is undertaking a study to look at transformational operational changes at the utility that could save ratepayers from these significant increases and find efficiencies by looking at renewables and other options. Why has it proceeded in this fashion?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, the direction has been clear, and the direction has been forthright. From the time we took office in 2018, we said that the political games with the utility had to stop. What we said was this: Here is a 100-year-old organization that has been a football going back and forth between political parties, and as a result, it has been put in compromising situations. It was one thing to say that, but it was another thing to put action behind two legislative changes that came from consultation with the utility to find out what it needed in order to perform at a high level.

Also, despite taking cues from the fact that political interference has created a lot of the circumstances and situations that have put the utility behind the eight ball, the member opposite is criticizing this government for actually letting a corporation be a corporation, for having it come to us with solutions, for letting it create efficiency programs, and—in the words of your leader—for letting the process follow itself so that we can see results in a timely fashion.

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, I am asking this minister: What has the government done over the last four years to allow the Crown corporation to get to where it is at this point in time—asking for the most significant rate increase that we have seen in 41 years? Yes, our leader has made comments about allowing the EUB processes to play out. That is what the government has said it wants to do.

The Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development is accusing me of trying to meddle in the EUB process. That is not what we have said. The Auditor General has come down hard against all parties for meddling in the past. We are aware of that. But this is about what this government could have done to help the utility get to where it is at this point in time, right now, when it has to ask for this megaincrease while, at the same time, it is undertaking a study. Is NB Power jumping the gun with this request for a significant increase instead of waiting for the report to be tabled?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether the member opposite is hearing me when I actually answer the question. When he talks about what is being done, let's talk about what is being done. He references and answers his own question when he talks about the fact that this is the government that supported transformational change at the absolute highest level of leadership with the utility. When in the history of the province have we seen steps taken at that level? We have supported bringing in a consultant of credibility, in the form of PricewaterhouseCoopers, to bring forward initiatives that will make that operation

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

perform at a high level. We have made changes to the legislation. We have given mandated targets for debt reduction.

When the member opposite throws some sort of word salad at us to try to confuse people and say that we are not answering the questions, nothing could be further from the truth. We have stood in this Legislature, we have been in the economic policy committee, we have answered questions in question period, and we have a four-year track record of getting results and helping the utility perform at a high level, which is something that seemed absent from the agenda of the former Liberal government.

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Again, Mr. Speaker, it is the same as it was with the Health Minister earlier this week. The ministers come in here and say that what they have done over the last four years is transformational change. Well, obviously, as in health care, it is not working.

Why is NB Power now asking for a rate increase of 8.9%? Yes, our leader has said not to meddle in the EUB process, which is a quasi-judicial board. But she has also said that this government needs to be there to help New Brunswickers who are struggling at a time when assessments are skyrocketing, rents will go up in January, and the cost of food is up by 10%.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has said in scrums this week that the government is going to be there to help New Brunswickers. Is he just trying to grab headlines? What is the government going to do to help everyday New Brunswickers, not to mention the small and medium-sized businesses that will be affected by this? What is government going to do to help New Brunswickers who are going to struggle to put the heat on this winter?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, it would appear that someone in the back room—the leader, the interim Leader of the Opposition—is busy writing questions to ask in the Legislature but not paying attention to New Brunswick, to Canada, or to the circumstances that the globe finds itself in as it relates to energy and its future. When the member asks about this horrific rate increase, which his leader is very much in favour of seeing follow through the process, because the EUB will determine what it actually is... We have that objectivity, so we can take heart in that.

But what the member opposite is failing to mention in this House—so that the New Brunswickers who are listening do not hear—is the double-digit rate increase just across the border in Nova Scotia. He is not talking about other jurisdictions that are in the same situation. Some jurisdictions have gone for two 5% increases, which would eclipse what we are looking at here in New Brunswick. I encourage the member opposite to have a look at what we are doing, at the efficiency programs, and at the fact that we are committed to the province of New Brunswick.

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

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I asked what the government was going to do to help individuals and small and medium-sized businesses in New Brunswick. Indeed, it is possible that economic circumstances across Canada and around the world are the same in terms of gas and electricity prices. However, if we look at the States and the other Canadian provinces, we see that their governments are there to help the people.

The current government of our province does not seem to be there to help when times are tough. As we know, earlier this year, the government put an end to the Home Energy Assistance Program. Of course, it was an annual benefit of only \$100, but it was something to help people.

