

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



October 30, 2025

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[Translation]

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Good afternoon.

[Original]

Madam Speaker, on the cost of carbon adjustor, it appears that the Premier has found the pen that she had lost for the past year. She promised to get rid of this cost of carbon adjustor immediately, Madam Speaker, not a year later. When we brought this up here in this House a year ago, we mentioned the risk to retailers with what this government proposed to do. It's been a year, and nothing has changed. There is still a risk to retailers with the actions of this government. This past year, New Brunswickers lost out because of the government's inaction, and we find ourselves in the same place. It's like Groundhog Day. It's a nightmare, over and over again. Why has this government... Its members had a year. They had a year to figure this out and change their approach. Why have they not changed their approach when it comes to the cost of carbon adjustor? Why are they still putting small retail gas stations at risk? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Our government has been listening to New Brunswickers all over this province, hearing them tell us the challenges they're having making ends meet. Our government wants to deliver that relief. We have been doing everything we can to find ways to make life more affordable, such as by taking 10% off people's power bills, putting a rent cap in place, freezing people's property tax assessments, providing school breakfasts, and making the RSV vaccine free for students.

Now we're taking 8.24¢ off the price of gas, something the people on the other side of the aisle voted against. They didn't want this relief for New Brunswickers, but we put people first, and that's what we've done here.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): And do the people of New Brunswick feel any difference as a result of this government's actions? Not at all. Madam Speaker, this Premier has painted herself into a corner with her reckless promise to be rid of the cost of carbon adjustor. This tax was given to us by her federal overlords. This political promise is going to do nothing but close gas stations, hurt small businesses, and make gas availability a problem for everyone, especially in rural New Brunswick. One thing the government could do instead of harming small businesses and closing gas stations is reduce the provincial portion of the gas tax and bring affordability to New Brunswickers that way. Will this Premier explain why she is willing to close gas stations rather than adjust and deliver the affordability she promised in some other manner? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and there it is. Finally, the real politics come out. The members opposite wanted to blame the feds. Does anybody remember the name Outhouse? The strategy was always to bring up the words “carbon tax” as much as possible in this House, and they created the carbon cost adjustor so that they could keep going. This was a temporary measure that’s been in effect for three years. Members of the industry are making a compelling case that they have true costs. We are removing the adjustor so that they will have the mechanism to go to the EUB and present their case. Everything is in place for them to do exactly what they want and actually get the real cost of the clean air regulations instead of having some formula so that this group can keep talking about the feds and the carbon tax. That’s all this was about. It was always about politics, and they seem to forget that.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Here are some facts, Madam Speaker. Promised affordability at the pumps? No affordability at the pumps. If the government members think for one second that this isn’t going to just continue to slide down to consumers, then they’re fooling themselves. This government had no problem with impacting provincial revenues with its electricity rebate. But here, we have a government that would rather choose to make it harder for people to live, get to work, and support their families. Will you stop attacking New Brunswick gas station and small business owners and deliver the affordability at the pump that you promised? Cutting the fuel tax would give affordability to New Brunswickers. Will you live up to your promise of affordability, or will you continue to attack small businesses and gas stations in this province? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know that the member opposite wants more affordability measures for everyone in New Brunswick. I know that the honourable member doesn’t want New Brunswickers to pay more than they should. It’s the opinion of the members on this side of the House that the cost of compliance with the Clean Fuel Regulations should be based on actual costs. I know that the honourable member doesn’t want New Brunswickers to pay a higher or inflated cost for that. So, I would urge the honourable member to support this government with respect to having the applicant, meaning the sector, go to the EUB and prove its actual costs of compliance with the federal Clean Fuel Regulations, rather than having New Brunswickers pay more.

One indication that has given us some apprehensions about using the existing formula is that the sector has not come forward to say that those costs are insufficient. Probably, they are paying over—

[Translation]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you again, Madam Speaker.

