

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



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[Translation]

ADDICTION SERVICES

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

[Original]

Madam Speaker, I'd like to try to go in a different direction today to see what we can accomplish.

I'm sure that the government members have paid attention. If they did, they would see that all our motions have been centred around mental health and addictions. We know that this is a scourge in our communities. We know that the drugs that people are taking are harder drugs that are more toxic and more addictive. We recognize that there is a huge effort going on to try to deal with this. However, Madam Speaker, I'm hoping to have more of a conversation or maybe a discussion about this rather than a debate. I just want to try talking to the government members in a conversation about where we think we, as a province, are.

Maybe the Premier or maybe the Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services, the Minister of Health, or the Minister of Social Development... It doesn't matter. Could we just have a conversation about whether we think we're gaining ground or losing ground? Are we saving more people than we're losing? I just want to have that conversation. Thanks, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services; L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the Leader of the Official Opposition. I thank the members of the opposition parties for bringing forward those motions. This gave us the opportunity to debate these very important issues facing New Brunswickers. As a result of, I guess, inaction by the former government, we've seen the crisis worsen over the years. However, our government is tackling this head-on. That's why, just a couple of weeks ago, we announced next summer's opening of the 50-bed treatment facility. The opposition members like to take credit for it, but we are the ones who pushed that over the finish line. The work had to be done this year in order to get to a contract that was negotiated for that.

We announced the mental health court for Moncton. We're working on where the next site will be. We announced the child and youth psychiatry unit for the Saint John area as well as a psychiatry resource strategy. These are all initiatives that we have taken and that we're very proud of. We are going to continue doing that work.

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Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thanks, Madam Speaker. I guess I'll have to try again to see whether we can get anywhere here. We know that this is a crisis. Everybody says it is. The government says it is. We say it is. It is happening all across the country. Everybody is struggling with it. Everybody is trying to find their own solutions to it, Madam Speaker. Each province does it a little bit differently. Nobody does it the same way. I would like to... Again, I'm trying to start a conversation to see where we can go with something. I recognize the immediacy of the issue.

We dealt with it as a government. This government is dealing with it, but there are still people who are falling through the cracks. The question is this: How can we be better? Again, I recognize the immediacy of this, but I just want to suggest these things so that we can discuss the possibilities around them. So, Madam Speaker, I want to just throw out to the government members the suggestion of having a royal commission. Would they consider that? Would they consider having the Auditor General do a forensic audit of all the programs and services we offer? Would they have an all-party committee? I just want to throw that out there and see what they think about it, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

We're going to continue doing the work that we're doing on mental health and addictions. When we're talking about addiction treatment in the province, we know that the wait list is between 140 and 200 people. They're waiting from six to eight months. We're going to open the 50-bed facility. We're going to complete our needs-based analysis that will guide us in our investments over the next couple of years. We know that the need is much greater than 50. We know that the needs of every community might be different. There are different types of care and levels of care, and we need to meet people where they are with the appropriate level of care.

Again, we're going to continue, and we're going to tackle the root causes. Why are people getting into the situations they are in? It is like our approach to affordable housing. We have a very aggressive plan for affordable housing. We are addressing the cost of living and addressing mental health services. We are ensuring that we have the people working in those very important positions. This is the type of work that we're going to continue doing, Madam Speaker.

[Translation]

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

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[Original]

Look, all we're trying to establish here is that we are in a crisis. We recognize that government after government after government has tried to deal with this. We recognize the immediacy. We recognize that the government has made efforts. What we're trying to do is give a different perspective or perhaps suggest a different effort. For example, we could have a royal commission. A royal commission is independent, Madam Speaker, so that would allow those people to do that work and report back to the Legislature. The Auditor General could do a forensic audit of all our programs that would help us understand where the gaps are and how we can be better. That would come back to us, and we could improve. We could have a legislative committee, whether that involves all three party leaders getting together, the leaders with the relevant ministers and critics, or all members of the Legislature. We need to do something to try to show New Brunswickers that we are taking this seriously as a Legislature, as elected officials, so that we can get to the root of the problem and try to fix this for everyone.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think that what has happened is that we've gotten to the place we are today after six years of the former government. We are a year into our mandate, and we have a very aggressive plan to deal with addictions and mental health services. We're not going to call a royal commission a year into our mandate when we're bringing forward several initiatives and programs that will move the needle on addictions and mental health services. We're going to continue building more beds to make sure that everyone who needs a bed has one available to them when they want it. That is going to be groundbreaking for people in this province, Madam Speaker.

If we want to talk about investigations, commissions, and those kinds of things, another initiative is the Mental Health Services Advisory Committee. The members opposite didn't put that in place for their entire six years. It's in legislation. They had to do it, but they neglected to do it. We're going to do that.

