

Oral Questions



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[Original]

**Ms. M. Johnson** (Carleton-Victoria, PC): Good morning, Madam Speaker. Typically, historically, we ask for an extended time for question period on the first day. We ask that we have an additional 15 minutes added to oral questions this morning.

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): Do we agree?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): Agreed.

**ACCOUNTABILITY**

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The government members seem so enthusiastic about the extra 15 minutes. Maybe I should ask for more. I think that, by the time I'm done, they'll probably regret the decision.

I would like to welcome all the ministers here to the people's House today. I know there are members of the media who will be equally delighted to see you, since they've been searching for you high and low all summer. This is a government whose members said they were going to be radically transparent. They've been so transparent to traditional media that they've been invisible. Ministers have been happy to make announcements, but when it comes to being accountable, they have declined to speak to the media, leaving journalists and, by extension, the public with unanswered questions. Journalists have a constitutionally protected role in our democracy. Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the Premier this: Why are her ministers not talking to the media? Thank you.

[Translation]

**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. Our ministers and all the other members of our team work tirelessly. The opposition members may not understand the way we work.

We work on the ground, outside of offices, and in communities. We are out there in communities in the northern part of the province, a region that is not well served by the media in our province. We are out there in the communities, with the stakeholders.

We listen to New Brunswickers, and we talk to them directly about the issues. We hold public events where we listen to their direct questions. We communicate with people the way they ask us to communicate with them—where they are, in their communities. There is not one minister here who has not travelled around our province to visit parts of it where people have never seen a minister. Every minister does an incredible job, and it's



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teamwork. There are no communities looking for the ministers because the ministers are out there with New Brunswickers, as they should be.

*[Original]*

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Did I just hear the Premier say that the media doesn't cover things in the north? Journalists work hard every day to keep the government accountable to the people of New Brunswick because New Brunswickers deserve more than government news releases. If we only wanted the government's version of events, then we would move to China, or we would move to Russia. We live in Canada, Madam Speaker. In this country, and in this province, we expect ministers to face journalists, who have a constitutionally protected role in our democracy. Journalists report on government, question government, and get answers for New Brunswickers.

This Premier obviously doesn't respect the role of journalists because she can't control the narrative. She does not respect anyone who questions her. She shows little respect to members on this side of the aisle, and little respect to members of the media who question her. Is she the reason the ministers have not been speaking to the media? Is she not allowing them to speak, Madam Speaker? Is she trying to silence the media, or silence her ministers? There are lots of opportunities for her to answer these questions.

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

*[Original]*

Our government has been the most open and engaged government that this province has ever seen. If you speak to members of the media, then they will tell you the same. Their access to the Premier's Office and to the Premier is unlike what they've seen before. We do regular media addresses with the media. We respond to their requests for interviews. We're actually receiving a lot of requests for national interviews—more than New Brunswick has seen in a long time.

We also get out of the office and hold announcements in places like Campbellton, Lamèque, and the Miramichi. We encourage the media to come and be in those places when we are on the ground, answering New Brunswickers' questions and working directly with the people of New Brunswick on the issues that they want us to tackle. New Brunswickers want us not only to talk but also to get to work and to deliver on their priorities of health care and affordability. We are out there doing the work, delivering the health care clinics New Brunswickers are looking for, and—



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**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, Madam Speaker, I really have to thank the Premier for proving my point. I said that government members are there for announcements but are not there when journalists ask them questions to hold them to account for what they say they are doing. This government is good at describing its actions, but it confuses actions with achievement. I am asking the Premier because it is important for New Brunswickers to understand what their government is doing from a source other than government.

I am asking the Premier—because she's the one in control here—whether she supports the disappearing act that her ministers have been pulling. Does she not have confidence in them? Why did they disappear? Why were there only statements put out all summer? We've had ministers say: You know what? That's not me. Talk to NB Power because that's not me. Talk to the Department of Environment.

