

Oral Questions



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[Translation]

COMMUNITY CARE CLINICS

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

[Original]

Madam Speaker, yesterday, I spoke about the government's claim that it has delivered seven new clinics. Having learned the horrible truth about the Premier's 10 000 jobs pledge, which resulted in the creation of only 3 jobs, including 1 for herself, I have no confidence in the Premier's math skills. Does the Premier stand by her claim that 10 000 patients have come off the wait list? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Translation]

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

[Original]

Thank you very much for the question. I have to say that I really appreciated yesterday how the member opposite, in his reply to the speech from the throne, went through and detailed each of the clinics that we have expanded, created, or supported. We're taking thousands of patients off the wait list for care with the seven clinics that we have created, invested in, expanded, and added new doctors and new nurse practitioners to. As you've just heard, social workers, dieticians, pharmacists, and the whole team of health care professionals in New Brunswick are at work. With those seven clinics, more than 10 000 people are coming off the wait list for care, and there is going to be more happening this year. Thousands more New Brunswickers are going to get off that wait list and get access to what they've been asking for most, which is better health care close to home, and our government is delivering it.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It seems like we are getting somewhere here when it comes to getting some real facts out of these Liberals. The Premier is talking about expanded clinics, when the promise was new clinics. Now it's family health teams. We're getting there. I don't know whether we'll be able to get her to actually say "10 new clinics" all at the same time because I think she has a mental block with that now.

This comes down to credibility. People have to be able to believe what government is saying. That's why I helped remind the government members of the importance of being transparent with journalists. It was a service that I was glad to provide. This government is



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losing credibility faster than it is losing school librarians. The government has promised things that it cannot deliver and is failing New Brunswickers once again.

The 10 new clinics the Premier has promised are supposedly taking 10 000, now 7 000, off the wait list. Can the Premier explain where she got her numbers and why—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Yes, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak again about the good work done by the team at the Department of Health and all our partners in both health networks, Vitalité and Horizon. Health care professionals in the communities have told us that they want to be there to help us.

The former government wasn't flexible enough to include the professionals in the system, but we have opened new clinics in Campbellton, Miramichi, and Moncton. We have recruited new family doctors in Carleton North. Access to family doctors and nurse practitioners is now provided on several more days in Tantramar. There is a new nurse practitioner and a new service in Lamèque. There are new spaces and two more family doctors in Fredericton North. We have added services and created a new collaborative care model to improve...

[*Original*]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. That is not what I asked. Can the Premier explain where she got her numbers from and why she is mixing in patients who already had access with aspirational targets? She's promised 10 000. She is saying 10 000 are coming off. She promised 10 new clinics. We're getting into the details here. Why did she mix people who are already getting service with aspirational targets to get to her 10 000 number?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): I'm happy to explain further. I really appreciate that the member opposite wants to spend time talking about the most transformative thing this government has done. We have built a model of primary care that is flexible and that includes doctors and nurse practitioners, and technology and administrative support. We have increased supports and created new clinics to allow 1 600 new people to get access to care in Fredericton North, 3 500 new people to get access to care in Lamèque with the expanded services it is delivering, 1 000 people in Tantramar, 800 people in Carleton North, 2 000 people in Campbellton, 1 000 people in Miramichi and Norton, and 700 people in Mapleton. If you do the math, that adds up to 10 600 new patients taken off the list.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): The Premier is leaving the impression that these people are getting this health care now. They are not. The Premier has complained that things often do not go fast enough to suit her. Since the



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Premier loves metrics, it is strange that she has not provided any metrics concerning the actual uptake in these clinics. Considering her background in the civil service, she should have known how long it would take for things to get done. What does she feel is an acceptable timeline for these people to get connected to a doctor? Is it one year? Is it two years? Is it longer, or does she have any timeline at all?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm so glad the member opposite asked about the timeline. I can remember sitting where he is sitting, reading the previous government's speeches from the throne that committed to four collaborative care clinics. The previous government made that commitment in 2022, and then in 2023, and then in 2024. Not one of those four clinics opened over the three years that those members were promising them.

