

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions



**May 9, 2023**

### CONTENTS

#### HEALTH CARE

Ms. Holt  
Hon. Mr. Fitch  
Ms. Holt  
Hon. Mr. Fitch  
Ms. Holt  
Hon. Mr. Fitch

#### GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Legacy  
Hon. Mr. Steeves  
Mr. Legacy  
Hon. Mr. Steeves  
Mr. Legacy  
Hon. Mr. Steeves

#### PHYSICIANS

Mr. McKee  
Hon. Mr. Holder  
Mr. McKee  
Hon. Mr. Holder  
Mr. McKee  
Hon. Mr. Fitch

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

### SCHOOLS

Mrs. Landry

Hon. Mr. Hogan

Mrs. Landry

Hon. Mr. Hogan

Mr. Coon

Hon. Mr. Hogan

Mr. Coon

Hon. Mr. Hogan

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Hogan

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Hogan

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Hogan

### HEALTH CARE

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Fitch

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Fitch

### NURSES

Ms. Holt

Hon. Mr. Fitch

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

[Original]

### HEALTH CARE

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask questions of the government on behalf of the residents of Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore as well as New Brunswickers all over the province who are losing faith in government as they sit on the waiting list for primary care for weeks, months, and years—many years. New Brunswickers have made it clear to me and to all members of our team that the number one thing that keeps them up at night is their health, their loved ones' health, and their access to care.

[Translation]

I am talking about people like Marilyne, from Tilley Road, who suffers from a chronic illness and has been waiting for a doctor for three years.

[Original]

Or there are people like Heidi, who wrote to us saying that she has never been more scared or frustrated in her life.

Can the Premier please update the people of New Brunswick? How many New Brunswickers are currently on the wait list with Patient Connect NB? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a real honour for me to answer the first question of the new Leader of the Liberal Party. I have enjoyed debating the leaders of the past, and I look forward to debating the leader of the present.

I do want to offer my congratulations to the member for Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, the member for Dieppe, and the member for Restigouche-Chaleur. It is always great to welcome new MLAs onto the floor of this Legislature. I have met many great MLAs over the years who have become ministers and many ministers who have gone through the ranks of sitting in Cabinet. Some of them are in the gallery here today. Welcome, as well.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the wait list, it certainly is an item that is not lost on us here on this side of the Legislature. We work very, very diligently to reduce the number of people waiting for a primary care provider. As a matter of fact, I can tell you very clearly that that has been...

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

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me help the member opposite out. In 2021, the Higgs government launched a health plan with targets and timelines, which we appreciated.

[*Translation*]

The first part of the plan includes five targets for improving access to care.

[*Original*]

Every single one of the five targets has been missed, and as per the New Brunswick Health Council, new dates have been set. The thing that New Brunswickers care most about is your commitment to eliminate the waiting list, which you said that you would do by the middle of last year. The new target to eliminate the wait list has been set for the end of next month.

[*Translation*]

According to the minister, last January, 60 000 New Brunswickers were still on the waiting list.

[*Original*]

In the interest of accountability, which I know that this Chamber exists to ensure and that the member opposite speaks about frequently, can the member confirm that the government will meet this target by the end of June and provide access to primary care to the 60 000 New Brunswickers on the list?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a great way for the Leader of the Opposition to start, and I will help her out as well. To say that the provincial waiting list for a doctor or nurse practitioner... It was at about 74 000. It is not completely finished, but I am pleased to announce today that we are down to 47 000 people.

Now, as you can see, there is a difference between the number that the member in the opposition has said and the number that I have said here on the floor of the Legislature. The last time, with the last interim leader, I kept on keeping the opposition on track, keeping the opposition accountable, and making sure that the opposition members had their facts correct when they came to the floor of the Legislature. So I would like to say today, Mr. Speaker, that number is not 60 000—that number is down to 47 000.

We are not going to put a banner up to say “mission complete”. We are going to continue to work day in and day out to reduce that number and to make sure that people have access to primary care here in the...

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

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

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. New Brunswickers do care most about the health of their loved ones, but they also care about accountability, transparency, and leadership in governance. Thank you for the number of 47 000 people. That is far too many to still be waiting for primary care in New Brunswick. A year ago, the Premier cited an approach of shock and awe, which I think is a U.S. military term, for the health care system when he fired the CEO of Horizon and the two health authority boards and took personal responsibility for the health care system's improvement. Now, 19 months have passed, and all the targets set have been missed. So whom do we hold accountable for the lack of results?

