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**VIRTUAL CARE**

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. News broke last week that nurse practitioners who are involved in the transition from eVisitNB to Foundever are sounding the alarm. Ever since this government decided to switch from eVisitNB's services to Foundever's, this has caused consternation, worry, and mostly fear, fear of losing a service that, by all accounts, was working very well for those who needed it. This government had promised a smooth transition by April 1 of this year. Then it was switched to July 1 of this year. That certainly raised eyebrows on this side of the House because it was a clear indicator that, once again, this government followed its ready-fire-aim approach and did not look at all the details of the contract. The official opposition has been asking questions of both the Premier and the Minister of Health, and no answers have been forthcoming from the most radically transparent government in New Brunswick's history. Will the Premier be radically transparent and tell us the details of what is happening with this off-the-rails contract? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, I'm glad to rise today to reassure New Brunswickers. New Brunswickers want good virtual care for New Brunswickers. That exists today, and it will be better come July 1. We have listened to 19 companies, and we have listened to patients and nurse practitioners who have described what people want on July 1. They will get it. I am very pleased to support our new company. I meet with its representatives. We've discussed any concerns that nurse practitioners have brought up. I'm very certain that there will be a smooth transition to a state-of-the-art, 2026 virtual care company. Thank you.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The people the government is not listening to, who don't believe there will be a smooth transition, are the people doing the work every single day. This contract is going to cost more but deliver less. This is a \$30-million contract over two years, whereas eVisitNB's contract was for \$11 million per year. That's 33% more in cost, but there will be less access for people who already do not have access to a primary care provider when they need it.

It is known that, currently, New Brunswick-created and run eVisitNB has a flexible system that allows nurse practitioners to see as many patients as possible in the run of a day, and eVisitNB has been doing the follow-ups so that nurse practitioners can focus on their next patient. Now, Foundever will be forcing a 20-minute time slot, whether the client shows up or not, and the nurse practitioner has to do all the associated follow-ups. The result? There will be fewer patients seen, more administrative work for nurse practitioners, and less access to health care for New Brunswick residents. Is the data-driven Premier okay with

paying more for a service with even fewer New Brunswickers getting access? This is what the data tells us will happen.

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, I could rise all day to reassure New Brunswickers. People who call a service today want more. They don't want to be waiting like they are when they call Air Canada, not knowing when someone will call them back or whether they will get a call back if they are Francophone. I'm very pleased that this new service will allow access from MyHealthNB, Tele-Care 811, and multiple other services that will be funnelled in, allowing people to get the right care at the right time. I'm very pleased that this is progressive. Thank you very much to the member opposite for giving me ongoing chances to speak about this. I hope that you ask more questions. Thank you.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): I certainly will, Madam Speaker, because the more they talk, the more New Brunswickers know that their trust in this government was misplaced. If only the last question was the worst of it. It's not. The original contract sent to nurse practitioners indicated that they would need access to electronic records, since the company had not obtained the necessary permissions. Then the contracts were changed, and that was omitted. Clearly, this is being made up on the fly between the Holt government and Foundever. This does not inspire confidence in how this government is managing this. There are over 70 nurse practitioners who are saying that they are worried the situation will worsen outcomes for patients. These are the people who know, who actually work in the system. New Brunswickers are rightly worried about this. Will the Premier back away from this bad contract and reassure New Brunswickers that they will not lose access to an e-visit system that was already working? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, I am very glad to reassure New Brunswickers that they will have virtual health care in New Brunswick on July 1. Thank you very much for telling us what nurse practitioners are concerned about. We hear that. We are acting on it. We have received letters from nurse practitioners who have had concerns about the other system and are looking forward to a new, modern system. You know, our nurse practitioners who are part of the new system will be able to order blood work directly, under their own names. That wasn't the case with the old system. They had to go through a medical director. That is not using our nurse practitioners to their full scope. We're very pleased that this will be a progressive system for New Brunswickers moving forward. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, I hope that this government just keeps digging in, digging in, and digging in, because New Brunswickers will see the truth of what is happening when they finally move over to this new contract. The following is a direct quote from the nurse practitioners who are worried about this bad contract.

