

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



March 30, 2023

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COST OF LIVING

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, New Brunswickers on fixed incomes are suffering with the increased cost of living, the cost of housing increasing, and the cost of electricity increasing, and the Higgs government, with this budget, is failing them. When it comes to income assistance for people with disabilities, this budget is failing them as well. For individuals on social assistance, this budget misses the mark. We know that the social assistance rates in New Brunswick are the lowest in the country and that recipients are living well below the poverty line. If you look just next door to Prince Edward Island, you will see that they are receiving almost double—a single person is receiving almost double what someone in New Brunswick is receiving.

The government has indexed the social assistance rates, which is a good thing, but it has missed the mark because it did not raise the rates of social assistance in the first place. So the rates are perpetually indexed, causing financial hardship to those who are receiving income assistance. This does not allow them to lift themselves out of poverty, and it does not give them the best chance of success. So what is this government doing to bring those people out of poverty and give them the best chance to succeed?

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Social Development, Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, PC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question, because we know that this government has done an awful lot. And I know that we can do more, but we cannot do everything at once. Let me talk about what we have done. We have put more money in the hands of low-income New Brunswickers than, really, anybody has. The measures that we have put in place so far as part of the reform represent an investment of \$22.6 million and are expected to impact the supports provided to almost 29 000 New Brunswickers, including children.

Now, I know—I know—that there is lots of conversation about basic incomes, minimums, and things like that. We are looking at those things, particularly for those with disabilities. But our federal partners are working through a disability program, so we need to see what they are going to do before we can actually augment that or see whether we even need to augment it. While I understand the question and I understand that many New Brunswickers are struggling, we have done many things to help them.

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

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, again, this government is relying on the federal government to come to the assistance of New Brunswickers, and these government members are not acting. They say that there is \$22.6 million for reforms, and they have another \$19 million or so in their budget, as we heard last week from the Minister of Finance. But what it will cost to lift social assistance recipients out of poverty—to just bring them up to that line—is \$185 million. So

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addressing poverty needs to be a priority of this government. It is the right thing to do, giving people the best chance to succeed.

It also impacts other areas of need in the province. For example, addressing poverty can help provide better access to education and better access to health care and healthy living. It leads to lower crime rates and safer communities, and it increases consumer spending, boosting the economy. It just allows people to get ahead, and it helps the province as a whole, Mr. Speaker. So why is this government not taking this problem more seriously and addressing the issue of poverty in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Social Development, Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, PC): Mr. Speaker, I have been an elected member of this Legislature since 2010, and for almost all that time, I have been involved in the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation. It is a bipartisan effort, having been started by Premier Shawn Graham, carried through by David Alward, continued by Brian Gallant, and continued by our current Premier. ESIC has proposed and implemented a number of reforms, and I am so thankful that I have been part of two different governments that have worked on improving the lives of those living in poverty. It is never going to be enough for the members opposite, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I am going to say here today that we know there is more to do, and we are willing to do that work. We push forward every time. But even just recently, we now have child support payments that are not calculated as income. Also, adult children who live with their parents can now keep their income separate from their parents. Lots is happening, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, they are just not listening to the realities that we are facing in this province. I cannot help but think of an individual who came to my office last winter. He had his power shut down because he could not pay the arrears. When you looked at his power bills, you could see that, in the dead of winter, he was keeping the heat off in his house. He was being charged \$60 per month. He was sleeping under blankets on his couch, and he could not pay that bill. He was in arrears, and the power was shut off. Those are the realities that New Brunswickers are facing, and this government is not listening.

Today, we have a motion that we brought forward to address electricity bills for New Brunswickers. We are asking this government to eliminate the provincial portion of the HST on electricity bills for residential customers. That would be an important step in providing relief, right now, in this trying time of increased cost of living. Is the government prepared to listen to New Brunswickers and follow this motion?

Hon. Mr. Steeves (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you. We will actually be speaking a little later today on the motion that the opposition has put forward. I guess that this afternoon, during opposition

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day, we will be talking about Motion 30 and the electricity situation and the HST on electricity.

But we have to go back to the things that we are doing. Do you know what? The member talked about the New Brunswick Housing Corporation being revived once again from the dustbins of history—from the dustbins of history. That is where the Liberals put it. That is where the Liberal government put it, Mr. Speaker. Do you know what? We are doing things all the time for the people in the province who are in need. We talked about the minimum wage. It is going up again on April 1, which is Saturday. It is going up again, by another dollar, to \$14.75. It is a fabulous move, and it is going to help New Brunswickers. With social assistance reform initiatives, once again, the rates have gone up by 7.3% this year. The numbers for the Department of Social Development itself are up by...