Why are government members not talking to the media and not being held to account? Instead, they are just putting out their own narrative, Madam Speaker. I want the Premier to answer why—

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Our government has taken questions from the media since day one. We have held open engagements. We have invited them to come to every single thing we do, including the leader's dinner—unlike the folks on the other side. We take questions from the public in live Q & A sessions. I have held them with New Brunswickers multiple times since being elected and before being elected. Maybe even more importantly, we took questions when New Brunswickers were trying to decide who to vote for—unlike the folks opposite, who never sent a candidate to a debate and never provided their people to the media to answer questions when New Brunswickers were looking to make their decision.

New Brunswickers decided on this government. They are thankful that we are out there on the ground, engaging with them and engaging with members of the media across the country and in this province. We are engaging with them to make sure that they get access, through all channels, to the work that we're doing and get to question us on how we're advancing their access to health care and how we're improving affordability in this province. We will continue to be open and transparent and make ourselves available to all.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, you know, to quote Shakespeare, Madam Speaker, methinks the lady doth protest too much. The Premier can try to put out all the narratives and spin that she wants, but the members of the media themselves have said this: Only a statement was given; minister not available.

Past performance predicts future behaviour, Madam Speaker. We're seeing this government... This started at the end of the last session. The government stopped sending the Minister of Education out to scrums right out there in the rotunda. This has been happening all summer. Nobody can make this stuff up.



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All the government members have to do is fess up and say: Do you know what? We can do better at being held accountable to people by the journalists whom we respect. Rather than saying: Well, they don't cover it very well. They don't say what we want them to say, so we're not going to engage with them.

Madam Speaker, what confidence will this Premier give to New Brunswickers and journalists that these ministers will be available to answer their questions and be accountable going forward? Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Madam Speaker, I am grateful for this opportunity to focus on our promise to New Brunswickers. We will continue to make ourselves available to them and members of the media. Every week, I provide my schedule to show the media and members of the public where they can find me and ask me questions.

[*Original*]

My ministers and I are out there sharing where we're going to be, how you can come see us, and where the media and the public can come and talk to us. We're out there in scrums. During the fire, Minister Herron was in front of the media for days and days and days, alongside Minister Gauvin. We have ministers such as Minister McKee, who, to be available on the ground with New Brunswickers, has toured every courthouse and shared that with the public.

We will continue to hold open and accessible events to share the work that we're doing and to take the questions that we receive from the media in scrums, media addresses, interviews, and statements. We will continue to be what New Brunswickers see in us—an open and transparent government that is accessible to them.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, the Premier just made a little faux pas there. She named her ministers. The Government House Leader might want to remind her of that fact.

Ministers should be well prepared to speak to journalists because this government has given them multiple rounds of media training. We don't even know the number at this point. Maybe the Premier can tell us what number we're up to. Apparently, the ministers failed their media training, as they have been declining to speak to journalists. Does the Premier expect that ministers will be refunding taxpayers for dollars wasted on this media training?



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[*Translation*]

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I find it interesting that the member opposite is asking us to communicate with the media, but he is not asking us to prepare to communicate with the media. The government is putting effort into communication in various ways: directly, on the ground, face-to-face with New Brunswickers, with stakeholders in communities, with members of the public online, through interviews, over the phone, on Zoom, and with the media in the media room. We prepare ourselves for that the same way other governments prepare themselves to find out how they can best help journalists get the information they need and to show the work that is being done.

We will continue to be a government that works to communicate the way New Brunswickers are asking us to and that works on their priorities. They want to see us improving their access to primary health care. They want to see more clinics, family doctors, and nurse practitioners in their communities. That is where we are focusing our efforts and investments.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): I think the Premier is having a hard time defending this, Madam Speaker. The reality is that the media noticed the absence of ministers. The Premier just talked about this: Well, we're talking to New Brunswickers this way.