[*Translation*]

We learned last March that the temporary trustee structure would be replaced by a new governance structure in the following weeks. It is essential to New Brunswickers that our health care system is governed with transparency and accountability. Can the minister confirm when the new governance model will be established?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Yes, this question is easy to answer, Mr. Speaker. I will be tabling a bill on this today.

[*Original*]

So, stand by.

## GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

**Mr. Legacy** (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. We found out in the last few weeks that the minister, without an RFP, awarded a contract to Medavie Blue Cross for \$30 million over the period of 10 years, despite the fact that there had been extensive discussions with the Auditor General and other parties. Can the minister explain why there was this sudden shift in strategy and decisions?

**Hon. Mr. Steeves** (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I guess that we do not get a prize for being second. No, no, anyway.

Yes, we did sign that on April 25 of this year. Finance and Treasury Board signed a new 10-year contract with Medavie Blue Cross for the administration of health, travel, and dental benefits. A long-standing, proud tradition in New Brunswick is Medavie Blue Cross, which has cared for a number of New Brunswickers over the years. It has taken care of New Brunswickers who did not have to worry about their insurance programs because they

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

knew that they were being taken care of by fellow New Brunswickers. So we do not make any—any—apologies at all.

The contract begins on July 1 of this year. It is for administrative services only, so costs are related to a percentage of the claims. That is where we get the cost. We are actually happy to award that to Medavie Blue Cross and to thank it for its hard work over the years for all New Brunswickers.

**Mr. Legacy** (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that Medavie will be quite pleased with the minister's plug, but that is not really the question. If you go into the Auditor General's report—just for reference, this is page 112, paragraph 3.55, from Volume I of 2022—there is an extensive discussion about your department having said that it needs two years to build the process around the RFP. There was even a question of putting some resources into it. So why the reversal? Why now, after putting all this process in? This was noted in 2017. It is almost six years later, and now, after all this work and all the resources that were put into it, why the reversal? Obviously, it did not come from your team, so where did the decision come from?

(Interjections.)

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

**Hon. Mr. Steeves** (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for the question. The contract did not go out to RFP, absolutely, but do you know what? We are happy to support a New Brunswick company, a proud company working in Moncton. Upon review, the decision was made to negotiate with the current New Brunswick provider, which is Medavie Blue Cross, to achieve administrative cost savings and financial sustainability. We have done that. We have maintained—this is hard to say, is it not?—financial sustainability, and we have also achieved administrative cost savings. We have done all of that with a company that is based in New Brunswick. You know what? Proud New Brunswick workers are taking care of us here in New Brunswick. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Legacy** (Bathurst West-Beresford, L): Well, Mr. Speaker, at least the minister followed the path and answered the same thing as his department—administrative cost savings.

Now, from the minister, I would like to know this. The RFP process is put into place for due diligence. So, if we can save some administrative costs on all kinds of RFPs, are you now advocating that we go away from these processes? Is that what is going to happen? Based on your discretion, we will pick based on what? If they are good New Brunswick companies, they should be able to bid. They are competitive. Why is the minister going away from this process? It is about accountability. Why is the minister not sticking to it?

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

**Hon. Mr. Steeves** (Moncton Northwest, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Am I to understand that the member from the Liberal Party is saying that we should not advocate for New Brunswickers? Am I to understand that a proud New Brunswick company should not be advocated for? Am I to understand that New Brunswickers are to be left alone? Good luck to you. We are not going to advocate for you, because, apparently, that is what the Liberal Party wants. The Liberal Party wants us to not advocate for New Brunswickers.

We have advocated. There is a new contract in place. It is for New Brunswickers and administered by New Brunswickers, and we are proud to be part of this with Medavie Blue Cross. You know what? We are proud to have it working with the government of New Brunswick.

## PHYSICIANS

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was a report of a doctor from Iran, an obstetrician and gynecologist, who is calling on the province to make it easier for internationally trained doctors to practice in the province. It was reported that this doctor has delivered 5 000 babies and performed more than 1 000 surgeries, including hysterectomies and ovarian cyst removals. She passed the oral and written exams required to receive her license from the Medical Council of Canada, and she has the credentials of 15 years of experience. But now the province is saying that she has to go back to Iran and work for three months or do a residency for four or five years.

