

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



May 13, 2026

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JOB

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

[Original]

Madam Speaker, last week, opposition members asked many questions of this government. As a rule, we do not get answers, but the answers to the questions that we asked last week were particularly egregious for their completely disconnected and nonsensical content. I'm going to ask the questions again and give members of this government another chance to be their best and truest completely radically transparent selves. Last week, I asked the Premier whether she is going to fight for the 60 jobs that are being lost in Sussex as a result of her bad deal. What I got for an answer was something from the Minister of Labour that had nothing to do with my question. I later cited the Premier saying that there was no hope of saving these jobs. Will the Premier confirm to the House today that she has indeed bowed to Agropur's wishes and is going to let 60 people in Sussex lose their jobs? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Randall (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to talk about the work that Opportunities New Brunswick does in this province. One of the ways that Opportunities New Brunswick drives business and economic growth is by investing in the private sector. These investments attract businesses that may be considering other jurisdictions and help New Brunswick businesses grow by becoming more competitive and productive. Our investments generate returns that support services like health care and education.

Madam Speaker, more than 95 jobs will be delivered to Miramichi. Agropur has secured a long-term partnership with New Brunswick, and this deal allows New Brunswick farmers local places to process their products. Thank you.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): That's Liberal math, Madam Speaker. It's not 95 jobs. It's 15, and there are still going to be people losing their jobs in Miramichi—smoke and mirrors.

On four separate occasions, the Premier was asked whether she would be radically transparent, the way she promised to be, and would reveal the details of the Agropur contract. In return, we received obfuscation on the part of the minister, who at least got up to answer the question, because the Premier would not get up.

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This is \$2.4 million of taxpayers' money to lose 60 jobs in Sussex. This government owes an explanation to the people of Sussex-Three Rivers. For the fifth time, Madam Speaker, will this government share with the people of New Brunswick the details of the contract with Agropur, as well as the emails about it?

This is the seat of democracy in our province. We, as an opposition, have a duty and an obligation to hold government to account on behalf of the people it governs. This government promised transparency. Will the Premier continue to evade questions on this topic, or will she finally give New Brunswickers what she promised and be transparent about how badly she managed their money?

Hon. Mr. Randall (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I have shared with this House on multiple occasions, we knew, and the last government knew, that Agropur was assessing different scenarios across the Maritimes. We also understood, as did the previous government, that this could result in operational changes in the region. The previous government hoped for a rejig. We acted, and we secured over 95 jobs for the long-term benefit of New Brunswickers. We secured a place to enable New Brunswick's agricultural sector to process its products.

This deal secures a piece of the supply chain that will support New Brunswick farmers. This is a good deal for New Brunswick. Yes, of course, this does present challenges for Sussex. We are certainly attuned to that, and the Minister responsible for Labour has spoken about that. However, this deal secures a place for us to have a partnership with Agropur. Without this deal, we would not have that place. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): The minister and the Premier should have been attuned to not losing 60 jobs in Sussex. Last week, we recognized that this contract deals with hitting growth targets, not job targets. As usual, we received a lot of word salad, jargon, and just plain gobbledygook, which is the kindest way that I can describe the lack of an answer from this government.

I asked the Premier whether she would please clarify whether the determination about whether Agropur is hitting these growth targets would be based on growth in New Brunswick and not on growth in Nova Scotia or Quebec. Those provinces are where the jobs lost because of this agreement will go. Premier Tim Houston from Nova Scotia celebrated the influx of jobs to his province through the expansion of the Bedford facility.

Will the Premier be radically transparent, as she promised, and clarify whether these growth targets will be based on growth in New Brunswick, yes or no? A yes or no answer will at least confirm whether she is unaware. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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Hon. Mr. Randall (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The project in Miramichi will be subject to productivity targets. Those targets are focused on the Miramichi facility. We are very excited to be able to deliver a more productive operation that will create a long-term place for Agropur in the province. This project, which ONB partnered on to help this company with its productivity goals, could have gone to another jurisdiction. Again, these productivity goals will be measured based on this plant, specifically. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Be open with people. What are those targets? What happens if the targets are not met? We haven't received any answers, Madam Speaker.