Next year, we're going to bring forward mental health advocate legislation. These are all initiatives that are going to make a difference, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think that anybody out there in the province would recognize that the problem is getting worse. All we're trying to accomplish here is to give the government options to show people that, as a Legislature, we're trying to work together. When we do

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that, we actually do better. We had the COVID-19 Cabinet committee. We got good results for New Brunswickers during COVID-19. For the stand-alone child welfare legislation, we worked together as a Legislature and got good results for New Brunswickers.

There is a way. There is a path. The opposition is responsible for holding government to account, but there is a path for us to do this differently. All I am asking the government to do is to recognize that this is a crisis. It's an epidemic.

It's not the government's fault. It's nobody's fault. But I think if we could do this... A royal commission takes time, and the Auditor General could take some time, but they are independent. We could have a committee work on this. We don't sit between December and March, so there's time for us to do this. We could have a report out by June. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services; L): Madam Speaker, we're addressing this issue head-on now with real initiatives and real programs that are going to make a difference. We've had chances to have these debates over the years. In 2019, I know we unanimously passed a motion for a mental health advocate. That was in 2019, and it never saw the light of day. I was the opposition critic at one time. I moved a motion to accelerate the five-year Inter-Departmental Addiction and Mental Health Action Plan to three years. Five or six years later, I'm still completing some of the initiatives that were in that report. We're working away, Madam Speaker.

I find it rich that the members opposite are trying to play nice today. We've worked together in the past, but they didn't act on it. We're dealing with this head-on. We brought forward initiatives, we're going to continue working toward achieving them, and we're going to make a real difference for New Brunswickers. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): We committed our whole session to motions on mental health and addiction, Madam Speaker. We're talking about trying to help New Brunswickers. While the minister wants to assign blame, I haven't taken any shots. This is about trying to reach across the aisle. There is no win for either side here. The win is when one hundred percent of New Brunswickers get the help that they need. Can the government credibly say that the work they are doing right now is going to get us there in the short term?

I recognize that there is not an overnight solution. However, having someone independent like the Auditor General could help us understand where those holes are. The minister talked about initiatives that weren't put in place. The Auditor General could identify those holes in different sectors, whether in Health, Social Development, Housing, or Justice. The Auditor General could help with that. A royal commission could help with that. We could be

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doing this work as parliamentarians in a committee rather than just resting it all on government.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I noted, we will continue to do the work. We will not help New Brunswickers by waiting until June to receive the report from a commission.

We will continue the work, including opening a 50-bed addiction treatment centre next summer. We're completing a needs assessment in the province because we know needs vary from one community to another. We will ensure that the appropriate level of care is provided in a timely fashion. We will continue the work.

We announced the construction of a new youth psychiatry unit in Saint John. We will continue to add psychiatry resources. We will ensure that the Mental Health Services Advisory Committee meets, which the former government neglected to do.

Our primary care teams include mental health professionals. Care is provided in communities, which relieves pressure on emergency rooms and ensures timely provision of services. We are continuing the work, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services has been taking time to say: Well, the members opposite didn't do this, and they didn't do that. I mean, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. The members opposite were supposed to put a mental health advocate in place and haven't done so. We could do this all day, Madam Speaker. That's why I'm trying to elevate this issue and move it in a different direction. All I'm looking for is the government to say: Do you know what? What we have going on right now is not working perfectly, and we recognize the immediacy of the issue.

Here is an opportunity for us, as MLAs, as elected officials, and as a Legislature, to be leaders. The Premier says all the time: Well, give us suggestions and work with us. Here's an opportunity where I think we can make a significant difference for New Brunswickers and for some of the most vulnerable in our society. This is an opportunity to do that, but the members opposite won't deal with it. For them, it's all about them. They have all the right answers. Going forward, this issue will be on the government members. When things don't work, we're going to be here to remind them. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services, L): Thank you very much, Madam

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Speaker. I would like to point out that the Auditor General did, in fact, do a mental health care audit. I think it was last December.

The Auditor General noted that the minister's Mental Health Services Advisory Committee had been inactive since 2018, when the former government was in office. He indicated that the Conservative budget for mental health care was not based on needs. So, the audit that was already done by the Auditor General really must be examined.

[Original]

Madam Speaker, we are taking this seriously. We've put in place a number of initiatives. We're continuing this work. We're a year into our mandate. I'm not saying it's anywhere close to being mission accomplished. There's a lot of work ahead. A lot of hard work is ahead. I tell you, I've had a lot of sleepless nights over this. That's the truth. It's something that touches a lot of families and a lot of people, and we're going to continue working toward increasing—

WOMEN'S EQUALITY

Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The *Weaving Our Voices Together* strategy was not a document intended to collect dust. It was New Brunswick's response to the *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. I remember its significance because we were among the first provinces in the nation to respond with a robust plan to address violence faced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

The work was to wrap up this fall, but now we're hearing from the Auditor General that the ball was seriously dropped. There has been no oversight at all by this minister, no significant goals have been reached, and there has been no progress report. The committee made up of First Nations communities and Indigenous organizations hasn't been meeting. Time is up.