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

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

Mr. Bourque (Kent South, L): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Premier introduced Bill 37 to amend the *Official Languages Act*. The official opposition is extremely disappointed with this bill. The *Official Languages Act* was passed to take precedence over other Acts, because it applies to all provincial Acts.

[Original]

While the creation of the secretariat seems to be a step in the right direction—and we will need to see the details and the functioning before we are sure of that—repealing the obligation to review the Act every 10 years is nothing short of a slap in the face to the Francophone community.

Former Premier Bernard Lord underscored the importance of this law by bringing forward this 10-year review. Why is this Premier relentless in attacking the Francophone minority by watering down this Act? Make no mistake, taking away this accountability mechanism is a backward move against this Act. Will the Premier keep this mechanism in place, like his PC predecessors Lord and Alward? The commissioners even suggested having a review every five years. Why take it out in the first place? Why was it a problem? What kind of gain is justifiable here? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, this is really disappointing. What we have put in place, what I am proposing here, is a continuous improvement model. It is not a review every 10 years on the status to see how it is going and then try to fix it. This is a model that actually reviews the activities each and every day. It is part of our ongoing obligation and commitment, and

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it is unfortunate that the members opposite cannot move to a model that allows us to have greater harmony in our province by managing and dealing with our obligations with respect to the two official languages and being served in the language of your choice. Mr. Speaker, that is our obligation, and we are strengthening that by having a system in place that monitors each and every day.

It is disappointing that in the face of that, which has never been created before, the opposition would continue to find something to rant about. That would be just having to talk about something. This move is in a positive direction, to see that it is not every 10 years—it is every week. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bourque (Kent South, L): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the member for Moncton East and his Francophone colleagues made two things clear to us during their media interview. Firstly, the Minister of Public Safety and former Leader of the People's Alliance of New Brunswick has more power in the committee on official languages than these three ministers combined. Secondly, the member for Moncton East really needs to find a better mechanic who will stop telling him crazy stories.

It is crystal clear that the mechanism of reviewing the *Official Languages Act* every ten years in no way prevents a government from reviewing and amending it at any time. So, the argument they made yesterday is pure hogwash. What this mechanism does is give the government additional responsibility regarding the Act by including independent, expert commissioners and transparent consultations in it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to listen to the minister from Moncton East use his ridiculous logic again to justify his belief that this bill is not a step backward for equality between the two communities. Go ahead, Mr. Minister; I am listening.

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Mr. Speaker, the only hogwash in the House is coming from the opposition. Again, today, we see the politics of division from the Liberal Party of New Brunswick. The bill will be on the floor of the House and we will debate it. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you right off the bat that the secretariat is a good thing and that it will do its job.

Please take the time to go see the people who wrote the Act in 2002 and listen to what they say about their intentions. Please do your job and go see them; I am sure that, in 2002, that was not their intention. So you will have to review the remarks you are making right now in the House. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bourque (Kent South, L): Yet, Mr. Minister, community organizations are saying exactly the same thing as I am right now.

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It is unbelievable how much credibility this minister has lost. It seems that a strong wind on the beach has erased the line in the sand that the member for Moncton East said he drew to set his boundaries regarding the language issue.

The member for Moncton East has really proved that his party is more important than his community. That seems clear to me. The minister from Neguac seems to agree: party before community. Yet, both of these ministers are fully capable of showing some backbone and standing up to such a step backward; it is indeed a step backward.

You just have to look at our colleague from Shediac Bay-Dieppe over here.

Mr. Minister, will you assume your responsibilities instead of sitting timidly in your corner and continuing to lose credibility in the eyes of Francophones? You know darned well that the arguments you are trying to make do not hold water. I am calling on the member for Miramichi Bay-Neguac: Will he stand firm? Thank you.

[*Original*]

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

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Mr. Speaker, the only person who has lost his credibility is the member for Kent South when he was Minister of Health in the Gallant government. I, for one, can tell you that we are cleaning up the crazy mess left by the member for Kent South. I can guarantee you that. Right now, that is what we are doing.

So, Mr. Speaker, right now, we are establishing a secretariat that will work on official languages day after day. The Gallant government could have made changes to the *Official Languages Act* at any time. It did not do its job, Mr. Speaker.

There are members over there who worked in the Gallant government. Susan Holt worked for the same government. It is the same government. So, Mr. Speaker, there will be an election in 2014.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): There will be an election in 2024.

Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee to you right now that there will be debates about the *Official Languages Act* on the floor of the House. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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[Original]

POINT LEPREAU

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I get the sense that the energy file went from 0 to 100 yesterday in the span of 45 minutes. It started with the Minister of Energy saying that the discussions with OPG were just routine business. It ended with the Premier saying that he is cooking up a secret deal with Ontario's utility. I imagine that it is the topic at the water cooler at Point Lepreau this morning. I would just love to get the take of the member for Fundy-The Isles-Saint John West to hear what the members of the community have to say about this. I think the people of New Brunswick are wondering whether this is going to cost us money or whether we are going to make money.

My question to the Premier this morning is this: Are we buying OPG expertise, or are we selling the asset?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Oh, Mr. Speaker, do we not love to burn the flames and keep fueling them and fueling them and fueling them. We talk about energy security. We talk about the opportunity that we have in front of us. We talk about the ability to have SMRs as the path forward. We know that we have two nuclear provinces in the country—Ontario and us. We know that Ontario has multiple facilities and we have one. We do not need to be competing with Ontario as we go forward here with SMRs. They are the future.

Just once—just once—it would be nice to hear the opposition talk about the future and how we ensure that we work with allies. Where is there a better ally than our fellow province in the nuclear industry? How do we arrive at a common purpose for SMRs? That is the future. I know there are people who think that we do not need those either. Guess what, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago, when the wind was blowing, guess what was shut down. The windmills were shut down because the wind was blowing too hard. It was -40°C, and we did not have a power supply from Quebec. We need our own energy security, and we need to build a future with allies to make it happen. We have allies right here in Canada.

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is funny that you are talking about the future. We are still waiting for your energy strategy, Mr. Premier. That is the future, and we need to address those issues today. The needs for electricity in our province are just increasing. We have aging infrastructure, and we need a plan.

You talk about secrecy. It is funny that I also had to find information on Ontario to actually have you speak about Point Lepreau. There is a secret deal cooking behind the curtains, and you are not sharing that information with the people of New Brunswick. The question that we ask is, Do we need the money? Is that the reason that you are trying to cook up a secret deal with OPG? This is what I would like to ask the Premier. Exactly what is it that you want to achieve with this secret deal?

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Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, could we just play on repeat the last answer because I guess the member was not listening? He was too focused on the next—reading.

The point in all of this is an energy future, and I think that it is important to talk about that energy future. I met last night with the U.S. Ambassador to Canada, and we were talking about energy security. Do you know what is different with the U.S. philosophy, which I think the Prime Minister might have learned a bit about from President Biden's visit? It is basically about helping industries to make conversions and to have green energy at a price that people can afford. It is not to download the cost onto every consumer in every part of the country and cause the inability for them to afford groceries and to afford transportation. The United States is doing it. It is saying, Industry, we are going to help you change the game, but we are not going to penalize the consumer.

What are we doing? We are costing the consumer more, and then we wonder why that happened. Well, Mr. Speaker, we wonder about this. If we do not plan a future that does not download costs onto the consumer, it apparently will not be done by this crew, because they cannot deal with their cousins in Ottawa who are causing it to happen. But we will fix it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, Mr. Premier, I think that the real reason you want a secret deal with OPG is because you cannot fix the problem. Now, if I were to guess, I would think that you are trying to find someone to manage Point Lepreau. It has been underperforming for years. The CEO in Ontario is very clear. He said that they are going to make a business deal with this province in the best interest of Ontario. I think they are squeezing the province by saying, If you want us to run the plant, you are going to have to sell us part of the assets.

I asked this question: Do we need the money, Mr. Premier? Why are you actually doing this in secrecy and not being up-front and transparent with the people of New Brunswick? I think they need to know. What are your future plans for Point Lepreau? When can we expect your energy plan for New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, we are working with NB Power to have a long-term vision of what we need here. The hope is that we would get alignment here on what that means. When we talk about OPG, which has multiple nuclear plants, and its capabilities, we know that it can offer us information. It can offer us help in a way that we can manage and operate Point Lepreau better. That is part of the long-term strategy.

Now, what does a partnership look like going forward? We do not know, Mr. Speaker, but I am sure that the member opposite, who likes to throw out "I guess", "maybe", "I suppose", or "I think" ... The thing is that he does not know anything for certain.

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The idea is that what we are working on is an arrangement that will allow us to have an energy future in Canada that is aligned so that we are not competing with each other—we are building on nuclear capability, which indeed is going to be the major player going forward for the supply of energy. I know that there are some folks here who think, oh no, that is not necessary. Maybe they are the same folks who would shut the lights out and hope for the best. I am not one of them, Mr. Speaker. There is a combination of solutions, as we agreed last night with the Ambassador. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, on the topic of the changes to the *Official Languages Act*, the Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform and member for Moncton East used the analogy of a car taken to a garage. He said that you just have to go to the garage when your car needs repairs.