This process is much too cumbersome when we want to attract international doctors. We currently have 116 family doctor vacancies and 129 specialist vacancies in the province. How can New Brunswickers be assured that this government is taking doctor shortages seriously when it still has not figured out how to put internationally trained doctors to work?

**Hon. Mr. Holder** (Portland-Simonds, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I join with the member opposite. We take this very seriously, and we have the very same concerns. In fact, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Social Development, and I met with the College of Physicians and Surgeons this morning. There have been a number of conversations going on over the past number of weeks between our respective departments and the colleges. We know that the process needs to be modernized.

I need to point out that it is the college, the arm's-length professional association, that is the regulatory body. Last year, we passed some legislation to make sure that all these professional associations are held accountable. Over the last month, we have worked with the Nurses Association, and we have had some tremendous results. In fact, the three of us had a similar meeting with the Nurses Association in late March, I believe it was. Just a few

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

days after that, 74 nurses were approved. I understand that this is up to about 140 as we speak.

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, we need to move much more aggressively. As I said, there are 116 vacancies for family doctors and 129 vacancies for specialists. While we in New Brunswick do nothing, other provinces are already offering practice-ready assessment programs as a route to licensure for international physicians who have already completed their residency and have practiced abroad. It is a way of circumventing having them do another residency for four to five years, sending them back to their home countries, or just losing them altogether. They will go to those other provinces.

Newfoundland, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan are all examples of provinces that offer a 12-week clinical field assessment. The completion of this is followed by a return to work. They are even encouraged to go to rural areas and to places of need. If we do not step up soon with an aggressive plan like this one, we are going to lose doctors, such as this doctor from Iran. They are going to go home or to other provinces. Mr. Speaker, why is New Brunswick falling behind other provinces in making it easier for internationally trained doctors to work here in New Brunswick?

**Hon. Mr. Holder** (Portland-Simonds, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are doing everything that we possibly can. In fact, we had a very frank conversation with the college this morning. We made it very clear that we expect action on this. At the end of the day, we told the college that we would provide any resources that it needs to make sure that it modernizes its process so that we are attracting qualified people from all over the world and so that we work with the individuals who are already here to get them through as fast as we can. At the same time, we are making sure that we protect the patient and that the regulatory process is intact.

I agree with the member opposite. We all agree with the member opposite. A lot of work has been done on this. That is why we passed the legislation last year. In our view, that is exactly why we have seen some of these professional associations step up and start to work with us, and we will continue to work with them, Mr. Speaker. We are not wasting any time, and we are going to continue to make it clear that time is of the essence and that we need to act now.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. McKee** (Moncton Centre, L): During estimates, we learned that the Minister of Health did not even have a recruitment and retention strategy. I asked for one. At least, I was told that there was not a written plan ready to be shared with me. We need a coherent plan to attract and retain qualified health care workers, whether they be from our country or from abroad, but this government is taking a piecemeal approach. We need a coherent plan to

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

remain competitive when it comes to recruitment and retention; otherwise, we risk losing ground.

Recognizing certain skill sets in foreign workers is another area in which the government is dragging its feet. Without a plan, how does the government intend to attract and retain qualified foreign workers in the health care sector, given our current shortage?

As I said, there are 116 family doctor vacancies and 129 specialist vacancies. Where is the plan, Mr. Speaker? We are behind other provinces, where a much more aggressive approach is being taken. I am asking the Minister of Health to show us his plan.

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, let's take just a minute and talk about what the Gallant government and advisers did with this file—absolutely nothing.

I will tell you this: We have an aggressive plan for recruitment and retention, and I articulated that very well here on the floor of the Legislature. We have added \$29.5 million for recruitment and retention. In fact, there has already been a tremendous amount of success on that file. We created a division within the Department of Health to coordinate with the RHAs in their attempts to help recruit and retain people. We are also working with the long-term care sector. As a matter of fact, one of the missions that I previously talked about during estimates... I did not write it down, but I talked about it. I thought that was fair enough. There are 200 people—200 signed contracts—coming back here and working in the province of New Brunswick. That is success. That is doing something. That is getting the work done.

## SCHOOLS

**Mrs. Landry** (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Mr. Speaker, schools are safe places for children, teachers, and staff. Policy 713 sets minimum requirements for school districts and public schools to create safe, welcoming, inclusive, and affirming school environments for students, families, and allies who identify or are perceived as LGBTQ+. After 10 years of consultations with the DEC, schools, parents, experts, partners, and allies, Policy 713 was finally signed off for implementation in August 2020.