How will the minister ensure that the implementation of this plan is treated with the urgency promised when New Brunswick, along with the other provinces, signed on to the plan in 2023? Does the minister plan to get this back on track?

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister responsible for Seniors; Minister responsible for Women's Equality, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the opposition member for asking that question. The information in the report is very important to us. Certainly, as was mentioned, it all started in 2023 and the report covers a period ending in June 2025. Certainly, since I received my mandate and responsibilities, we

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have, of course, been working closely with Indigenous communities and Indigenous women in the province.

The report highlights a situation that is very important to us. We have strategies to implement and steps and actions to take. As soon as I had the report in my hands, we immediately acted, and there was even cooperation before that. I met with various departmental officials to ensure that we work together with a vision of shared leadership. The goal was for Indigenous women's voices to be heard and for them to be around our tables. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Original]

Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Madam Speaker, this plan promised 39 actions with a two-year completion date. Now we're hearing that the minister maybe just saw this plan. I'm not sure what she was really saying there. This minister has had this file for more than a year, yet the Auditor General couldn't even get a consistent response from her department on what has been accomplished in all that time. Some documents say one action was completed. Others say two. At most, some say four.

So what is it, minister? Would you pick door number one, door number two, or door number four? No matter what door you choose, completing a couple of actions on your watch should be embarrassing to you. Please enlighten us here today. How many actions were completed by September of this year, and what were they?

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister responsible for Seniors; Minister responsible for Women's Equality, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the opposition member for the question. It enables me to rise in the House again to list the actions we have taken, of course, in the Women's Equality Branch.

When I said I had learned about the report, in fact, I meant that we received the report. We took action beyond what was in the report, of course. We have certainly already had several meetings with Indigenous communities and Indigenous women in the province. You can follow me and see the steps I am taking.

Indigenous women are always at the heart of our work. You can also see in the report that we are doing interdepartmental and intergovernmental work. We are making sure the work is done together to provide leadership.

If the opposition members want to sit down at the table with us, we will certainly be willing to work with them. We will be pleased to do so, since our approach is to join forces to use different strategies. On that note, thank you, Madam Speaker.

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[Original]

Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Three Rivers, PC): Madam Speaker, the department's annual report, which this minister signed and submitted, claims that 37 of the 39 recommended actions were initiated or completed. The Auditor General didn't appear impressed when presenting his audit this week. He pointed out that the department wasn't even using New Brunswick statistics when determining the number of victims in the province. He referred to the lack of accountability on this plan and the lack of urgency, and he made 11 recommendations to fix this mess. Have you, minister, sat down with staff at Women's Equality to hatch a comprehensive plan to extend this expired strategy and get this important work done for those in the vulnerable sector who were made to believe the government was working toward making things better for them?

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister responsible for Seniors; Minister responsible for Women's Equality, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you again to the opposition member for enabling me to add some things to my answer.

I will answer the last part of the question first, about whether I met with Women's Equality Branch staff. I do not only meet with the staff when emergencies arise; in fact, I am in very close, direct communication with all the civil servants in the Women's Equality Branch. If you follow my steps, you know that I organize regular meetings with the Women's Equality Branch staff to be sure that we are working closely on different issues that have come up concerning our files and mandates.

It really is very important that we work with our Indigenous communities, Indigenous women, and certainly the different departments. We received the report in June 2025. We are working closely, as I said, with the people involved. We will really be interested... In January, when you have other questions like this, we will really be able to tell you about specific measures.

[Original]

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Thank you, Madam Speaker. NB Power's goals and objectives are established by this Legislature through the *Electricity Act* and its regulations, which come from Cabinet. In 2013, the Conservative government of David Alward established a regulation under the Act that would require NB Power to ensure that at least 40% of electricity sold to New Brunswickers was produced using renewable resources. Over the subsequent 12 years—12 years—the Gallant Liberals and the Higgs Tories failed to increase this target to keep power rates affordable despite the plummeting cost of renewable energy.

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Since 2013, the costs of onshore wind power, offshore wind power, and solar power have fallen by 60%, and the cost of battery storage has fallen by 90%, making all of them cheaper than new fossil fuel or nuclear plants. Those costs keep falling. Does the Minister of Energy plan to significantly increase the regulated target for renewable power generation set out in the *Electricity Act* in order to keep the cost of power rates low?