There is also a requirement to our constitutionally protected and respected journalists, who are professionals in their realm, that the government be there to answer them when they ask the tough questions. It seems as though the ministers have disrespect or disregard for traditional media and the people who do that job. That is shameful, because the members opposite continually go on and on about how they're transparent and all this kind of stuff. However, it's important for our democracy that people see and hear from their government in traditional media. I want to know: Is the Premier allowing her ministers to speak, or is media training simply a course on how to avoid speaking to the media? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think this is the strongest team the government of New Brunswick has ever had in terms of Cabinet ministers and caucus members, all of whom are prepared to speak on the work we have been doing and are available to the media upon request. We have built good relationships with the media in this province, and, as our schedules allow, I have consistently made myself available at the drop of a hat to every media outlet that asks. We also have to do work at the same time as we are engaging, taking time for interviews, and providing that information to journalists. We also have to get work done, so we strive to get that balance right to make sure that they get timely responses to their questions and that those responses are strong and provide the



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complete picture of the information they're looking for. Each minister in this Cabinet is capable of and free to speak on anything our government does, including their portfolio, and we respond to requests accordingly.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, I heard a narrative. The Premier said: I, I, I and me, me, me. We don't hear her talk about her team very much. It's all about how much she has gone in front of the media and how much she has done, but not about the rest of her ministers.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): They're getting a little riled up, Madam Speaker.

We have a government that says: We're too busy. We're too busy to talk to journalists. We're doing so much work that we just can't talk to journalists. Well, where are the results? Do New Brunswickers feel better for the work this government has done? Do they see an improvement in their lives? Absolutely not. That begins with a government that is open and transparent and that is willing to speak to the media. Will the Premier stand up and commit that, whether it's out in the rotunda or for any other media request, she will make her ministers available? Thank you.

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased that the member opposite recognizes the actual work that our government has been focused on. New Brunswickers have asked us to improve their access to health care because they went years with no action on the transformation of primary health care. Now we have transformed the model to deliver that with doctors, nurse practitioners, and new clinics in communities all over the province. So far, seven of them are done. Three more are coming this year. We are talking to the media about those commitments. The minister has been available to the media every time.

We have made measurable investments in affordability for New Brunswickers, such as making RSV vaccines free. This speech from the throne announced a \$10-million commitment to at-home care for seniors, something they have been looking for for a very long time. We've also opened the doors for more nursing homes to add the nursing home without walls program. A ton of work has been done. The ministers doing that work will continue to be available to the media to talk about it.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, the Premier can try to convince people with talking points and repeat them over and over and over again, but the facts remain. The journalists know. The word is out. The government members are in a corner. They just need to do better.





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Speaking of missing ministers, none have been missing more than the Minister of Education. This summer, school was out and so was the minister. This actually began at the end of the last session, when the minister stopped going to the rotunda. Can the Education Minister tell us why she refused to speak to the media all summer long?

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, I've been doing the work. As we've said again and again, this is a government that hit the ground running. This summer, we were busy organizing a school breakfast program. In the fall, we have been busy rolling it out. We have been busy going to the schools where this is being rolled out. We have engaged with teachers, school administrators, and students themselves. We are getting a ton of good feedback. They are so grateful this breakfast program has been rolled out in every single school in New Brunswick. I am here now and am happy to answer questions.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Madam Speaker, I'm glad she's happy to answer questions. What I asked was: Why did you refuse to speak to the media? She said she was too busy. That tells me that this minister is in over her head. If she can't organize her day enough to be able to speak to the media when it has a request, then maybe she should do something else. She hid from the media, but she can't hide here in the people's House.

**SCHOOL EMPLOYEES**

A few months ago, this government tried to fire librarians and school support staff. Then, it would not take responsibility for this decision. Instead, it opted to blame the district education councils. The labour board said the government was wrong. The courts said the government was wrong. Government was forced to rehire these workers. Now, the government has made the heartless decision to fire these people—again—on Thanksgiving weekend. All of this is from a government that said it would support workers. How do you defend this heartless decision?