Our government made a commitment to open 10 clinics this year. We got right to work. In seven months, we have opened seven clinics. Before the end of this year, there will be three more, if not four more, clinics open, making 10 collaborative clinics open in different communities across this province so more New Brunswickers can get access to primary health care close to home—the thing they were asking the previous government to do. It didn't deliver, even though it promised to. Our government is meeting that commitment this year, with 10 more clinics next year. We are going to meet our commitment of 30 clinics and connect every New Brunswicker in this province to a collaborative care clinic close to their home.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, there she is, Madam Speaker. I was wondering when she was going to show up. Good old rear-view Sue.

This government avoids responsibility at all costs, whether it's blaming the EUB for the cost of carbon adjustor, blaming librarians for literacy scores, or blaming DEC's for not knowing their budgets were negotiable. Who will the Premier blame or hold to account if these teams do not reach their aspirational targets, as described in government press releases?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Again, I really appreciate the question on accountability, because our government prioritizes being accountable for our promises and our work. That is why, during the state of the province address in January of last year, we presented 15 measures to enable New Brunswickers to hold us accountable for our promises. It is up to us to be responsible and provide services.

We have fulfilled three promises regarding health care and one regarding access to primary health care and having a health care provider. There was a decrease. We are talking about a rate of 95%. The former government had a rate of a little less than 67% during its term. We will work to increase the numbers by providing patients with family care teams in their



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communities. So, our entire team will be responsible for ensuring that New Brunswickers have access to the new nurse practitioners and family doctors in New Brunswick.

[Original]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Patients waiting for two years to access clinics is unacceptable. The Premier promised transformational change. She said that health care is in crisis. This crisis needs solutions now, which this government promised to deliver. She promised better. Does the Premier think that people waiting two years, which is information sourced from her own government releases... Does she believe that waiting two years for access to health care is acceptable?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Thank you for the opportunity to rise today, Madam Speaker. Yes, two years is a long time. Waiting in the emergency department for 12 hours is a long time, and it is unacceptable. We are working very hard to reduce those waits. You don't hear from the senior who saw their new family doctor in Nordin yesterday. You don't hear from the 22-year-old person who has a significant problem but isn't in the emergency department because they saw their new family doctor in Miramichi.

What does "new" mean? Well, I moved houses a few years ago. To me, that's a new house. When we take a clinic that has one doctor today and turn it into a clinic that has three doctors, two nurse practitioners, and a bunch of nurses, that's new to me. We are doing that all over the province.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. For several months, we have heard from numerous sources in relation to the carbon cost adjustor, warning about its removal. Recently, in the *Telegraph-Journal*, the Convenience Industry Council of Canada Atlantic Vice-President Mike Hammoud said:

Other than a political promise, we're very very shocked that we're even here having this conversation today.

I've talked to retailers. They are going to be out of business very quick, and the constituents are going to be calling the offices of MLAs—both opposition and government, I might add—saying that they can't put gas in their cars.

With all the experts strongly advising against the removal of the cost of carbon adjustor, who can the Minister of Energy point to who is actually advocating for the removal of the cost of carbon adjustor?



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Hon. Mr. Legacy (Bathurst, Deputy Premier; Minister of Finance and Treasury Board; Minister responsible for Energy; Minister responsible for the *Right to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the member opposite. I was kind of worried that he was going to ask me about my schedule and whether I was talking to media or whether I did media training. Apparently, that's the concern New Brunswickers have and that's what they've been looking at all summer. To actually have a subject to talk about is really, really interesting.

To answer the member's question about who is asking us, I will say this: New Brunswickers. That's who is saying it—all of them. New Brunswickers are saying that they do not like this formula. It is a temporary formula that was put in three years ago. It went in as temporary, and it stopped being temporary. We have been asked to remove this. We promised to do it. We are going to remove it. The EUB has said it will probably have some hearings with the industry. They know this. Chris Stewart was at public accounts. I think the member was there when the session was in. We are going to remove this because New Brunswickers have asked us to do it and because they want it done.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Do you know what? As the MLA for Fredericton-Grand Lake, I get all kinds of calls. I get calls about bridges. I get calls about roads. I get calls about emergency room visits. I get calls about the lack of doctors. I get calls about everything. I have never once gotten a call from a constituent saying: Will you please remove the cost of carbon adjustor? What a ridiculous answer.