Mr. Speaker, I know that, with my car, I have to do preventative maintenance. Sometimes, I have to get an oil change to avoid any engine problems. Every 100 000 km, I have to get a few belts changed. In other words, I have to take my car to the garage to avoid having serious problems. I know one thing: If this is the way the member for Moncton East treats his car, I feel sorry for whoever buys it used. One thing is clear: His argument and—maybe—his car are not on the right track.

Mr. Speaker, that is why the mechanism to review the *Official Languages Act* is so important. It is to have the best experts look into the matter every 10 years. It is to ensure that we have the best Act possible. Can the minister try again to better justify his position on these changes to the Act?

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, mechanics need tools. We are equipping ourselves with tools. We have a Commissioner of Official Languages who does her job and gives us advice. We will be equipping ourselves with tools with the new Official Languages Secretariat. It will have eight employees. In his budget, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board increased the secretariat's funding by \$500 000. So, we are equipping ourselves with tools.

There will be a follow-up to the Finn-McLaughlin report. We have received recommendations, and the secretariat will work on implementing them. That is the goal.

So, in my opinion, when it comes to the *Official Languages Act*, if changes need to be made, they should be made here. The goal is to get the tools to improve the Act. When it comes to removing the mechanism to review of the Act every 10 years, the intention in 2002 was...

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Mr. Speaker, the goal is still to improve the Act, and we are equipping ourselves with the tools to do so. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

NB POWER

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, we learned yesterday that NB Power is negotiating with Ontario Power Generation to sell it a share in Point Lepreau. During a meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in January, I was told that Bob Youden, the former Irving colleague of the Premier, had been hired by the Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development to provide strategic advice on NB Power and that, based on his contract, he would be working out of the Office of the Premier. Perhaps he advised the Premier to sell NB Power's generating stations. My question is for the Premier. How long has he known about these negotiations to provide OPG with a financial share in Point Lepreau, and why did he not reveal them to the public?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): So, Mr. Speaker, this was spoken by someone who has probably not had a negotiation on all these issues for a long time. When you are negotiating with big companies, you do not publicize it. You do not put it in the smoke. The point of negotiations is well overstated here, Mr. Speaker. We do not know what this is going to look like at the end of the day. What we know is that we need a partnership to help move energy forward in this province, which is not necessarily any different than how we are going to manage Mactaquac. People may ask why we need Hydro-Québec to help us refurbish that dam. It has done it before, over and over again. That is why you bring in expertise for help.

I have said over and over again here that OPG has extensive experience in the nuclear industry. We have one reactor, one operation. So, Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that their focus is so narrow here, but I can appreciate their not being in a position to have exposure to big corporate deals over the years. Then there would be a reluctance to say, well, we can do it on our own. I think that we all have lessons to learn from a lot of people.

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, last night, a commentary was posted on the websites of Brunswick News and *Acadie Nouvelle* recommending that the government sell off Point Lepreau, the Mactaquac Dam, and Belledune and then buy the power back from the new owners. Coincidence? I think not. Clearly, this government has a strategic plan for the future of our public utility that it is not telling us about. NB Power belongs to the people of this province, Mr. Speaker, and its assets are public assets.

The Premier is not running a corporation negotiating deals with other corporations. He is running the province. It is a different matter. It is the Premier's responsibility to be up front with New Brunswickers before deals are done. Will the Premier hold a press briefing this



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afternoon so that he can explain to New Brunswickers his plan for the future of our electrical utility and our assets?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): So, Mr. Speaker, I think that the Leader of the Green Party should talk to the member opposite here because one thinks, one surmises, and one knows. The two of them could probably come up with a path forward that they all could surmise could be right, maybe.

Mr. Speaker, we are working on a long-term strategy with NB Power, and we will do that strategy in the best interest of consumers and ensure that we have the best and the lowest rate for consumers. But we are living in a time of increased energy costs, energy costs that are increased because of federal policies. We know that there is an issue in Europe, and we can be part of the solution. Also, unlike in the United States, there are energy costs that we have because there is a denial of the transition opportunities that we have right here in New Brunswick to make the difference. While other countries, particularly the United States and Norway, are using traditional fuels to generate revenue to do the research and development needed to keep energy costs low for our consumers, we are sitting here thinking about it. Well, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we are not thinking about it—we are doing it.