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. We know the challenges in the education system did not appear overnight. For years, we've heard about under-resourced classrooms causing teachers stress and impacting students' performance. That is exactly why we hit the ground running. As part of our work, we want to ensure the specific investments that are targeted to students are close to them. That's why we are supporting literacy and numeracy and are fighting chronic absenteeism specifically at the classroom level. That has been asked of us. We have been asked to stabilize the classroom and to invest directly in numeracy and literacy. That's what we are doing. Thank you.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Firing people who are a huge part of our students' days is not going to improve things. This government has been taken to task multiple times for bargaining in bad faith. It tried to improperly fire school librarians and support staff. The government was ordered by the court to send them back



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to work. The Minister of Finance had to be pressed into service to speak to the media. He revealed that this government was going to fire these workers again as soon as it found a legal path to do so. It's amazing that government managed to keep that promise.

Why does the Minister of Education not value the work of librarians and school support staff? If our schools need stabilization and more help, why is government taking help away from these students? Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. We are working very closely with our partners in the school districts. We trust the heads of the districts, and we believe they are capable of making the best decisions for the good of their schools because they are the closest to the situation on the ground. We are doing our job, the heads of the districts are doing theirs, and we are working together.

We have been clear. We want to stabilize the situation in classrooms. We want to have specific resources for literacy and numeracy and to deal with the issue of chronic absenteeism. We are working with the heads of the school districts, who are working with the union, to reach the goals to which we are committed as a government regarding accountability in the province. Thank you.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Government works so closely with the DECs that the DECs didn't even know their budgets were negotiable. They didn't know. It is a \$43-million cut, and they didn't know it was negotiable. Yet, government works so closely with the DECs. The talking points just do not line up.

From this minister, I would like to hear exactly this: Does she agree with the disrespectful and heartless decision to fire school librarians and support workers? I want her to get up in this House and explain to New Brunswickers why she does not value the work that these people do and why she does not think that they add any benefit to our students in New Brunswick. Please explain that to people, to parents, because they're worried. They don't understand. This government, whose members won't talk to the media, needs to give us answers here.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, that's an interesting question. I absolutely value literacy and numeracy, and we want to support students being engaged in school to reduce chronic absenteeism. That is why we are engaging with folks. We're engaging with folks directly on the ground. We're engaging with folks at the district level. We're working together to meet those specific goals.



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Sometimes districts will decide on a certain path, and other times, they won't. All of New Brunswick isn't exactly the same. That's part of the magic of decentralization and working with partners on the ground.

I can assure you that our goal is to always provide the best quality education to our students. To do that, we need the resources to be close to them. In partnership with the DECs, the districts, the superintendents, and everybody that I literally walk the halls of schools with—

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. News flash—it was the Minister of Finance who said: We're going to fire these people as soon as we can. It was not anyone on the DECs, the way the minister is trying to describe. This word salad and not answering... If this had been a test, the minister would have gotten a big red X for that answer. She didn't answer, Madam Speaker.

I want to talk about the impact this has had on workers, on these people who have families, who work each and every day to make this province, their communities, and the lives of students in our schools better through that work. They have lived through months of heartache and uncertainty, all caused by the disrespectful and cruel actions of this government. I want to know who made the decision to give pink slips on the Thanksgiving weekend. Was it the Premier, the Finance Minister, or the entire Cabinet, or was it a decision by the Minister of Education, who, according to the Premier, was too busy to talk to the media? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): For the members opposite who might not be familiar, given their track record in government, I'm happy to take this question and to provide a bit of a description of how labour relations work. This is a decision that was made by the districts. Then the problem of the timing was that, given that Finance and Treasury Board enters into negotiations and works out the contracts with the unions, it was communicated, and the timing didn't line up. We let them know that this was a decision that the districts made that we're going to flow through the contract. The union was made aware of that. We worked with the union to find positions for all those workers; then we had the Justice decision asking us to move them back. We let them know that the decision of the negotiations with the district and the Finance and Treasury Board would still stand and that we thought that would cause more chaos. They asked us to move them back anyway, knowing that this would be the outcome.