Madam Speaker, the reality is that this minister cannot point to one expert. This government is all about data. It is all about facts. It wants to review and consult. It wants to strike up commissions and committees. Yet, this government does not want to act. On this, for some crazy reason, the government wants to remove it. My question is for the minister. Again, does he plan on taking the fall when dozens of gas stations close across New Brunswick, or will the Premier wear that?

[Translation]

Hon. M. 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. The member for Fredericton-Grand Lake says he has had several conversations, but he obviously did not talk to the Leader of the Official Opposition, since in his remarks yesterday, the Leader of the Official Opposition said loud and clear that it was time to eliminate the cost of carbon adjustor. We were told yesterday that it had to be eliminated immediately, but today, the cost of carbon adjustor absolutely must not be touched. Do you communicate with each other? Perhaps there is division within the official opposition party.



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[Original]

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, PC): Let me remind the Minister of Energy that it was our government that put the cost of carbon adjustor in for the very specific purpose of protecting consumers so they can fill their tanks when they need to fill their tanks. The Liberals made this campaign promise in the hopes of saving 7¢ per litre. What they are not telling New Brunswickers is that they will save 7¢ per litre, but they will have to drive an extra 60 km to fill their tank because all the rural gas stations are closed.

Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister responsible for Economic Development. This is going to close small retail businesses. Small mom-and-pop shops are going to be out of work. I hope the minister understands the economic impact this will have on New Brunswickers. He should also understand that people in rural areas still need gas in their cars in order to get to work. What is the Minister responsible for ONB and for Economic Development going to tell New Brunswickers when they can't fill their tanks and people are out of work?

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, on a day when the opposition is standing up and saying that we aren't speaking to the media and on a day when every single newspaper in this country shows the President of the United States saying he is cutting off trade talks with Canada, I am surprised that we are talking about an affordability measure that will help this economy and will reduce prices to get goods and services transported around this province. I am surprised that this is the response to one of the most devastating pieces of news we have seen in weeks. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

EDUCATION

Mr. Lee (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. At the press conference on Monday, the Premier acknowledged that the latest Francophone sector school assessment results, which the Education Minister said were a key factor in the government's expansion of a professional development pilot project in the Anglophone sector, did not show the results and improvements that were indicated. The Education Minister eventually admitted that the government didn't have any data or evidence to connect the pilot to better results, but the province is forging on and marching on.

If there is no existing data or evidence to support the decision, then my question to the Premier—or the Minister of Education, pardon me—is this: Now that we're into Term 1 and the pilot project apparently still needs someone to dig into the numbers, why is this happening? Empirical data... It says that you get data and then make an informed decision. You don't make a decision and then get the data. What are you doing about the decision?



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Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the opportunity to talk about the exciting pilot that we have launched in the Anglophone sector to make sure that teachers have the time to collaborate, work together, and hone their trade to provide the best quality education to our students. This government is very committed to teacher retention, recruitment, and the academic success of students. The system has asked for this—the opportunity to work together, to collaborate, and to increase teachers’ knowledge of literacy and numeracy so that they can then transmit it to students.

On the data front, we heard from the Francophone sector that it loved it and that it went well. We had preliminary data that gave us the confidence to try a pilot on the Anglophone side—

Mr. Lee (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Okay, thank you. The question really comes down to this: Does a reduction in instructional time hurt student learning, or does it not? The incongruity is that cancelling class twice a month is viewed as an investment in success and achievement, but days lost because of snow days are seen as a calamity that needs to be avoided. If snow days could be reshaped as potential virtual PD sessions, as the minister has suggested, what is the reason for cancelling classes on alternate Fridays at all? If there is a potential for virtual PD days, then rethink the schedule. This could happen without a schedule and without the week being disrupted.

My question to the Minister of Education is this: How will the government ensure that students in pilot schools are not disadvantaged by missed instructional time? What supports are in place for students with special needs and those who rely on school for stability and routine? How will this affect rural and low-income families, who may not have access to childcare on Fridays? Will the province subsidize or coordinate that care?