After only two years, the policy is now up for review by the Department of Education. Mr. Speaker, would the minister please explain the reasons for the review and the reasons that he believes that the policy is too broad or unclear? Could he give specific examples of the misunderstanding surrounding its implementation?

**Hon. Mr. Hogan** (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member opposite for the question. I want to assure the member opposite and all the teachers in the province that we will ensure that we have safe,

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

inclusive, and respectful workplaces and schools for our children and teachers and that we will continue to respect the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

**Mrs. Landry** (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Mr. Speaker, the minister originally agreed to fund a learning session for teachers on how to implement the policy in their classes. He then canceled the funding nine days before the event. Can the minister explain what happened between the day he agreed to fund the event and the day he decided to cancel the funding?

**Hon. Mr. Hogan** (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you again to the member opposite for the question. At no time did I see a letter for funding this event. Thank you.

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Education has said that there are problems with his department's Policy 713 on creating a safe, welcoming, inclusive, and affirming school environment for students who identify as part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. What, exactly, are those problems? This is his chance to explain himself. Is it that he supports a safe, welcoming, inclusive, and affirmative environment for gay, lesbian, trans, and nonbinary students as long as no one complains? That is the question. Can the minister tell this House exactly what problem he has with Policy 713?

**Hon. Mr. Hogan** (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member opposite for the question. I have a long history of creating respectful, safe, and inclusive spaces and environments in the schools where I was the administrator. We are going to continue doing the same thing in the schools of the province, and we will continue to ensure that the *Charter of Rights* is respected.

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We did not hear what problem he has with his policy, but we did learn yesterday that he was reviewing Policy 713, the policy to provide a supportive, safe, and affirming school environment for students who identify as lesbian, gay, trans, or nonbinary. On Friday at the council meeting on the policy, it was clear that the minister had put out a quickly written statement at the end of the day to distance himself from the objections to the professional development session that was put on by teachers for teachers. He abandoned those teachers. This is his chance to apologize to them. Will the Minister of Education apologize to his teachers for throwing them under the bus?

**Hon. Mr. Hogan** (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the member opposite, I served on the Middle Level Council committee. I served on the Elementary Council committee. That is the sole domain of the NBTA. We were receiving a lot of complaints about one of the sessions that was



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

widely publicized. All I did on Friday was say that it was not our event and that if there were questions or concerns, to please direct them to the NBTA.

I do not support nonpeaceful protests. I do not support hate speech. I do not really understand why the protesters were allowed on the school property. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Mr. Speaker, I am struggling with the comments that the minister made, when he says all he did was pass the buck over to the NBTF, when there was an opportunity to provide leadership and to communicate to New Brunswickers our values and the mission of Policy 713 to protect students and teachers in our schools. By issuing that press release absolving the minister of responsibility, the minister has created an unsafe environment for students in our schools. I would ask that the minister clarify the expression “a lot of complaints” that he received. Could he explain for us the nature of those complaints, the specific number of complaints, and where they came from? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Hogan** (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, thank you again for the question. I am going to continue to reiterate that we believe in respectful, safe, and inclusive school environments. We will continue to promote and guarantee that, and we are going to continue to guarantee the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in all our schools.

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of New Brunswickers today—many—who are afraid, who are losing sleep, and who are experiencing challenges with their mental health based on the actions of this government, both with the press release on Friday and previously by making the decision to review Policy 713, completely out of cycle, and by pulling the funding to Pride in Education four days after committing the funding and nine days before the event that it was to hold. Can the minister please commit that this government will continue to fund Pride in Education into the future?

**Hon. Mr. Hogan** (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the member opposite, again, I saw no letter requesting funding for this particular group to sign. I am sure that if it should apply for funding, then we will look at that application as we do with every other letter for funding and act on it in due course.

While I am on my feet, though, I want to assure New Brunswickers that their children are safe in schools, that we demand a respectful school and an inclusive school for all our students, and that we are going to continue to respect the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that if the member opposite were interested in ensuring that students are safe in schools, he would be putting his full support behind Policy 713. I am also a little bit concerned that funding applications can come in and that the minister is not aware of them. So, I am wondering about the management... The minister mentioned that he will look at the next one, but it seems clear that this request did not cross his desk. Maybe the minister could explain to us the process for funding applications that might get his attention for Pride in Education.