So, we continue to work through the team that is responsible for the labour negotiations with CUPE 2745 to have the best outcome possible so that we can make sure that the resources are where the minister described—

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): I would love to thank the Premier for admitting, as she just said, that they are creating more chaos, Madam Speaker. They're creating more chaos. She just said it. This collaboration that they say they're having



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with the DEC's and with the workers is just not happening. It's not happening. I can't get over the gall that these guys have to try to make it look as though they're doing this, that it's benefiting students.

We have this bargaining unit that doesn't even want to ratify its contract now because of the actions of this government. Can you at least try to explain to people what you're trying to accomplish by firing librarians and school support staff? They act in a support role in significant ways for our students, each and every day. Not least of all, they help students with literacy, which we all know is an area for improvement in this province. Can this government explain its vision regarding firing librarians and school support staff? Why does it think less is more?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, I absolutely would like to explain to you how we, in collaboration with our main partners, have chosen targeted ways to directly support students regarding literacy, numeracy, and chronic absenteeism. We have decided to have specialized teachers to support school objectives. This is something that is desired, targeted, and well thought out. This is what we want to do.

Another part of all this is directly supporting students' well-being in classrooms and schools. In collaboration with our partners, we have considered in great detail how to provide students with the best support to bring stability to the classroom, strengthen their sense of belonging at school, and improve their well-being. All these great things that have been mentioned are being achieved in partnership with the districts and the good people involved. We are proposing solid plans.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. New Brunswick students deserve an education system that helps them achieve the literacy they will need to succeed in their lives and careers. The provincial literacy target of 90% is not being met. However, rather than have librarians and support staff helping students meet this target, this government has decided to fire these workers and lower the bar for students. This is my question, Madam Speaker: Is this government blaming librarians and support staff for literacy targets not being met, or is lowering these targets a way of justifying the firing of these workers? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I couldn't agree more with the member opposite on how important education is for our students and the future of our province. That's why we invest in education. That's why we work so hard with our partners to come up with the very best plan for our students. Now, the challenges in education did not appear overnight.



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It will take time. It will take a lot of work. We are doing that work. We are literally in the schools, doing that work, and engaging with people directly.

Now, we know the test results aren't where they need to be. They haven't been for a very, very long time. That is why we are targeting specific incremental improvements with plans regarding how to get there. Also, we want to be held accountable so that, each year, we see the test scores going up, up, and up—every year. That's what we want.

**MEDICAL HEALTH OFFICERS**

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, Madam Speaker, it has been almost eight years to the day since, on October 23, 2017, a Liberal Health Minister said he was going to introduce legislation to make the Chief Medical Officer of Health independent. That was just weeks after his government had gutted the expert office staff of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. The Premier has resurrected that eight-year-old commitment. We are expecting to see another bill tabled to make the Chief Medical Officer of Health independent.

Madam Speaker, for the Chief Medical Officer of Health to be independent, they need to have sufficient expert staff in their office. Otherwise, they will be reliant on staff from outside of their office who are not independent and are subject to the whims of their political masters. So, will the Premier ensure that there will be sufficient budget for the Chief Medical Officer of Health to restaff their office with the experts they need to protect the health—

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Through you, Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, thank you very much for highlighting this accomplishment. We are quite proud that we are asserting the independence of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. You will hear this later today. Thank you for that.

Yes, for the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health to work properly, it has to have adequate staffing. We have already worked with its staff to be sure that they have adequate experts and that they can look outside when necessary. We will ensure that this division is funded appropriately, as requested and as needed. Thank you for bringing this point to the people's Assembly today.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Coon** (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Madam Speaker, the Chief Medical Officer of Health's independence depends on his boss. Currently, the Chief Medical Officer of Health reports to the Deputy Minister of Health, even though his role is considered equivalent to that of a deputy minister.

During the last election campaign, this Premier committed to making the province's Public Health office independent, but it comes under the Francophone Affairs, Pharmaceutical



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Services, Public Health and Medicare & Physician Services Division, which is run by just one executive director.