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*Currently we see between 400-800 patients daily, and with the proposed “appointment only” contract, we will not be able to see a fraction of the same number of patients. We are the ones sitting in front of New Brunswickers daily, and **patients are scared and understandably concerned about their ability to access healthcare beyond June 30th**. Given the current state of Foundever’s hiring practices, it is morally difficult for us to continue to reassure patients that the system will work for them. We have a growing concern that this inability to safely provide care **will result in real world harm to our patients**, for whose welfare we care deeply.*

Does the Premier not see the concern? Will she be that blind to those who do this work every day? Does she believe these nurse practitioners, who clearly—

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, we did receive a letter, anonymous, so I’m not sure what “direct quote” means. We have received other letters from the nurse practitioners’ association. They have shared some concerns. We’ve met with them. You know, I’m very pleased that our nurse practitioners consider the well-being of New Brunswickers. They are trusted partners in health care management.

We have spoken with Foundever representatives. They assure us that it will meet the needs of multiple different sources and will be able to point people in multiple different directions, give direct advice, order blood tests, get those results, and follow up accordingly. The more I look into this file, the more I am reassured that this is the best way forward for New Brunswickers to get the virtual care that they expect and demand. Thank you.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): He’s the only one who is reassured, Madam Speaker. Trust me. Here is another quote.

*As Nurse Practitioners, we are advocates for patient safety, and it is our sincere concern that this company does not have the capacity to provide equivalent virtual care to New Brunswick with this looming deadline. ...*

*We are all aware of the challenges our patients face accessing care; primarily those who are not connected to a primary care provider. At eVisitNB we have kept countless patients out of the emergency rooms of New Brunswick, and have a grave concern for patient safety and care access from July 1st onwards. **With our current knowledge of Foundever, we do not believe they will be ready or capable for the task; nor do we feel they are investing the time and resources this province deserves.***

Does the Premier respect the opinion and knowledge of these front-line staff members? Does she believe them, yes or no?

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**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, it's not a matter of belief. We really appreciate the input and support that nurse practitioners give us. Frankly, they do keep people out of the emergency department, and they will do that on July 1 and August 1. They will continue to be very valuable. We continue to listen to nurse practitioners. We are meeting with them.

Nurse practitioners are not aware of the specifics or the workings of Foundever. That's just the way it goes. However, we are aware. Foundever has been giving us quite firm plans for moving ahead to meet that deadline, and it's under contract. It's obliged to provide virtual care for New Brunswickers. We have ways of monitoring that. We've spoken with Foundever and the previous providers, and we expect that it will deliver on behalf of New Brunswickers. I have been hearing positive expectations that virtual care will continue on July 1. I haven't heard anything that would lead me to believe that it won't happen, and I am aware of what the company is planning to do. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): It was supposed to start on April 1, Madam Speaker, and now it's starting on July 1. There should be warning signs all over the place for this government, but its members are not listening. They're not listening to people who actually work in this system. So much for good collaboration, trust, and leadership.

The nurse practitioners who have done this work in the service of New Brunswick patients are being treated poorly from the get-go. While an American company, Foundever, is making much more money from this contract than New Brunswick-based and New Brunswick-founded eVisitNB ever did, and is doing far less, nurse practitioners will be forced into pay that will be about half of what they were making and are being given 48 hours to sign a contract they are reluctant to sign. These are all signs pointing in the wrong direction, Madam Speaker. Does the Premier think that these front-line workers, who have kept untold thousands of people out of emergency rooms... Does she really believe that these people deserve to be paid less? She obviously does because she defends this contract at every single turn. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, I try hard not to repeat myself, so I won't. I heard the questions. I heard them three times. I would like to talk about a clinic I visited this morning while we were in Moncton. It's called an "access clinic", and it's where six nurses and three physicians look after over 15 000 patients. They do that very well, they are very credible, and they show leadership in New Brunswick. We are attaching patients to physicians and nurse practitioners. So, this is a good-news story from our trip to Moncton this morning. I will just reassure people that virtual care, real care, and access are all improving as we move on. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Hogan** (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Madam Speaker, the Premier has awarded the e-health of New Brunswickers by the hundreds of thousands to an American company in

Florida. The Premier will pay this American company 33% more, and that's not all. The American company will cut the pay of New Brunswick nurses so that even more profit can flow south to Miami, Florida, America. Congratulations, Premier. President Trump would be proud of you. New Brunswickers, not so much, especially at the end of the month if this boondoggle continues to blow up at the rate it has so far. In fairness to the Premier, before I ask another question, has she finally realized all the signs of the impending mess, or is she still guaranteeing a seamless transition to Foundever at the end of this month?