My question is this: What is the government going to do to help individuals and small and medium-sized businesses in New Brunswick? Will it reinstate this Home Energy Assistance Program for New Brunswickers? Will it expand the program with more money? Will the government use the Emergency Fuel and Food Benefit to provide more assistance to New Brunswickers?

[Original]

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

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, in addition to the process of taking a number of steps to help the utility to become a high-performing organization and working in partnership with it versus trying to manipulate or meddle in its affairs, indeed, the member opposite must not have heard or paid attention to the fact that we made an announcement that is going to affect, benefit, and help New Brunswickers who are in an income bracket of \$70 000 or less. The last time I checked, that is a group of people that runs through a broad range of New Brunswickers. It includes everybody from seniors, workers, and single parents and across the genders. This is a demographic that needed help, and we have come forward with a program that we are going to move ahead with. We have also talked about federal programs we are pursuing, because the feds have them, and we are going to access them to help in the conversion from oil in home heating.

At the end of the day, to say that we are inactive is confusing to me because we have done nothing but address the organization, provide it with assists, and deal with something that is going to help New Brunswickers.

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

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, this government eliminated the Home Energy Assistance Program. It eliminated the program, so the Conservative government is not there to help New Brunswickers.

There is also the Emergency Fuel and Food Benefit, but it is very restrictive. We were only able to help a small number of New Brunswickers. I am asking the government to expand this program and reinstate the Home Energy Assistance Program with significant funding to help New Brunswickers this winter, Mr. Speaker.

If we also want to talk about the heat pump program, it is too restrictive as well. The set limit for household income is less than \$70 000 a year. Many families will have problems with their house because they will not have access to this program. The government has invested \$30 million over three years. That might help a few thousand people this winter—I do not know—it is not a lot. Will the government expand this program and find more eligible suppliers to install these heat pumps?

[Original]

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

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that it is interesting to hear criticism from the members of the opposition on talk about actually implementing something. Is that not the state of affairs that we find ourselves in? Typically and historically, I think that New Brunswickers want to have a government that is willing to act versus have a conversation. They can come up with all sorts of scenarios that take care of everybody—that put a chicken in every pot, so to speak—but if you sit on your hands and do nothing, as was evidenced by historical Liberal governments, that is no good for New Brunswickers. I will choose taking steps, moving forward, correcting drift along the way, and actually starting to book people right now—today—for that program versus sitting around talking about it forever.

The member opposite misses a point. He misses a very important point. It seems as though his research vanishes as soon as we actually take steps. The member opposite must know about the freeze that NB Power put on rates during the COVID-19 period, when people needed it the most. We have been here for New Brunswickers. We will be here for New Brunswickers.

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, it is clear that the Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development did nothing to help NB Power to mitigate its operational costs over the past few years. Yesterday, he said that there was nothing he could do about the NB Power rate application because the EUB is independent.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Can the minister explain why he was prepared to try to intervene with the EUB when Irving Oil made an application?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the EUB, we stand on the independence of it. If the member opposite remembers, that was a situation in which stakeholders came to the province of New Brunswick and we reached out to say: If they have an issue, can you look at it? It was not: Can we interfere? It was not: Can we meddle with it? We were basically taking the concerns of a stakeholder group to an independent organization and saying: We are not interested in influencing or impacting the decision whatsoever, but we are highlighting it as a priority, because it is a significant area that needs to be looked at. From there, what the EUB did was up to it.

Also, the member opposite is forgetting that when we saw fuel prices rise staggeringly, we also reached out to the EUB and said: What can we do to help bring relief to New Brunswickers? That was absent from the statement of the member over there. It is funny how the amnesia pills go around when it comes to what we on this side do that is positive and helpful to New Brunswickers. I encourage you to go back to the history of the past four years to see what we have done to make a difference.

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

(Interjections.)

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

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Mr. Speaker, let's keep the show going.

NB Power will embark on the refurbishment of the Mactaquac Dam, a project that could experience significant cost overruns and put NB Power in an even worse financial situation. Because of legislation brought forward in the fall, the minister completely removed oversight. I do not know, Mr. Speaker, if you understand the arc of the story: the taxpayers of New Brunswick, the EUB is independent, Irving Oil intervenes with the EUB, and Mactaquac Dam—no EUB. So, Mr. Minister, what independent oversight will you put in place to ensure greater fiscal accountability on this project?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I guess that whenever we make any mention of financial oversight, it is a concept that is foreign to a Liberal government. When it just seems easier to throw money out a window, the members opposite forget what we said.