**Hon. Mr. Hogan** (Carleton, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite. Every request for funding that comes to my department is screened by different members of the department. The ones that are approved or recommended to be approved are then sent to my desk for approval. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

### HEALTH CARE

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. We are not going to drop this subject; we will come back to it in the future. For now, I am going to come back to the issue we hear about the most, which is access to the health care system.

[*Original*]

I appreciate that the member opposite let us know that 47 000 people now remain on the waiting list. I go back to the plan that the government put in place and the target that was originally set and then modified. The target now is that the waiting list will be eliminated by June of this year, in about seven weeks' time. I hope that the minister can clarify for us what actions are going to be taken to get 47 000 people off the waiting list in the next eight weeks. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, again, I do not mind keeping the opposition accountable. When we have a target, it is a target. Those numbers keep changing. I do not know if the members opposite are aware, but we have had an increase here in New Brunswick of about 30 000 people. That is a success that shows that New Brunswickers are doing it right. We are doing it right here in New Brunswick. We are attracting people, Mr. Speaker. They are choosing New Brunswick as the province to be in. We continue to work, day in and day out, to make sure that people are connected to a primary health care provider.

I know that the member opposite is stuck on a timeline. You know, Mr. Speaker, maybe she needs to look within her caucus and to some of the new members as that is a timeline that



# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

was put forward by Extra-Mural/Ambulance New Brunswick. These are, again, best practices that we can take a look at and work toward.

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

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of things that the minister said really struck me, one being that the numbers keep changing. That is why we are asking these questions. New Brunswickers are frustrated because they do not know when the waiting list will disappear. They do not know where they are on the list. How many other people are on the list with them? When can they expect to have access to primary care? We are stuck on a timeline because the government has made commitments, which we believe to be sincere, that it will take actions to reduce this waiting list—commitments that it has missed once, twice. Now, there is a commitment for June, at a time when New Brunswickers have lost a lot of faith in our collective ability to deliver good government to people.

I do not think that it is unreasonable to request that the Minister of Health let the people of New Brunswick know when the waiting list will be removed, what actions he is taking to address that, and how many new primary health care providers will be recruited into the province by the deadline that he himself set.

*[Translation]*

Thank you very much.

*[Original]*

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Once again, I will help the opposition out. These numbers keep changing because the population keeps changing. Doctors make decisions to come here to New Brunswick, so they take patients off the list. Some doctors retire, and that puts patients on the list. It is a fluid number that keeps changing.

I know that the member opposite wants to try to score some points, especially on the first day, by saying that the government is not doing the job, but that is far from correct. That is far from correct. We continue to recruit. We have now recruited more doctors than we have lost. That is a stat that the Gallant government and its advisers could not come forward with. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work to make sure that people have access to primary care. That is why we have instituted things such as eVisitNB to help with episodic care. We have NB Health Link up and running. We want it to be in...

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

## Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

### NURSES

**Ms. Holt** (Bathurst East—Nepisiguit—Saint-Isidore, Leader of the Official Opposition, L): Thank you very much. I appreciate that the minister referred to the government's recruitment plan. As we know, and as my colleague mentioned, there is no written plan. However, there is a plan, and, as we know, there is currently a \$29-million budget for recruitment and retention.

[*Original*]

I think that it has been made very clear by the nurses of this province that no work is happening on retention to successfully keep nurses in the work where they are desperately needed. All the attention is being put on the recruitment side of the house.

[*Translation*]

There is a lack of respect for nurses, who are not getting incentives, while provinces around us, like Nova Scotia, Alberta, and Ontario, are attracting and welcoming our nurses.

[*Original*]

Can the minister please reassure us... While there is a focus on recruitment, what portion of that \$29 million is going to retention? How has the government stabilized the exodus from our nursing profession?

**Hon. Mr. Fitch** (Riverview, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, once again, it is an honour to be up answering questions from the new Leader of the Opposition. You know, there is a lot of work being done with respect to retention, and it may be different than in other parts of the country. But I know that we have said this on the floor of the Legislature many times: We have the utmost respect for the RNs here in the province, and not only for the RNs but also for the NPs, doctors, personal support workers, janitors, and custodians—for all that those people can do.

Within our department and within the RHAs, there are plans with respect to recruitment and retention, and they are written down. I know that the member opposite is trying to make a point about this, but the fact of the matter is that this government continues to work day in and day out to make sure that people have access to primary care. We continue to do that, and we continue to work with our stakeholders, as mentioned by the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. We have included a number of internationally trained nurses. The fact of the matter is that...

# Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

## Oral Questions

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