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, an important piece in this pilot project will be to evaluate and measure the outcomes and results. That’s the data that is going to guide us in moving forward. We’re also reflecting on how we can better support students to learn beyond the classrooms. That’s an important piece here. On these days, we’re partnering with the McKenna Institute to develop really innovative material for virtual learning and a whole lot of different opportunities to connect with partners to learn beyond the classroom.

Mr. Lee (Fundy-The Isles-Saint John Lorneville, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. There is data that suggests that adding PD days is potentially harmful to children and teens and that, apparently, professional learning communities, which were the pedagogy 20 years ago, hold more promise for sustainable results. The problem with trying to draw a correlation between professional development days and better student testing is that it doesn’t consider the data about the impact of missed instructional time. The research on four-day school weeks shows that it has a negative effect unless it is minimized by adding 50 minutes to the school day or 10 minutes for secondary courses in schools.



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To the Minister of Education, what accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure that PD days improve teacher practice? Will the Department of Education release interim reports during the pilot year? How is this being funded? Is it through allocation or new spending? What programs or services, if any, are being deprioritized?

Hon. C. Johnson (Moncton South, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, L): Madam Speaker, as I mentioned yesterday, I have visited many different schools in these past couple of weeks. I've been engaging with teachers at different levels. We have been talking about what they have been doing on PD days. I was actually there on these Fridays to witness the beautiful work that's being done. On that front, I have a testimonial from a teacher saying: I have been able to have dedicated time to interact and problem-solve with experts in specific subject areas—math, literacy subject coordinators, and leads—to enhance my knowledge and understanding of the holistic curriculum. The impact on student learning is direct and immediate. Thank you.

JOBS

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): New Brunswickers are waking up to some troubling news: StatsCan reports that our province's unemployment rate has now climbed to 7.7%, the highest this year, with 6 500 jobs lost in August alone. Manufacturing, wholesale, and retail sectors are all shrinking, and for the first time in years, fewer people are working today than a year ago. This is not a blip. It's a trend. Month after month, our unemployment rate has crept up, from 6.3% to 7.7% in August. While job losses mount, our labour force is actually shrinking, meaning fewer people are working or even looking for work.

New Brunswickers are living through deeply troubling times. Every week, we hear from families struggling to afford the basics—groceries, rent, and home heating—and now power rates are rising. It's not just about job numbers anymore; it's about survival and dignity. How can the minister stand in this House and claim that New Brunswick's economy is stable when the data shows that thousands of jobs have vanished? Unemployment is rising, and fewer New Brunswickers are working today than a year ago.

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): You know, what's interesting, Madam Speaker, is that the labour force has actually grown. The employment numbers have gone up. What I would like to suggest is that New Brunswick is holding up surprisingly well in the face of U.S. tariffs and disruption in international markets. I would just like to point out to the opposition that, in fact, the number of employed individuals has actually grown over last year. The labour force has actually grown, and I would say that this speaks to the confidence that Canadians and New Brunswickers have in our government. The unemployment rate is up, yes, but the actual number of employed people is also up.



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I would just like to point out that people are more confident. People are confident that this government is delivering and actually charging up the pipeline of opportunity. At ONB, we've been able to remove the investment handcuffs that limited the ability to invest in New Brunswick. We see significant improvement in investments being made toward giving New Brunswickers the jobs they deserve.

[Translation]

Mr. Monahan (Arcadia-Butternut Valley-Maple Hills, PC): The total of payday loans in the province has almost quadrupled. It went from \$5.4 million in 2020 to over \$20 million in 2024. This data means thousands of people are ending up with high-interest credit just to make ends meet at the end of the month. In 2024, the average loan was \$415, but fewer than half of the borrowers were able to pay it off with their next paycheck. Some have to take out a second loan to pay off the first. This is not a theoretical economy. It is a reality experienced by families throughout the province.

Households that were once stable are now faced with several loans to keep the lights on. The government likes to talk about balanced budgets, but when families have to borrow money to buy food or medication, the balance is upset. Since the cost of living is increasing and indebtedness is exploding, what is the concrete plan to provide real relief to people and prevent an imminent social crisis?