We stood here and very clearly stated that the EUB will be invited to look at all the financial ramifications, components, and pieces of the Mactaquac Dam project. That is operating within the scope of responsibility, and I would ask the member opposite to speak to his

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

new leader and say: What do you think we should do with the Mactaquac Dam—nothing? It is something that is responsible for such a significant part of our renewable energy here in New Brunswick, and again, it sounds as though the theme that is developing is just to have inactivity or to throw money at it.

At the end of the day, we are planning to address the Mactaquac Dam situation. We know that the EUB will be involved in the process, and we are committed to ensuring the protection of such an important resource—the renewable hydroelectricity that we have from the Mactaquac Dam. We realize that the federal cousins have thrown at us an asteroid related to fossil fuels. We are committed to renewable energy.

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Mr. Speaker, I think that the minister is losing a little bit of steam here.

As I mentioned, the minister brought forward legislation last spring to reduce financial oversight on NB Power. Fast-forward a few months, and we have NB Power now seeking the largest rate increase in 41 years. As a shareholder of NB Power, what is the minister doing to ensure that it reduces its operational costs so that we do not see this repeated next year? And do not say the heat pump program, because there is no way that NB Power is going to be able to install 50 000 units in the next three years.

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would admonish the member opposite to never presuppose the plans that we have, because I am afraid that we would confuse the members opposite very quickly when they see the level of activity and the number of things that are being done.

I go back to the comment on the rate increase. I go back to that. I would ask the member opposite whether he is aware of what the average rate increase has been in New Brunswick over the course of the last decade. I am pretty sure that he would have to find somebody to give him that information. Well, I will tell you that it is about 1.35%. Okay? In addition to that, we have put together...

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): No, it is not, sir. I think that you should get somebody to give you better, more current information or perhaps get better research over there.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): At the end of the day, what we have done is... In spite of the Liberal Leader saying that we

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

must not meddle with the ability of the utility to get proper rate increases, I would ask the member opposite to go one step further and get the team who writes his questions to figure out what the average rate is across the country. I think that he will have a look. I think that he will do some research and he will realize that we are looking at rate increases that are good, fair, and in line with the rest of the country.

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

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. K. Arseneau (Kent North, G): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The New Brunswick Local Food and Beverages Strategy 2022 Action Plan was published just recently. It was published in the fall, after the end of farming season. However, in this plan, Mr. Speaker, there are no numerical targets or measurable objectives. As a result, we do not know what the government is trying to achieve with this plan.

Mr. Speaker, the situation is worrying, given that, in New Brunswick, there were 4 551 farms in 1970 and 2 255 in 2016, but only 1 851 in 2021. In addition, there are currently only 165 farmers under the age of 35 in New Brunswick.

This is what I want to know: What is the minister doing to reverse the devastating trend of the loss of farms and the dangerous increase in the average age of farmers here in New Brunswick?

[Original]

Hon. Mrs. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Thank you to the member opposite for the question. We are very proud of what the Local Food and Beverages Strategy is creating and how it is performing. I have some key messages here that I would like to share with you. We have seen a 24% increase in vegetable production. We have seen 41 new greenhouses to promote year-round growing. We have partnered with Opportunities New Brunswick and with the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. We have broken down the silos in the government to get partnerships to create an effective use of government monies all the way around.

We have worked with 10 communities that have been looking at food action grants, which have been put in action 22 times. There are 1 100 New Brunswickers who have joined the Food For All bilingual network. We have promoted 12 additional abattoir and local meat projects. We have worked with the Department of Health to encourage having healthy foods in hospitals, food banks, and soup kitchens and with the Department of Education to

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

ensure that there are healthy local foods for our children and for Indigenous communities. We are working daily with our various departments to make sure that we are providing...

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

Mr. K. Arseneau (Kent North, G): You might be working, but you are not getting any results.

The urgency is extreme. We have lost 404 farms in New Brunswick in five years, and 6.7% of our farmers are under 35 years of age. If 6.7% of our educators or nurses were under the age of 35, you guys would be moving a lot faster, and I sure hope so. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) just came out and said that there is greater uncertainty with higher economic volatility, geopolitical confrontations, and more frequent and devastating natural disasters—a world in which any country can be thrown off course more easily and more often. My question to the minister is this: If for any reason, supply chains are cut tomorrow, do you have a plan, and what is that plan?

Hon. Mrs. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Well, the member opposite... I mean, we started with talking about the local food and beverage strategy and the numbers there, and then we jumped all over the place. So I am going to try to hit a few of the items that the member talked about.

The department has implemented a series of key initiatives that are going to contribute to strengthening New Brunswick's food system and improving food self-sufficiency. We have an amazing, first-time-ever partnership of the four Atlantic provinces that is as solid as the federal government has ever had to deal with. We have made it...