In this year's throne speech, the commitment is once again to strengthen the Chief Medical Officer of Health's independence. Can the Premier tell the House to whom the Chief Medical Officer of Health will be accountable: the Premier, the Minister of Health, or the Legislative Assembly?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Dornan** (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the members opposite, we are looking at the finer points of how this independence will exist. This is the first time, so right now we will keep the reporting structure, recognizing that the Chief Medical Officer of Health is, indeed, independent and will respond to the public, report to the public, and have job protection. The hierarchy, or the way that this will happen within Health, will remain the same. There has to be a reporting structure. Otherwise, the Chief Medical Officer of Health would report to you, Madam Speaker.

There is a structure, and we are anticipating that it will work. That person's office will remain independent. In every instance, there has been a need for alignment in the reporting structure. We think it will work, but if it doesn't, we will address it. Thank you.

**POWER PLANTS**

**Ms. Mitton** (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, the list of reasons not to build a fracked gas and diesel plant in Tantramar, or anywhere, is too long to list in a minute, but I'll try. Burning fracked gas and diesel will pollute our air, which will harm human health and further contribute to climate disruption. It will put people's well water at risk. Wildlife and their habitat will be harmed in this ecologically significant area. NB Power has chosen to work with the American company ProEnergy. New Brunswickers will be on the hook to pay over \$1 billion for this project, and ProEnergy and NB Power misled the public into thinking that they had Indigenous equity partners, which is not true.

Given the many reasons, will the Minister of Energy tell us whether he went to NB Power and asked for alternatives to this terrible idea?

[Translation]

**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): Good afternoon, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the question. I think it is important for us to ask questions about this, because a lot of misinformation is circulating right now.



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First of all, the member opposite says that this project is all about fracking and a gas plant. It is, in fact, a project regarding the integration of renewable energy and network security. The project has basically been created to integrate more renewable energy into our system.

Last year, we announced a major wind turbine project with First Nations. It's a 650 MW project. Some of the 450 MW from the project has already been committed. Another 400 MW of renewable energy will be announced in the next few weeks. That is almost 1 000 MW of renewable energy. Baseload energy is needed to reach the objective. This means the project is basically playing a part in meeting our objective.

[Original]

**Ms. Mitton** (Tantramar, G): Most of the gas coming through the M&NE Pipeline is fracked, so I think using the word "fracked" is accurate. Also, the title of this project, calling it renewable, is just spin.

This is actually not our only option. This is not our best option. We need to be investing more in wind and solar, and we don't need this plant in order to do so. Wind and solar are the most affordable types of power. We must have an emphasis on energy retrofits. Other places are already taking a distributed energy approach. Ontario is building a 400-MW battery energy storage system. In New England, distributed solar and batteries help to prevent blackouts during the hottest days of the summer.

We've invited all MLAs to an info session with Ralph Torrie, a world-renowned energy analyst, tomorrow afternoon to learn about his research on a renewable future for New Brunswick and Canada. Will the Minister of Energy join us to learn about these alternatives?

[Translation]

**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 again, Madam Speaker. The other solutions proposed, like batteries, are inordinately expensive. You need to understand that NB Power sets its prices based on costs. So, if we choose the most expensive energy source, like batteries... I hear the member opposite talking about a \$1-billion project. To get the same result, batteries could cost up to \$9 billion.

I am not sure, when there is talk about... I met recently with the group that was here yesterday. We are actually very concerned about poverty and people's ability to pay their energy bills. It's important to be aware that we need an entity capable, for instance, of providing us with renewable and cleaner energy. At the same time, we must be able to pay for it. This is important, because New Brunswickers need a break. Thank you.



Oral Questions

[Original]

**EDUCATION**

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. This government has stated goals of improving literacy, numeracy, and chronic absenteeism for students, but this government is lowering expectations, lowering instructional time for students, and increasing childcare burdens on families, which is the opposite of its stated goals. Can the minister balance this equation? I know that I'm dragging her into some math here, but how will less instructional time equate to improved literacy and numeracy scores? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Translation]

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity to talk about our vision of how to increase literacy and numeracy levels and reduce chronic absenteeism.