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, I'm concerned that the member opposite described an effort that we, as a credible government, have undertaken as a "boondoggle". People who call today get virtual care. People who call on July 1 will get virtual care. We are moving to a system that people have designed. Foundever, eVisitNB, and 17 other companies helped create this RFP. The successful contractor is going to deliver on that, and we will hold it accountable. So, I'm seeing signs of success, signs of 2026, and signs that we are moving forward in a way in which we listen to New Brunswickers. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Hogan** (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Madam Speaker, signs of success are kind of like all the announcements about these collaborative care clinics that are going to open sometime in the future. I believe the Premier's counting on New Brunswickers getting upset about Foundever one at a time, on a case-by-case basis—each person who is not well versed in the digital universe but who has come to learn how to operate eVisitNB and who will struggle with Foundever, each senior who has lost their family doctor and has come to learn to appreciate eVisitNB, each person who is told that there's no service for them and to call their family doctor, and each person who has lost follow-up service.

The list goes on. By the next election, the Premier ought to have 200 000 or 300 000 New Brunswickers good and mad. Can the Premier tell the people of New Brunswick, and even the Miramichiers, especially the nurses whose pay will be cut, whether she knew about this cut on February 16 of this year when—

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, I have yet to meet a New Brunswicker who is upset about the announcement of our new clinics. Go to a community, and you will see that the vibe has changed. The Premier and I were at the Medical Society meeting this past weekend, and members told us that the vibe has changed. The atmosphere has changed. Family doctors are happier in their practices. They are bringing on more people. We have reports from people in our department who have talked to physicians, and over 60 physicians are bringing on more caregivers. We talked about the number of people who don't have family doctors. We inherited that from another government. Things are changing, Madam Speaker. We are seeing more people being attached. We will have more stats in the near future. We are going to report more frequently. This is a good-news story. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak about it.

**Mr. Hogan** (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Things are changing, Madam Speaker. Some 40 000 more New Brunswickers are without a family doctor, and the Minister of Health doesn't know how many family doctors we need in New Brunswick. As we know, earlier this year, the Premier was creeping my Facebook page and telling people that she still had questions about eVisitNB before saying she had reviewed the contract and had endorsed the Foundever deal, paying an American company more just to pay New Brunswick nurses less and send more profit to America. She is Trump's kind of Premier.

It might interest the Premier to learn that the opposition's right to information request about eVisitNB has been delayed until after the Legislature closes. However, there's great news: We have some information from another right to information request that shows that the Premier, on January 23, knew this Foundever deal was a mess and asked for an extension with eVisitNB. Yet, on February 16, she gave Foundever a full, enthusiastic blessing. Can the Premier explain to the people who are about to have their e-health thrown—

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, has there been a decrease in nurses' salaries? I don't think so. The Premier signed a contract with our Nurses' Union for increased salaries, and it is one of the better-paying contracts in Atlantic Canada. That is true for our nurses and our doctors. The member of the opposition may want to check his facts. I'm just saying.

We had a transition period. I am thankful that eVisitNB helped provide virtual care for that three-month transition period. We signed a contract. There is no way a company could come up with a service in two weeks. Foundever will provide a credible service starting July 1. New Brunswickers need not be afraid. Thank you, eVisitNB, for covering that span of time. Thank you very much for participating in helping us move forward with a contract with a new contractor. Thank you very much.

### ENERGY

**Mr. Austin** (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to switch gears a little bit and talk about a bill the government introduced that will create an energy sector consumer advocate. Now, while that title may sound great for NB Power customers, the details absolutely water down the wine. We know the office will be located in Saint John, and it claims to be public facing. It will no doubt be a one-stop shop for electricity consumers to file complaints about high power bills but will do nothing to actually lower those high power bills. As the minister said, he, as an MLA, doesn't want to take the calls. Can the Minister of Energy please tell us how much this new office will cost? Will this new office increase power rates for NB Power customers?

**Hon. K. Chiasson** (Tracadie, Minister of Indigenous Affairs, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I believe the opposition members got a good briefing from the department last week. Cost was one of the items that was discussed. The cost for the advocate will

actually be a little bit higher than the cost for the Intervener. However, at the end of the day, it's going to be cost neutral. It will be financed the same way as it is for the Intervener. You will have NB Power and Liberty, with the gas sector, also contributing to the advocate's office. At the end of the day, the service that the advocate is going to provide will be well worth it. Consumers will have a voice when NB Power goes before the EUB to talk about rate increases. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Austin** (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): The minister's response was very interesting, Madam Speaker. He said it will cost a little bit extra. This consumer advocate will cost double what the current Public Intervener costs. It will be double the cost of what's already being done by the Public Intervener today, and it won't change a thing. It won't lower power rates or bills for customers. This person will basically fill the same role as the current intervener, with the exception of off-loading industrial concerns and basically taking complaints from residential customers.