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mrs. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, PC): Do not interrupt me.

We have made it possible so that in the event of another crisis, such as we had during COVID-19, or if there is a rockslide in Rimouski or on River de Chute, we are going to be ready. We are going to be able to be self-sufficient and to work among ourselves to make sure that the people of Atlantic Canada have food to eat and food on their grocery store shelves, that our farmers will be able to feel supported, and that our fishermen are going to be able to find markets for their food. Thank you very much.

(Interjections.)

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

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

Mr. Bourque (Kent South, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the minister responsible for official languages, therefore the Premier. I have been critic for official languages for two years now, and I have been criticizing this government for two years because results in terms of progress on the *Official Languages Act* file have yet to be seen.

After 10 years, meaning at the end of last year, action should already have been taken. At least a report was produced at the end of last year. It is a good report, but now, basically 10 months later, the Premier, who is supposed to come to us with measures to be taken, has yet to act. So, I will not even talk about what he has started to do because he should already be working on it. This is what I am asking: Will the Premier finally respond to the report? Will we stop being told to wait two to three more months? Now is the time for the Premier to tell us what he is going to do. Thank you very much.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is correct, it is time to act on this. I said that we would be back in the House and would respond to this in this fall session. It is later than anticipated, but our intent is to have a response, whether it is right here in the House or whether it is publicly. It will be responded to in this session, before this year ends.

Mr. Bourque (Kent South, L): I want to thank the Premier for that answer, and I just want to remind the people who are listening that we are very late when it comes to this issue. We were supposed to have action started last year. Last year, we had only a report. It has now been almost 10 months, and the Premier says that we are going to start seeing things in this session. Honestly, it is not just about talk. It is also about action.

I also want to remind the people who are listening that this law, the *Official Languages Act*, supersedes all other Acts in the province. That is why, often, as is the case now, you have the Premier being responsible for official languages. I want to reiterate how important this review is and how important it is to act. So, Premier, please reassure us again, and please follow up with some action. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate what I just said, that we will respond to the report before the year ends. It was our intention to do so this past spring, and it was delayed, but we will do so by year-end. That is what I said just a few minutes ago, and I can repeat it again, should the member ask again. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. LePage (Restigouche West, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On September 21, the government released a renewed climate change action plan for 2022 to 2027. This plan is based on three pillars: government leadership and accountability, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and preparing for climate change.

The Higgs government is finally recognizing that climate change affects our environmental health and well-being in New Brunswick. A total of 30 measures are described in this action plan. However, this document does not establish any new targets or measures for the industrial sector, which is the largest greenhouse gas emitter in the province.

Could the Minister of Environment and Climate Change explain this shortcoming in his action plan and transparently state the position of the department and the government on this issue?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Crossman (Hampton, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the question from across the way. Regarding the climate change plan, which was released just recently, we have had very little negative feedback. It has all been good. Even the naysayers are saying that it is a good job. It should be noted as well that it is an all-department plan through the secretariat in conjunction with the climate change meetings that we have had.

Regarding the reduction of the 118 items, we are down to 30, with specific pillars, deadlines, and guidelines in there for some of these items to be reached in a timely manner. It is working well. I am looking forward to more in the future. Thank you for your question.

[Translation]

Mr. LePage (Restigouche West, L): I would have liked it if the minister told us the plan for the industrial sector. We do not see it in the document. Today, the minister is not giving us an answer. Since my time is limited, I have a second question for the minister.

As the minister said, we can applaud some aspects of this renewed climate change action plan and, of course, the work done by employees. In fact, this action plan specifies some timelines and makes some departments accountable. However, we recall that, earlier this week, the minister responsible for municipal reform publicly criticized our new leader for not having quantified the cost of her recommendations to the government.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

So, before I criticize the department, I am going to ask the Minister of Environment and Climate Change if he could tell us this, with full transparency: What is the budget for each of the 30 recommendations or actions in his renewed climate change action plan? Could he also give us a dollar figure for the entire action plan?

[Original]

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 from across the way. I cannot give you the breakdown today, but I will have it for you. I will take note of that.

More than \$47 million has been allocated in the 2022-23 budget to support dozens of climate change-related projects. You may know this, or maybe you do not. The New Brunswick government is committed to being part of the solution for climate change. We are working hard on that, as you would know if you kept up on it. The 2022-23 budget has a commitment of \$47 million to the Climate Change Fund to support initiatives across the entire province. There is a lot going on. There was a lot of devastation from the recent storms, and money is going into mitigation and adaptations to make things better.