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[Original]

The New Brunswick Energy and Utilities Board, or the EUB, our province's independent regulator, has long incorporated this adjustor into its pricing formula precisely to ensure that costs are passed through transparently and predictably. Since the regulations took effect, the board has affirmed that it is a necessity. Despite the evidence, the Holt government is going to remove this calculation. Why are you not listening to the evidence, as you promised to do, and finding another way to provide affordability, as you also promised? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, the proper process for a regulatory framework is that the burden is always on the applicant to prove what their costs are. The original carbon adjustor, when it was brought into that legislation, circumvented normal regulatory practice. Instead of having the sector do the work and prove what its costs are for compliance with the CFR, it made the EUB do the work for the sector. That circumvents normal regulatory practice.

Whether it is for electricity, motor carriers, or gasoline, you always have to prove the cost of your compliance and your cost of operations. That's the way it should have been done. The original carbon adjustor should never have been part of the equation. It should always have been up to the sector to come before the EUB and make their case. Thank you.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, that gets right down to the crux of it, doesn't it? Without this calculation, New Brunswick would be the outlier as the only province in the country forcing suppliers to absorb federal costs, creating a notable market distortion. The minister just admitted that applicants will have to try to prove their case. If they can't, as we are saying, they will lose.

Fuel markets are national and interconnected. Suppliers don't operate in silos. If New Brunswick retailers and wholesalers can't recover CFR costs, which we're hearing that they may not be able to do, then, with those costs currently averaging 7.5¢ to 9¢ per litre, operations will be unprofitable. I have retailers telling me that they will be out of business in two weeks. People will lose jobs. Communities will suffer. What do you have to say to retailers who are under threat by your policies?

It is clear that retailers do not believe they can recoup these costs. What can the government offer to allay these fears?

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Madam Speaker, the member opposite has just suggested that the cost of compliance is 7.8¢ for the CFR. I'm not sure what evidence he's using to establish that. I think the normal practice is actually to have that based on evidence as opposed to an esoteric formula that was only intended to be in place for a short period of time. I don't think the member opposite knows what the true cost of compliance is for the CFR because he hasn't seen the evidence. The EUB hasn't seen the evidence. I think New Brunswickers want a clear and

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transparent process to understand why they are paying any amount of tax on top of their fuel. Thank you.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, it's clear that eliminating the adjustor risks causing significant trouble for the supply chain. We've seen this before. The EUB isn't a partisan body. It's an independent, quasi-judicial tribunal established to safeguard consumers through evidence-based regulation.

Over two decades, the EUB has managed a formula that balances supplier viability with pump affordability, incorporating federal mandates—I know the Minister of Finance doesn't like to hear that—like the CFR. The government of New Brunswick should let the EUB do its job, and not risk supply jeopardy by unravelling the very stability that New Brunswickers depend on. Will the Premier commit to finding other ways to reduce gas prices, as she promised, rather than creating chaos with her reckless political promise? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Herron (Hampton-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Natural Resources, L): Madam Speaker, I think we're getting somewhere. I agree with the member opposite 100%. We should let the EUB do its job.

EDUCATION

Mr. Lee (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have some overlapping questions and overlapping themes today: accountability, transparency, obligations to students, and spending. The advocate's report criticizes the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for significant failures in communicating the impact of budget cuts which led to layoffs and, later, a \$14.6-million reversal. It's apparent that the department has its own numeracy problems.

If radical transparency and accountability are on the government's internal curriculum for conducting business, then my question to the Minister of Education is this: Can you provide a clear explanation of how such a major error occurred with the budget? Are any officials being held accountable for it? What specific accountability measures will be implemented to prevent future budget miscommunications and reversals like the \$14.6-million one?

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. We thank the New Brunswick Advocate for his work. We've read the report thoroughly. I've even had a conversation with him to clarify any kind of nuance in his report. We've accepted his recommendations, and we look forward to clarifying the budgetary process with his help and with the help of the department and all other stakeholders. Thank you.