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. I think this is an excellent opportunity to talk about affordability. That is exactly what we have been working on all year. The opposition has had a great deal of difficulty understanding that, when we cut 10% of the provincial portion of the HST on power bills, it had a real impact on New Brunswickers.

When we established a 3% rent cap, it had a real impact on New Brunswick. There is no doubt that inflation continues increasing. The situation is difficult for New Brunswickers. We want to continue improving it by strengthening our economy and continuing to find savings for people where we can. However, this government really takes affordability seriously, and we are acting immediately.

[Original]

CRIME RATE

Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, PC): Recently, during a CBC interview in Saint John, the Minister of Public Safety stated: We need to manage expectations. We don't pretend that we can fix one hundred percent of the problems.

This was all about crime. He also acknowledged that, under the Liberal government, crime has increased between 20% and 30%. Given these concerns, can the minister please



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provide us with a clear timeline and with the specific actions that are going to take place, particularly for those who are affected in New Brunswick? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, Minister of Public Safety; Minister responsible for La Francophonie, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am very pleased that the critic is raising this topic for discussion, because crime has not only increased... First of all, during the first quarter of 2024, it went down slightly thanks to the efforts of two successive governments. I would like to congratulate my predecessor, who worked on this issue. We have pursued great initiatives, so the numbers went down a bit.

Now, crime has been increasing in New Brunswick for the past 10 years. It has increased by 9% over the past five years. I have travelled around the province, and I also want to thank the former minister, since he was there. The work that must be done will be done, and everyone will work together. Right now, we think needs are being felt, and they must be met by people on the ground.

We will meet with people throughout the province. We had exceptional meetings with my colleague, the Minister of Justice, last week in Alberta, where we discussed reforming the bail system, which will be more severe for repeat offenders. So we will start seeing success stories in New Brunswick soon, too. Thank you very much.

[Original]

Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is interesting—there is actually no action. He is talking about a minority government in Ottawa that might come to the rescue. Get real.

I will try again. To the Minister of Public Safety, given that the recent 8% increase in violent crime in Saint John is attributed to illicit drug activity rather than homelessness, what specific measures—not what he hopes Ottawa is going to do—is he going to take to help New Brunswickers? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, Minister of Public Safety; Minister responsible for la Francophonie, L): We drafted a plan at the beginning of our term. We went on patrol with all the police forces. I visited many police stations where people in charge told us: No one, no minister, has ever come here; I have been working here for 24 years, and this is the first time I have seen a minister.

This summer, we worked for a month on forest fires, and we did a great job dealing with the whole situation. Thank you, also, to the Minister of Natural Resources. Then we met with 12 RSCs. It had been a long time since these meetings took place. You were there and



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heard what I said: We will take action; we will meet with people. It's about teamwork and the work we do alongside municipalities.

I know that collaboration is not a word that you are used to using, because you talk about collaborative clinics. How many clinics have the members opposite opened? Well. How many actions have they taken regarding mental health? Well. How many actions have they taken regarding affordability? Three zeros: that's the average we want the Dodgers to get tonight. The Leader of the Official Opposition said he didn't want to look in the mirror. Do you know why? He's afraid to see his face. Thank you.

[Original]

Mr. Ames (Carleton-York, PC): All talk, and no action. I was there. I heard the frustration in the room. The minister did not give one example of what he is going to do to help New Brunswickers out. Let's hear the facts. What are you going to do to help lower crime in New Brunswick? People want to know.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin (Shediac Bay-Dieppe, Minister of Public Safety; Minister responsible for la Francophonie, L): Thank you again, Madam Speaker. I am going to repeat what I said. Something you wanted but never succeeded in getting when you were in office was stricter reform of the bail system. We heard New Brunswickers and we got it. A bill was tabled this week. It will be hard for repeat offenders to get out of prison more quickly. That is just one step.

We are discussing municipal bylaws with municipalities to get more people on the ground to help New Brunswickers. Then my colleague brought in a mental health tribunal, and it will continue over the four years of our term to help New Brunswickers, a concept that you don't understand. We are going to help New Brunswickers. Take notes. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