Madam Speaker, government members can spin it however they want. The reality is that NB Power rates are out of control, and they are doing nothing about it. This consumer advocate is just a smokescreen for high rates, high bills, and government members sitting on their hands and doing nothing. Can the Premier please explain how she justifies paying double for less service while New Brunswickers pay more on their power bills?

**Hon. K. Chiasson** (Tracadie, Minister of Indigenous Affairs, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm going to push back a little bit on what the opposition member was saying about the Intervener and the advocate. These are two separate roles. I think this was mentioned when you got the briefing last week, and you would understand this from when you were in government. The intervener was there for the entire sector. The voices of retail customers and small businesses weren't actually being heard the way they were supposed to be heard.

Obviously, we are very concerned about the increased cost of electricity. We're concerned about the service residential customers actually get when they call NB Power or when they come to our office. That is the reason we are going to put the consumer advocate in place. It's to make sure the voices of customers are heard when the advocate goes before the EUB.

**Mr. Austin** (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Madam Speaker, when it comes to NB Power, New Brunswickers don't care about a voice being heard. They care about lower rates. They care about lower bills.

Let's play out a real-world scenario. It's the end of the month, and you open up your NB Power bill. After picking yourself up off the floor, you call the toll-free number to seek answers about why your bill is so high. Someone at NB Power responds by advising you to turn the temperature down in your house, bake your bread at 325°F instead of 350°F, use a flashlight, and maybe try some cold showers. They say: Do all this stuff to reduce your electricity consumption.

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Feeling as though you're on a dead-end road, you call this advocate, who is the great new idea the government has brought forward. Can the customer expect the advocate to lower their bill? Or will the advocate just make them more energy literate about why their bill is so high or tell them why they should be happy to pay a higher bill in the first place? How will this advocate really make life more affordable for everyday New Brunswickers? Explain that to me.

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Madam Speaker, while the previous government did nothing for Will, Josh, Jaren, Carter, Connor, Cameron, Rachel, and Dylan, our government has reduced their power bills by 10%. We know New Brunswickers are struggling with their power bills. That's why, in the official opposition's response to the budget, it was shocking to hear that one of the few suggestions it put forward was that electricity bills should be higher. The member for Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills suggested introducing a levy on electricity bills. We're making power bills cheaper, while the opposition wants New Brunswickers to pay more.

### AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Madam Speaker, today the Auditor General revealed that NB Power failed to conduct any analysis of the alternatives to the diesel gas power plant for Tantramar before it signed the agreement to have the Americans build it. Unbelievably, NB Power, which needs to provide extra capacity by 2028, did not analyze the risks and benefits of the alternatives to burning diesel and fossil gas until after the deal was done. Then it became a matter of defending its decision to go ahead with the fossil plant, which it has been trying to do ever since.

Madam Speaker, NB Power's planning documents referred to a series of alternatives. Other options included demand response and battery storage, but it didn't do the analysis before climbing into bed with ProEnergy. On the part of the utility, this betrays a commitment to self-interest, not the public interest. Will the Premier commission an independent study into the risks and benefits of the alternatives to this diesel gas plant?

**Hon. K. Chiasson** (Tracadie, Minister of Indigenous Affairs, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We recognize the Auditor General's report on the cost of the project. I think it's important to note that, as every province is looking to generate new electricity, the cost of actually putting a project in place is very, very high.

Here in New Brunswick, there are two benefits from the RIGS project. First, we're obviously adding new energy to the grid. Second, this new energy acts as backup power as NB Power transitions toward a greener energy grid. Nova Scotia is going to piggyback on the RIGS project. It wants 100MW. It is actually looking to put its own RIGS project in place. So is P.E.I. You know, as a province, when we're looking at these projects, who do we rely on for oversight and to make sure that the project is cost-effective? It's the EUB. Thank you.