Mr. Lee (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Well, Madam Speaker, in keeping with the advocate's report, the province, and specifically the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, has a strong inclusive education mandate under Policy 322, which sets out the requirements and expectations for inclusive education in all public schools

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across the province. It is a ministerial policy directive, which means that it is binding on both schools and districts.

When it comes to ethics, students, and budgets, my questions are for the Minister of Education. How do funding decisions align with the province's legal and ethical obligations to support students? What safeguards are in place to protect vulnerable learners from the fallout of budget missteps? How will the department ensure that inclusive education policies are properly funded and not compromised by reactive budgeting?

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. This government is committed to supporting and stabilizing the classroom by making sure that the resources students need to learn how to read, to write, and to be engaged in their learning process... This has been our commitment from the get-go, and we're working with districts on how to make this happen and on how to target those resources by hiring more academic support teachers, educational assistants, and—

(Interjections.)

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Behavioural mentor... Behaviour intervention mentors. I'm sorry about that. I got a little bit distracted by sounds coming from across the hall, but that doesn't dissuade me from what we're focusing on, which is stabilizing the classroom to make sure that we increase literacy and numeracy and reduce chronic absenteeism. Thank you.

Mr. Lee (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Continuing with my previous questions with respect to ethical obligations to students, accountability, and transparency, yesterday, the Minister of Education attempted to use my own words to try to help her respond to the opposition leader. She neglected to refer to the rest of my response to Tuesday's ministerial statement, in which I said:

as for government commitments, the pay-what-you-can lunch program promised in the election campaign of 2024 has not been forgotten.

Imagine what else students could accomplish if, in addition to the breakfast program, the pay-what-you-can lunch program was also up and running.

My question to the Minister of Education is this: Yesterday, the minister deliberately presented my words out of context. However, hasn't the minister deliberately failed the interests of parents and students by agreeing and supporting a promised pay-what-you-can lunch program that was supposed to be up and running in September but now doesn't exist?

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, I would love the opportunity to take a deep breath right now.

We are very, very proud of the universal breakfast program that we've launched.

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(Interjections.)

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Yes. We've doubled access, and it's universal. This is a huge step. Students' bellies are full. They are starting their day ready to learn, and we know that this is going to have a huge impact on literacy, numeracy, and chronic absenteeism. Students will feel engaged when they come to school, and they're going to be ready to learn and to concentrate.

Now, if anybody in this room, on either side, hears about challenges in their schools, please flag them to us. Flag them to the team of people that can actually come up with solutions. Let's think about the children and them eating and not make this about politics.

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Members. Members.

HOSPITALS

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to start off by thanking all those who work in our hospital emergency departments in New Brunswick. I certainly don't know how they get out of bed, knowing what they're going to face on a daily basis, with the overcrowding. They are overworked, and there are excessive demands being placed upon them on a daily basis.

My first question for the Minister of Health is about an issue that was brought to my attention in at least one hospital. I want to know whether or not it's true that any hospitals have been fined for overcrowding by the Fire Marshal.

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the critic on the other side, welcome back. We're glad to have you on board and asking good questions. I echo your comments about thanking folks who work in the emergency department. I've worked in the emergency department, and they all work long hours. Sometimes, their jobs are thankless, and sometimes we thank them for doing these jobs. I am not aware of any Fire Marshal regulations. The Fire Marshal imposes things that help create a safer environment. At the end of the day, when you need emergency care, it's an unsafe environment anywhere else.

I am not aware of that. I don't anticipate that. We do have crowding in our emergency departments. It's intermittent. We are working hard to reduce it. Thank you very much for your comment.

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Through you to the Minister of Health, I'm sure he'll look into that to make sure it's accurate that no hospitals have been fined due to overcrowding.

I know what I saw in a couple of hospital emergency rooms in our province. If we had dogs, cats, or horses lined up and stuck in every cranny in the building, you know, we'd have someone showing up and taking them out of there. I've been in a couple of hospitals when an announcement came across the PA system saying that the ER was overcapacity. In one

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instance, I believe it was 400% overcapacity. I'd like the minister to explain to New Brunswickers, through you, Madam Speaker, what overcapacity means and what happens in these hospitals when it occurs.