Last week, I asked whether there was a way to cancel this agreement. Is there a way for this government to cancel the bad cheque it has written and prevent this from happening? What would the penalties for New Brunswick taxpayers be if the government were to break this contract? What would it cost us?

These are very simple questions that this government has a duty and responsibility to answer. Is there a way for the government to cancel this agreement, yes or no? What are the penalties if the agreement is broken? Do penalties even exist? If the government did, indeed, break this contract, then what financial amount would it have to pay?

These are all questions that the Premier can provide a definitive answer to for New Brunswickers. If 60 people will lose their jobs in Sussex, then don't you believe that they deserve to have concrete answers as to why you are not fighting for them? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Randall (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the question. To answer directly, if targets aren't met, then we don't deliver dollars. It surprises me that the opposition is calling for us to end a deal that will bring 95 jobs to Miramichi—

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Randall (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): It will bring \$63.5 million worth of GDP growth.

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It confuses me that they would want to say no to those jobs and to say no to that place for Agropur in this province. However, maybe it shouldn't confuse me. They ran on a one-page platform, and when they were aware of this situation and the opportunity for Agropur to be part of our growth in New Brunswick, they decided not to engage and instead hoped for a rejig, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): That's pure artifice, Madam Speaker. I quoted the Premier last week when she said:

There's not going to be a net loss of jobs... There's actually going to be more jobs with Agropur at the end of the day.

She then went on to say:

Well, let me check, because our understanding of their growth plans was that they were going to come out with a larger workforce at the end of this process.

That sounds to me like, in the process of their discussions, this government knew what Agropur's plans were. I remind the Premier of this quote from her minister in Hansard:

I shared with the House that Agropur had said that it was assessing different scenarios across the Maritimes, and we understood that this could include potential operational changes within the region, including in Sussex.

That's another indication that these government members are giving mixed messages to New Brunswickers about what they actually knew. This is my question to the Premier: When? Will she share with New Brunswickers exactly when she knew that Agropur was going to cut 60 jobs in Sussex? Give us the date and time when she knowingly flushed 60 jobs in Sussex down the drain, or admit—

Hon. Mr. Randall (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the member opposite for repeating that quote that we've certainly gone back and forth on several times in this House. I will again repeat what this deal brings to Miramichi. ONB's decision to invest in Agropur will increase the number of jobs in Miramichi to more than 95. It'll generate \$63.2 million in GDP in five years and position the Miramichi facility as a centre of expertise for fluid milk processing in the region. The question I guess I have is this: Why would we not want Miramichi to have this opportunity? This is a really good project for Miramichi. We are proud to be making sure that we have processing capabilities in this province for the agricultural sector. We look forward to having a partnership with Agropur for years and decades to come. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): He should be asking himself why he didn't protect those 60 jobs in Sussex, Madam Speaker. The mixed messages continue. Again, this is from Hansard:

We weren't privy to exactly what their restructuring plan would look like

This is another quote:

Agropur had shared that it was assessing different scenarios across the Maritimes. We understood that this could include potential operational changes within the region, including in Sussex.

I asked which of these statements was correct. If you didn't know Agropur's intentions, why did you give it money? If you did know its intentions, why did you give it money? The answer we received was the minister trying to blame Agropur for not telling the government what it planned to do. Does the Premier want to tell us exactly when the government did or did not know what Agropur's plans were? I think the Finance Minister summed up the philosophy of this government best when he said:

We spend money for New Brunswickers, and we won't stop doing it

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Randall (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for raising the questions. It's as if the member opposite hasn't been reading the economic pages of newspapers lately. It's as if he's been in a bubble, unaware that there have been significant political challenges to the energy sector. We're in a trade war. The global economy is rapidly changing. Supply chains are changing. Technology is transforming. This opportunity in Miramichi is a way to be part of Agropur's future in an ever-changing world.