There are two things I am particularly proud of. There are the school food programs, which enable us to ensure that all children in New Brunswick have a full stomach and are ready to learn during their school day. We know these programs will have a huge impact.

Then, there is the education plan. We started consultations this summer, and we had discussions with experts, actually. We produced an initial document. We also launched surveys, and we are organizing public consultations directly with people so that they can contribute to our long-term vision. People tell us that they want specific plans with measurable and attainable targets that will enable us to see an increase year after year after year. That is how we will improve literacy rates...

[Original]

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I think she said literacy and numeracy at the end, but the rest of the answer had nothing to do with what I asked. In July, the Minister of Education stated that preliminary results from the Francophone sector showed promise. She has now admitted that the government had no idea, no data or evidence, that adding professional development (PD) days and removing instructional time from students would improve scores. At the bottom of this government's mandate letter, it states that it is "committed to evidence-based decision-making across all departments". How does this government justify continuing this pilot in the absence of any evidence that it is effective? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. This PD pilot is very, very important. Teachers have been asking for it, and districts have been asking for it. As I've been walking the halls, I've been hearing about how amazing this time is for them and how valuable it is.





Oral Questions

Speaking of which, I have, right here, a testimonial from a teacher who says: With the extra PL time, we're not just collecting data. We're using it. The conversations and planning that happen on these days are leading to real improvements in student outcomes.

I could not have said it better myself.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that response from the minister because it segues very nicely into my next question. The stated goal of this pilot is to give teachers more time to do the work they need to do. The reality is that teachers already spend countless hours dealing with administrative tasks, which are the real culprit for taking away their ability to focus on students. Is every administrative task that a teacher is asked to do a complete necessity? Can we not reduce a teacher's administrative burden, thereby giving them more time to deal with classroom needs? Can the minister not agree that taking administrative burden away from teachers is preferable to taking instructional time away from students? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. C. Johnson** (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, this government is engaged today and has always been engaged in teacher retention, recruitment, and student outcomes. Teachers have specifically said that to meet this, they need tools to collaborate and to hone their art so that they can then teach important educational skills to our students. We've heard this time and time again.

Do you know what? The education system's challenges did not appear overnight. That's why, at this time, we are engaging with people with the education plan to come up with a new vision for next time. We look forward to hearing about efficiencies. We look forward to engaging with people on the ground during this process to attain our collective goals. Thank you.

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The minister missed the point. More than anything, teachers want to focus on students. They want to do the work that directly impacts their ability to prepare students for a life outside the classroom and for a life after school. My question to the minister was designed to make her think. I'm reaching across the aisle to say: Do you think that if everything is a priority, then nothing is a priority? If teachers have to prioritize all these administrative tasks over teaching in the classroom, they're losing time in the classroom. Rather than taking teachers away from the classroom to do administrative tasks, why not talk to teachers about what administrative burden can be removed to give them the ability to spend more time on task with students, which is what they've dedicated their lives to? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Ms. Holt** (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.



Oral Questions

*[Original]*

I think the words the member used are interesting because he described exactly what our government is doing: listening to teachers, talking to teachers, getting out on the ground, and taking the burden off them. Teachers used to feed kids out of the drawers in their desks. They used to make trips to Costco to make sure that they could feed the kids in their classrooms. We've taken that pressure off them by providing breakfast to every kid in the classrooms. Teachers used to be responsible for providing all the services in the classroom. Last year, we invested in putting academic support teachers in the classroom with them, EAs in the classroom with them, and behavioural intervention mentors in the classroom with them so that they could focus on what they do best. Now they get time to engage with their colleagues and provide exactly the best services to students.

*[Translation]*

Our government has set itself objectives. We want to increase the literacy rate. We also want to increase the numeracy rate. Thanks to our team and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, we will meet our objective.

*[Original]*

**Mr. Savoie** (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thanks, Madam Speaker. Considering that the Premier took extra time on that last question, why can't I push for more time?

**Madam Speaker** (Hon. Ms. Landry): No. Good try. The time for question period has expired.