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to educate the people's House. Sometimes, there are more people in the emergency department than we are able to deal with within a reasonable period of time. Sometimes, that's tolerable. People wait a little longer. Then, sometimes, it starts to become an unsafe environment where there's not enough room in corridors, beds, and waiting rooms, so we invoke what's called a Code Orange. Then patients who have been admitted to the hospital can be shipped up to the floor regardless of staffing on the floor because it's felt that it's less risky, safer, for them to be in an understaffed area than in the emergency department, which is that much more understaffed. The emergency department deals with crises, with people rolling in off the street and having been in a trauma. At least, on the floor, things are a little bit more stable. It's a Code Orange. It happens. I wish it didn't happen. It's really a reflection of how busy our emergency departments are. Thank you very much.

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's clear to me why we're losing 6 out of every 10 nurses we hire. I don't know how they do it every single day.

My question back to the minister is this. I appreciate his answer on Code Orange. Normally, in the hospitals I've been in, they just say: Emergency is overcapacity. They must understand that as a Code Orange. We ship people up to the floors. Well, there are no rooms available on the floors or they would have already been there. My question to the minister is this: Are we shipping people from emergency to the floors to be on a stretcher in the hallway, thereby overcrowding those floors? What is this government's plan? Clearly, we need to have good recruitment, better recruitment, and better retention than what we have now.

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, I'm happy to have this opportunity to speak about these issues. Yes, at times, people do go to understaffed floors, but we are working very hard to get more staff on these floors.

We've opened a number of nursing positions at our universities. We have a retention agreement to bring nurses back. Nurses are telling us that it's a more respectful, attractive working environment.

Yes, 6 out of 10 nurses left, not this year but last year. I have to give credit. Even that was better than the years before. It's not a current statistic. Nurses retire. We can't preclude that, but we can give them a safer, respectful, well-paid environment. We are doing that, and I expect more will stay. Thank you.

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[Translation]

ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

On Friday afternoon two weeks ago, the Minister of Environment released a statement that revealed that 50% of the gas stations he had his inspectors inspect were in violation of environmental laws. Despite rigorous regulations under the *Clean Environment Act*, last fall, at Murray's Irving in Woodstock, somehow, 189 000 L of diesel fuel leaked without being detected. If environmental regulations had been followed, this disaster would never have happened. Before it got completely out of control, the Department of Environment should have caught the problem, rather than relying on customers to begin to taste petroleum in the drinking water there.

My question for the minister is this: Of the 50% of gas stations that failed the inspections that his inspectors recently carried out, how many failed to monitor the levels of gasoline or diesel fuel in their tanks and to report that information to the department?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. LePage (Restigouche West, Minister of Environment and Climate Change; Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, L): Thank you for the question, Madam Speaker. I would just like to clarify one thing. The 91 inspections we have done since April were additional ones. Our team does, on average, 2 200 annual inspections in the province focusing on environmental protection issues.

We have taken additional action to ensure gas station compliance. Half of the gas stations inspected were in violation. I would say to you that half of them had committed administrative violations. I have named them, but I can repeat them. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, I don't have the subject of the member's question in my notes. It was not a subject we were informed about, but I will be able to provide an answer to him in the next few days.

[Original]

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, it seems to me that there's a big problem with a lack of enforcement and, certainly, a lack of transparency around inspections. It shouldn't take an environmental disaster like what happened in Woodstock to ensure that gas stations are following the environmental laws of this province. The minister keeps saying that most of the violations the inspectors found were administrative in nature, but, to take one example, his stats showed that they found gas stations that had unregistered tanks buried in the ground—ghost tanks. There's no way to manage an unregistered tank if you don't know it's there.