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Madam Speaker, NB Power and the member opposite are conveniently ignoring the battery revolution that is upending conventional wisdom in electric power planning world-wide. It is replacing fossil gas peaking plants and lowering—lowering—power rates. Large grid-scale batteries have collapsed in price in just the past two years. NB Power ignored this because it was using costs from well before that. The quality of large grid-scale batteries has dramatically improved, and their lifetime is even longer. Household grid-scale batteries are taking over the role that fossil gas has been playing in Australia, for example. They fill the gaps in its renewable energy generation, driving down power costs and eliminating climate-damaging emissions. NB Power is also ignoring the fact that, by 2028, Irving's Reversing Falls mill will drop 50MW of demand from the grid and add 90MW of new capacity to the grid. Madam Speaker, will the Premier pause the ProEnergy relationship before—

**Hon. K. Chiasson** (Tracadie, Minister of Indigenous Affairs, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I just want to provide a little clarity on the report that was tabled this morning. There was a reason the EUB had to hear from NB Power. It had to get reassurance that there was an agreement in place. The EUB will not have a hearing for a project going forward if there is no agreement. Obviously, there isn't going to be a one-off thing. If so, there would be many projects in front of the EUB for revision. We have to make sure that the agreement is in place and that a lot of boxes can be checked on it. In this case, they were. Again, I keep coming back to the RIGS project and the fact that the Minister of Energy repeatedly says that, if it weren't for the RIGS project, NB Power would not be able to develop wind power, which First Nations are in on. Wind power is going to be used as backup power and will be very beneficial to NB Power and to us moving forward. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

### COMMUNITY CARE CLINICS

**Mr. Russell** (Miramichi West, PC): Madam Speaker, an elderly lady in our riding who had cancer a few years ago reached out to us. She had not been feeling well lately and was concerned that her disease was back. She has no family doctor. Feeling very unwell, she made the trip to the hospital one hour away, and, after waiting 18 hours, she returned home. She told us that she feels defeated and is going to stay home because she can't find help anywhere. Stay home and die? Her frustration has led to that much fear. Excluding the old clinics being given a paint job and announced as new, what new clinics can my constituents expect to see?

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, as I reported earlier, we are increasing the number of people being attached. It's hard to speak about every single patient without a family doctor, except to express my concern. You know, this is the access point to health care in our province. We take it very seriously. In fact, providing more primary care with efficient clinics was one of our campaign undertakings. There are new clinics, new people, and new graduates. New people from Quebec and new

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people from other parts of the world are coming here. There's a vibe in the room. We spoke to our neighbours at a Medical Society meeting recently, and they came to see what has changed. They were asking this: What is the vibe? Why are people coming to your province to look after New Brunswickers and look after the patient that you spoke about today? Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Russell** (Miramichi West, PC): Madam Speaker, *Webster's* dictionary defines the word "new" as recently created or as having recently come into existence, with synonyms such as "recent" and "modern". An example is a new car. It is defined as having been seen, used, or known for a short time, with synonyms such as "novel" or "unfamiliar". An example is a new experience. It is defined as being other than the former or old, with synonyms such as "different" or "fresh". An example is to turn over a new leaf. It is defined as having no previous connection or not being previously known, with "unused" as a synonym. An example is a new employee.

Given that the minister now knows the actual definition of the word "new", I will ask again: What new clinics can my constituents expect to see?

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the newest member of the Legislature, who is not that new, I will say... There is not a single town we have visited that has shared concerns about new, old, improved, or whatever. Towns are glad to receive the attention and resources that the RHAs bring to these clinics. New practitioners and a new attachment of patients, to me, is new. I am very glad to continue doing this, and I look forward to seeing more clinics. I don't think I've heard anybody talk about not wanting us to come to their town to announce such new clinics. If anybody suggests that they don't want us to do that in their town, please let me know today because there are many standing in line. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Russell** (Miramichi West, PC): Madam Speaker, people are waiting months or even years for care. Many can't access it at all, and they are being forced to stay at home while sick and alone. To know or even suspect one's cancer is back and to have no place to turn isn't health care. It's torture. In this instance, it isn't about the cost. It's about the lack of care and having no options for resolve. Where will these new clinics be built next? Remember, we all now know the definition of the word "new".

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, the hardest part is being at home and not knowing where to turn. We have a virtual care clinic that will be available on July 1. I am pleased about that. We are bringing more people in with our announcements. I am very sensitive to the fact that some New Brunswickers might not have a primary caregiver today, but they will have primary care moving forward. Our numbers show that. We continue to strive toward that.

In fact, in the member opposite's own riding, we've spoken about opportunities to bring clinics together to work under a collaborative model. I am very hopeful for that kind of

variability and change in what we can do. We are a flexible government. We will continue to be that way moving forward. We've been that way with our collaborative care clinics from the start. Thank you very much.

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