The 2022-23 approved project list includes a total of 83 projects. I cannot name those individually today, but we can get those for you. These projects will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions in New Brunswick and increase our resilience to the impacts of climate change and foster climate change education, opportunities for youth...

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

NB POWER

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, I just want to conclude questions on the NB Power rate increase. I know that the minister opposite is getting excited to have the last word today. He is revving his engine. I want to be sincere here. I want to know. We have world economics, outside factors, and inflation. We know that neighbouring jurisdictions are facing the same issues. But from what I have heard today, I am not sure that the government has a plan to help New Brunswickers and small and medium-sized businesses that are facing hardships. That is what I really want to know.

The Premier said in scrums this week that the government is here to help New Brunswickers. It has the heat pump plan. It is a good plan, but the rollout is a bit bumpy. It is working out those kinks. Seriously, what do the Premier and this government have planned to help New Brunswickers and small and medium-sized businesses that are no doubt going to struggle with the rate increase if it goes through at the full ask? Surely, some middle ground will be found. What does this government have planned to help New Brunswickers?

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, I do appreciate the humility of the question from the member opposite as we round up and finish question period. It is a serious topic, and it is a discussion about what we are going to do, what we plan to do, and how we plan to unroll initiatives and programs.

When the member opposite talks about our not having a plan, let's talk above and beyond that. Let's step up and look. If you had a plan a year and a half ago as it related to energy futures in the globe, it would be a moot plan that would not be applicable anymore. We have had to read and react to some global situations that have really put the entire world on its ear, whether it be with the federal government's imposition of certain taxes that are really coming home to roost now and that we are seeing at the pump or in a variety of areas or whether it be with the invasion of Ukraine. At the end of the day, we continue, in a real-time situation, to put programs in place, but we continue to be mobile and flexible enough so that when the time comes, as we work with the utility, we will work with the stakeholders and the opposition to put together programs that work.

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

The time for question period has expired. I believe the Minister of Health has a response to a question that was asked yesterday.

HEALTH CARE

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Yes, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I took a question under advisement. The interim Leader of the Opposition asked for the number of people waiting for surgeries in New Brunswick and the top five surgeries by category, including wait times and how many people are waiting for surgery. I am happy to share the details from <www.surgerynewbrunswick.ca>.

[*Translation*]

In English, it is <www.surgerynewbrunswick.ca>.

[*Original*]

The data currently displayed there is from Q1 of 2022-23, and the data will soon be updated for Q2 of 2022-23. The total volume of prioritized surgeries that people are waiting for in New Brunswick as of October 6, 2022, is 22 713.

The member opposite asked for the top five procedures. In first place is cataract surgery. For cataract surgery, there are 6 727 people waiting, and the average wait is 163 days. Knee replacement surgery is No. 2, with 2 150 people waiting, and the average wait is 263 days. No. 3 is hernia repair surgery, with 1 182 people waiting an average of 250 days. No.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

4 is hip repair surgery, and there are 1 024 people waiting, with an average wait being 219 days. No. 5 is dental fillings and extractions. There are 760 people waiting those surgeries, with an average wait of 274 days.

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for bringing this information forward. He likes to reference this website. He likes to try to poke fun and say that he can use his phone and find it, so why are we asking for increased transparency and accountability from this government? Well, Mr. Speaker, it is not there in a user-friendly...

(Interjections.)

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): It is not there in a user-friendly format. Members are just throwing insults from the other side. When their backs are up against the wall, they are going to insult. It is not there in a user-friendly format.

We tried to pass a motion yesterday to increase accountability. We know that transparency is an issue with this government when it comes to health care. With the decisions that government is making, whether they be on assessments or on the local governance reform file, there is a lack of transparency with this government. Yesterday, government members did not want to pass a motion to increase accountability with their health reform plan.

I am going to ask them once again today. Will government members make this information available in a user-friendly format?

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

Hon. Mr. Fitch (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, you know it is Friday. This is the last question period of the week. I think that the interim Leader of the Opposition was quite clearly given a demonstration yesterday to show that the website in question is quite user-friendly. I would make the demonstration again, but I know that we do not want to use props here. So I think that the demonstration that was given yesterday to the interim Leader of the Opposition should stand as a clear indication that the website is quite user-friendly.

There are other options, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about getting information. When you look at eVisitNB... Since January 2022, there have been 70 000 people who have used that particular service, and 79% of those 70 000 people were deemed to have been diverted from the emergency room.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Time, minister. Question period is over.