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, the Premier is just icing the puck here. Before he puts NB Power's generating assets in a yard sale this spring, he needs to explain to New Brunswickers what he is doing and why. This is a serious matter with huge implications for the province. He is not running a corporation, negotiating corporate deals. He is running a province. It is a public body, not a private body. These are publicly owned assets operated by our public utility. In the case of Point Lepreau, it is responsible for two thirds of NB Power's \$5-billion debt.

These are publicly owned assets and are operated by our public utility. In the case of Point Lepreau, it is responsible for two thirds of NB Power's \$5-billion debt. NB Power's principal source of revenue is from what? Power sales—from its power plants. If they are sold, NB Power's debt will fall to the taxpayers. Once again, I ask the Premier this: Will he come clean with New Brunswickers and hold a news conference this afternoon to explain what he plans to do with NB Power and its \$5-billion debt?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, is it not interesting that at least there is acknowledgement that there is some issue around a \$5-billion debt? That is progress. Coming from the Leader of the Green Party, that is progress because there is usually no acknowledgement of anything to do with debt load. I always wonder how he manages his household.

Mr. Speaker, in this scenario, we are going forward with looking at the best way to keep prices down for consumers. I guess to think about not doing deals that are important for us to get the lowest prices and not using business principles to ensure that we get the best



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prices for service and delivery to consumers . . . To me, it is kind of a thoughtless exercise to say that we do not need to think in those terms. When we deal with anyone—Hydro-Québec or OPG... These big players can eat our lunch. We are going to make sure that does not happen. That is why we are working with NB Power, and we will get the best deal for the people of this province because we know how to negotiate the best deal. That is the difference.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, where is the leadership from the Premier when it comes to the *Official Languages Act* review? The recommendations from the commissioners, in the review, were brought forward and finished in December 2021, but last year, right before we broke for Christmas, there was nothing—nothing—from this Premier with respect to responding to those recommendations. Now, there is a bill that is a step backward and a slap in the face to the minority linguistic community of this province. The Premier is abdicating his responsibilities when it comes to official languages.

My question is this: Why was the 10-year review included in the *Education Act*, with the *Official Languages Act* cited as a positive reason to include it in the *Education Act*? The argument was that we were taking politics out of education. From the government's own logic, it is now politicizing the *Official Languages Act*. Where is the logic from the Premier?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the leader of the opposition at least got in a last-minute question on the floor here that might be a little different.

For the first time, we have put in place a secretariat that analyzes why we are not doing a better job every day and every year to deliver the services that we committed to 50 years ago. I might add, Mr. Speaker, that the only party that has really made a significant difference in any of this throughout these 50 years is sitting right here on this side of the House. Is that not ironic, when the party that benefits the most from continuing this division day in, day out is sitting over there on that side of the House? It loves to keep the division going. Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not apologize for trying to find a way for us to work together in harmony by solving our differences without making it a political football but by making it a reality of people dealing with people every day in their communities. That is our goal. Thank you.

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, it is true. His party has made a difference when it comes to the *Official Languages Act*, but his predecessors would be ashamed—ashamed—of this Premier. This Premier and his government lack vision. The budget definitely does not do anything to help New Brunswickers.

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[Translation]

On the contrary, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

The Premier's leadership over the past several years has caused nothing but chaos in the province: in health care, closing ERs and then flip-flopping; in education, scrapping French immersion and then flip-flopping; in the *Official Languages Act* with what he is doing right now; and in labour relations. Year after year, we have seen how he treats the public service, our nurses, and our teachers, and he is simply leaving New Brunswick's most vulnerable behind with this budget. They are clearly not happy with him. The time is up. He asked the question back in February: Should I stay, or should I go? Well, Mr. Speaker, he should go. Can he tell us when he will leave?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess that we all have our own definition of "chaos": the strongest population growth in the history of the province, right here, right now; the highest level of investment and interest in this province that we have ever seen; growth in every sector of the province that we have never seen before; and unprecedented assessment increases.

Yes, it has brought challenges. We have more people here. When did we ever see virtual buying from anywhere? Now, we have that in New Brunswick because people want to be here. In fact, the latest numbers show that there are 828 000 people. The province is not on the brink. I think the book should be recalled. The book *Over the Cliff?* should be recalled and rewritten. Have a new edition—a new edition.

That is chaos to this group next door—chaos. Imagine people looking at New Brunswick and asking what is going on in New Brunswick. Nationally, people are looking at the opportunities that are being created here, and the opposition calls it chaos. I call it moving forward. Thank you.

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