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How can we know whether those tanks comply with environmental regulations, regulations that are designed to protect people's drinking water and to protect them from explosions and fires that, in the past, have resulted, and can result, from leaking underground storage tanks? Can the minister tell us how many of these ghost tanks, these unregistered tanks, his inspectors found in the ground?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. LePage (Restigouche West, Minister of Environment and Climate Change; Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Too bad the member opposite didn't bother to ask me his questions outside of the House. They are really purely technical questions that we could easily have answered by email or telephone.

I just want to ensure that the member opposite and all New Brunswickers understand the situation. Our inspections are basic. Operators have an operating permit, and there is a strict requirement for them to do certain things and not others to run a gas station. Their reporting is monitored every time they submit their reports to the government in compliance with their operating license. Every time their operations result in a failure, our inspectors are there to ensure that it is put right. That's what we are aiming for. That's what we will do to protect New Brunswickers.

POVERTY

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): The *Hunger Count 2025* report is completely unacceptable. Nearly 20% of food bank users in New Brunswick are employed. Despite their full-time jobs, these people can no longer manage to feed their families. That's the reality under the Holt government.

Since 2019, food bank visits have gone up by 45%. Community organizations like Feed NB are saying they're at the end of their rope. We are being told about exhausted volunteers, insufficient donations, and families forced to choose between heat and groceries.

Meanwhile, the Holt government prefers to talk about budget surpluses and economic prosperity. What prosperity can we talk about when retirees and workers have to stand in line to get bread and milk? When will this government finally stop congratulating itself and establish a real plan to fight poverty and food insecurity in New Brunswick?

[Original]

Hon. Ms. Miles (Hanwell-New Maryland, Minister of Social Development; Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the member opposite, thank you. There is no doubt that New Brunswickers are struggling. There is a financial strain. We read the report about the use of food banks. The national rate is up by 5%, and I think the rate in New Brunswick is up by

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about 0.5%. That's 0.5% too much. We know that. That's why this government is putting in other measures to support affordability. It's why we've rolled out opportunities such as the universal breakfast program. It's why we've taken on opportunities such as the rent bank. It's why we're moving forward with the 3% rent cap. It's why we're putting these other affordability measures in place. Food insecurity is real. It's impactful. It's impacting children. It's impacting families. We have to come together to find ways to support affordability for New Brunswickers. That is why I'm proud to stand behind a government that puts New Brunswickers first. New Brunswickers told us what they wanted. Taking 8.2¢ or 8.4¢ off the price of gas today is another piece—

[Translation]

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): We are often told repeatedly that New Brunswick is moving ahead, that the economy is strong, and that the indicators are positive. However, a hard reality is hiding behind the slogans. Over 32 000 New Brunswickers had to resort to going to a food bank last month. Nearly one in five of them has a job. This is not a temporary crisis, but rather a lasting shame.

Community organizations are sounding the alarm. The number of requests is skyrocketing, donations are shrinking, and food costs continue to climb. Numbers don't lie: they show a government policy that has failed to protect those who work hard but can no longer keep up with the cost of living. Retired people, unable to make ends meet because of a fixed income and rampant inflation, are also turning to food assistance.

How can this government talk about economic growth while more and more employed New Brunswickers now have to count on charity for food?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much for the question. This question goes straight to the heart of the work our team has been doing since our government was elected a year ago.

[Original]

This team has worked day in and day out to be on the ground with New Brunswickers to make sure we are tackling the things that matter most to them. New Brunswickers told us that the cost of living is too high and that they can't afford rent. We put a rent cap and a direct to tenant subsidy in place to deal with that. They told us that, even in their homes... There were seniors whose property tax bills were getting out of control. We froze their property tax assessments, and now we're doing a complete property tax reform. Parents told us they were having a hard time sending their kids to school fed, so we put a free universal breakfast program in place to help families and to help kids learn. Seniors told us they couldn't afford the medical vaccines that they need, so we made the RSV vaccine free. Today, we've reduced the price of gas by 8.2¢ per litre, starting December 1, because we are focused on New Brunswickers and on making sure they can live an affordable life here.

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Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): The time for question period has expired.

[*Translation*]

Question period is over.