We have secured processing capacity for the province and the agricultural sector. This is an opportunity to grow the workforce to 95-plus jobs in Miramichi, and this is an opportunity for Miramichi. I'm surprised that the opposition has been suggesting that we would say: No, we don't want those jobs, and we don't want that economic benefit for Miramichi.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): There it is, Madam Speaker. The government members accept no responsibility, blame everyone else, and rinse and repeat. That's all they're capable of doing, Madam Speaker. When they get in trouble, they say: Well, let's make sure we blame the former government. It's incredible how they say they have all the answers when, in reality, they have none. We're not having much luck with straight answers from this government. That's no surprise. Let's try a real Wiffle ball of a question.

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At one point, the Minister responsible for Opportunities NB said that the money was a “conditionally repayable loan”. However, the ONB website says that it is a “non-repayable contribution”. This is not a simple slip of the tongue. Government members have given these two different answers not only on the floor of the House but also in the media.

Since the Premier is habitually unaware, will she look deep into her prepared notes and clarify which one it is? Your minute starts now.

Hon. Mr. Randall (Fredericton North, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB; Minister responsible for Economic Development and Small Business; Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB, Minister responsible for the *Regulatory Accountability and Reporting Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to let the House know that this is a non-repayable contribution, conditional upon specific targets being met by the proponent. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Recently, the Premier and the Minister of Health provided a health care update where we learned that 28.5% of New Brunswickers don't have access to primary care. There was no update regarding virtual care and what that will look like when the supposedly seamless transition happens at the end of June.

I'd like to know from the Premier whether the 90-day extension built into the original eVisitNB contract is only 90 days or whether it is 120 days or even longer. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, I always welcome the opportunity to talk about the progress we're making in virtual care in New Brunswick. Yes, I have to acknowledge that there was an extension proposal in the original contract. We are abiding by that now. We look forward to providing seamless access to virtual care in New Brunswick, which New Brunswickers want, deserve, and will get. It will be high-quality care as per the request for proposal (RFP) that was distributed and responded to by 11 different groups of people. We picked the very best proposal, and we scored it appropriately. We look forward to a seamless transition in virtual care in New Brunswick, and I am glad that you've reminded us of that phenomenon here today. Thank you.

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I thank the Minister of Health for getting up and talking about what is apparently some kind of 90-day extension that might have been built into the original contract with eVisitNB. Whether that's going to happen... Now, we're going to have a seamless transition, not on April 1 but on July 1, I guess.

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I want to know whether the minister has received any updates from Foundever. How is it doing with staffing and things of that nature? Can we be assured—more importantly, can the people of New Brunswick who count on this virtual health care service be assured—that there will be a seamless transition to an effective service on July 1?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, virtual health care is the direction in which we are currently moving. It started during the COVID-19 days. Now it's 2026. We have to provide high-quality virtual health care. New Brunswickers have asked us for virtual health care that is provided in both languages, for appointments without having to wait on the phone for long periods of time, and for a system that employs New Brunswickers. We have worked with the provider of virtual health care on 811 and on other files in the past. It has performed. This is a performance-driven contract, so we expect the provider to perform as well going into the future as it has in the past. We're very pleased to be current in our provision of health care, including virtual health care, in our province. Thank you very much.

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. That was quite the answer. It didn't answer the question, but it was an answer.

So we're going to have a seamless transition on July 1. I want to know whether the minister has an update on how much Foundever will be paying its nurse practitioners. How many nurse practitioners have been hired to date? I want to know whether the minister is aware that Foundever is trying to pay nurse practitioners \$30 per consultation, as compared to what eVisitNB pays, which is \$35.

I'm really concerned about this because I want to know what's going to happen on July 1. Foundever runs 811, which is a call centre that redirects your call to somewhere else. What is going to happen when we don't have the seamless transition on July 1? What is the Minister of Health or the Premier—whoever wants to answer—going to do to help New Brunswickers then?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to talk about a better quality of virtual care in our province. This is what New Brunswickers have expected. People don't know some of the nuances, but we know that when we move ahead, Foundever will provide a better quality of care that responds to a 2025 RFP. I'm not going to speculate about all the possible occurrences that could happen. We negotiated for a seamless transition, and we expect that transition to occur. We are moving forward positively, and we always do that. We have good contracts with good people who deliver, and I look forward to an improved version of virtual care in this province. Thank you.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, social media platforms are designed to be addictive and to get kids hooked. They interfere with healthy eating and sleeping habits. It's

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not a matter of willpower. Social media platforms want to keep kids on them for as long as possible. This has resulted in a mental health crisis and has contributed to children experiencing body dysmorphia, self-harm, and suicide.

Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew recently announced that his province will be the first to ban social media and AI chatbots for children under the age of 16. On CBC's *Information Morning*, cybersecurity expert David Shipley recommended that the New Brunswick government follow Manitoba's lead. Will the Premier join Wab Kinew in banning social media and AI chatbots for children?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much to the member opposite for the question. She raises an issue that is on the minds of many parents and people in our province, across our country, and around the world. We've certainly been very closely watching Australia, which has moved to restrict access to social media platforms with an age gate. We think that what Manitoba is proposing is really interesting. We have a team that, right now, is looking at various policy mechanisms that might be at our disposal to do exactly what the member opposite is asking.

We need to make sure that our kids are protected from what we see to be a really complicated environment that can cause significant mental health harm. This is something we are wrestling with, even personally, at home. As everyone knows, I have a 14-year-old, a 12-year-old, and an 8-year-old, none of whom have devices and all of whom have limited access to accounts. The kind of exposure our kids are getting to these systems keeps us up. This is something that our team is looking at right now.

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I look forward to seeing the Premier bring something forward to bring this ban into effect. In the meantime, our kids are still being exposed to these things in school. The use of social media and generative AI chatbots has been largely unregulated, and they are generating more wealth and power for the tech billionaire oligarchy. Enough is enough. We know and they know that these products are harming our kids. Research shows that using AI contributes to cognitive impairment, and experts are raising concerns about the long-term impact on brain development. As the Premier mentioned, Australia is seeing some early signs of success with its ban, with the number of children using Snapchat decreasing by 40% since January. Will the Minister of Education at least take the first step and ban social media and AI chatbots in schools, as has been proposed by the Education Minister in Manitoba?

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite for the opportunity to talk about how we are managing this complex issue within our schools. I can say that, yes, we take this very seriously. We know that this is a reality we need to contend with, and our students are faced with this all the time.



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We also recognize that there is some good to these tools. They can be used to help with learning, by assisting those with learning difficulties and by creating dynamic learning environments. That's why we are focused on using AI chatbots and all these tools in an ethical and responsible way. That's why we have a policy that does just that.

We are able to take the good parts and use them in a responsible learning environment while also managing the distractions and harmful impacts these tools can have. We're striking—

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, the list of major problems with the use of these tools is long, and those problems are actually listed on the government's website. While Manitoba is protecting kids, the Holt government's new digital literacy curriculum is going in the opposite direction. We need to think about young children. For example, the curriculum suggests that kindergarten students use AI tools to come up with ideas or get prompts to explore or represent simple data. Isn't that what their brains are for? As the mom of a child starting kindergarten this year, I'm extremely concerned about this push to have kids use AI starting in kindergarten instead of learning how to think.

Will the Minister of Education press stop on the new AI curriculum? Will the Minister of Education instead consult with parents, classroom teachers, and students on how to ban the use of social media and AI chatbots in the classroom and on how to invest in things to foster the ability for kids to engage with the real world without relying on devices?

[*Translation*]

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, I thank the opposition member for giving me the opportunity to talk about this subject. At the department, we are very worried about children's development. We are very worried about their language acquisition, numeracy, and literacy; that's why we are seeking to determine how these tools can be used ethically and responsibly. Safeguards absolutely must be established to ensure the safety of children, especially younger ones, as they grow up. That's precisely why we are developing policies and platforms to manage their use.

As a parent, I'm also worried about the use of screens in schools, and that's why we're talking with our partners to develop an approach that is focused on the positive aspects, since these tools are used in our society. However, children must be protected from negative effects. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

CREDIT RATINGS

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): For the benefit of the Finance Minister, I will mention some of the headlines that have come out since he promised quarterly updates on the state of the province's finances. They say that the government is performing poorly on finances and that the government is performing poorly on social issues, the Premier's videos and photo ops notwithstanding. On the issue of the province's credit rating, New Brunswickers have a good reason to be concerned, in part because the credit rating agencies are concerned. Whenever they drop the Holt government's credit rating, New Brunswickers lose social services. After its first budget, the Child and Youth Advocate essentially put the Holt government on probation because of its \$47-million cut to youth mental health services. The minister responsible had to report to the advocate. Can the minister advise the people on how often he'll be reporting to the credit rating agencies that have essentially put this government on probation?

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, for the question. I feel like the opposition has been on auto-repeat for the past two weeks, as we haven't heard anything about the budget. To be clear, the rating agencies did not downgrade the province. We have a stable rating. What the opposition doesn't seem to understand is that we don't operate in a vacuum. If you look at what's going on geopolitically around the world, you'll see that there are wars and tariffs and that a change is going on. The rating agencies have already said there is a negative outlook for the country and the provinces, so we were going to have that impact anyway.

What the rating agencies also said, though, is that they realized this province and this government were catching up after six years of underinvestment. They understand that we have to do that. They understand our plan to get ahead. That's what they brought up, but the ratings did not change. The ratings are the same. I know people were looking forward to a change, but it did not happen. Two rating agencies gave us stable ratings, and we're still very high in this province.

[Translation]

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): Let's stay on the subject of the quarterly update and the downward revision of the credit rating related to the Holt government's poor financial and social results.

I don't know if there used to be a saying that if a government can do one thing wrong, it can do several. That saying exists now because of the Holt government.

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The Premier stated before a legislative committee that, when her government members learned that Moody's had lowered the credit rating, they celebrated the news. I believe that a number of New Brunswickers found that remark rather strange. It seemed to us that the Premier didn't really understand what had just happened.

This morning, I'm curious. Did the minister attend that celebration? If so, can he tell the House if the Premier was dancing the Highland Fling?

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. What I know is that we just spent four weeks considering estimates in the Legislative Assembly. We worked for 80 hours and we looked at every budget item. No questions were asked until now. What we're hearing are unwarranted comments about the Liberals spending recklessly. The opposition still doesn't want to debate anything in the House.

The member opposite is talking about the credit rating because it's the only thing his party can come up with. During six years in office, the previous government only discussed the credit rating. So nothing has changed on the other side of the House.

If official opposition members really believe that we have spent too much money on something, they should propose a debate on it. However, I haven't heard or seen anything like that. What I have heard from the official opposition is that more money must be spent and no additional revenue must come in. However, the official opposition never tells us where we have spent too much.

[Original]

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): I have to disagree with that statement because we have constantly been asking questions about the budget and about the way money is being spent by this Liberal Holt government. But you got your clip, so that is good.

The minister and all members of this House are aware that this session is scheduled to end on June 13. The minister's quarterly update could turn out to be one of the Holt government's trademark summertime feel-good photo ops. It would be a shame for the minister to avoid the scrutiny of this House on the very first update. When the Holt government avoids the people's House, it avoids the people, all 853 000 of them.

I believe it would be in the best interest of both transparency and accountability for the minister to move up the date of his first update so that it would be delivered no later than June 10. Will the minister commit to this today? Will he face the scrutiny of the people's House with his first update?

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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): I find it very interesting that, again, those members don't understand what a quarterly update is. Quarterly updates are in August. It has been like that forever. It is based on the quarterly update of this province, which we will add to. I will get back to what is being discussed.

There have been no questions about the budget. I haven't heard about anything specific in this House for the past week and a half at least. What I've heard are general comments. These are concerning comments, such as: What is \$60 000? What is \$500 000? What is \$6 million? What is \$5 million?

We have a structural deficit. Everything counts. Everything counts. Members opposite are knocking everything out of the park, saying that we can't touch anything. That says a ton about the reason we are in this situation right now. It says a ton about how the members opposite govern and about what we have to change, structurally, in this province. We will get it done.

[*Translation*]

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Question period is now over.