Hon. K. Chiasson (Tracadie, Minister of Indigenous Affairs, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm going to use the tone of the Leader of the Official Opposition and have a discussion. Let's talk about energy. Obviously, for NB Power and its clients, the people of New Brunswick, the most important things are energy security and affordability. I think we have to recognize that 80% of NB Power's grid uses clean energy. The other point that we have to highlight is that there is a huge push to bring on wind power. There are a few hundred megawatts of wind power as we speak. As the Minister of Energy has said over and over, 1 000 MW of new wind power is on the radar. From that, 450 MW will be Indigenous-led.

Obviously, I understand that the leader of the third party has to try to highlight the gaps in the NB Power grid. However, we also have to recognize the great work that is being done here in the province.

[Translation]

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Madam Speaker, the federal funding program for greener homes was removed from the budget. The program provided interest-free loans of up to \$40 000 to enable Canadians to renovate their homes by installing solar panels, heat pumps, and insulation. Over a year ago, this government committed to increasing its support for the home renovation program and expanding its programs to cover the costs of installing solar panels, since that could considerably reduce people's power bills.

Will the Minister of Energy establish an interest-free funding—funding—program for home renovations to replace the federal program so that New Brunswickers can pay their power bills?

Hon. K. Chiasson (Tracadie, Minister of Indigenous Affairs, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I thank the opposition member for the question. Of course, NB Power's energy efficiency program has been received very well by people in the province. I am sure that you, like several of my colleagues, see many people at your constituency office who have applied. There is a waiting list. Of course, we know there is a great need among the public.

The Oil to Heat Pump Affordability program has been in place for several years. In fact, we will have to have a discussion with the federal government to see if there is interest in continuing the program. I sincerely believe that heat pumps must continue to be promoted.

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With respect to solar energy, there is already an incentive program. A discussion must be held with the federal government to see if there is interest in expanding the current program. We want to ensure that we keep helping people so that they have heat pumps installed in their homes, which will enable them to offset the increase in costs...

[Original]

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Bockus (Saint Croix, PC): Madam Speaker, on Tuesday, during supplementary estimates in Committee of the Whole, the Finance Minister said the budget covered out-of-province visits for medical services for New Brunswickers. However, this week, I received word that the Lubec medical centre in Maine has informed the residents of Campobello Island that the cost of their regular visits to doctors at the medical centre will no longer be covered by Medicare.

Madam Speaker, Campobello residents have a doctor who visits the island maybe once a week. For years, they've received their medical care in Lubec. Can the minister please explain the reason for the change in coverage?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, I have received similar emails. They are unverified at this point in time, but it is a very serious matter. I accept your concern. We are looking into this. We are investigating it. At this point in time, many people on Campobello do receive good, timely, high-quality care in Lubec in the absence of other care. Thank you for bringing this to my attention. We are investigating it, and we will fix this oversight. Thank you.

Ms. Bockus (Saint Croix, PC): Madam Speaker, this change has caused some intense concern for residents of Campobello. This is especially true now, in winter, when the ferry from the island to Deer Island is no longer operational. To reach mainland New Brunswick, residents have to travel an hour one way through Maine and then an hour home again. They have to go through four border crossings.

We have elderly residents, like a 91-year-old grandmother, who can't drive all the way through Maine to St. Stephen or Saint John for a doctor's appointment—if she can get one. Our Campobello residents need the attention of the Department of Health on this sudden decision. How do we fix this?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, I had the opportunity to visit Campobello in the past month and it has a very—

(Interjections.)

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Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Pardon?

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): I did. I did, and we are coming there too.

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Member—

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Can we turn back the clock?

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): I ask the minister to please answer the member for Saint Croix.

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Thank you. Yes, we visited Campobello. We are coming to Nackawic, too. I would like to give credit to the nurse practitioner and the physicians who work on Campobello. They do a fine job. I am also thankful for what happens in Lubec.

As I said earlier, we are investigating this right now. Similarly to you, I received an email. We will investigate. These people need appropriate and timely care and not necessarily to travel for the amount of time you mentioned. As I said earlier, we will investigate. We are thankful for the care that people receive from Canada, and we are thankful for our American neighbours as well. Thank you.

Ms. Bockus (Saint Croix, PC): Madam Speaker, that's encouraging. The provincial government has allocated funds to help New Brunswick residents pay their medical bills while travelling in other parts of Canada.

The provincial government has allocated funds to help New Brunswick residents pay their medical bills while travelling in other parts of Canada. The government members say they want to make health care accessible to all New Brunswickers. Could the Health Minister—and I understand that he's already looking—please look at ways to help New Brunswick residents isolated on an island pay for regular medical care in Lubec, where they have been receiving medical care for decades? I would like the minister to tell us how this can be addressed.

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, you are correct in saying that not all New Brunswickers receive all their medical care in Canada. We have a very strong process for reimbursing people's expenses through Medicare when they go elsewhere, to other parts of the country, or along the Eastern Seaboard. It's not just the local phenomena that you mentioned. We have line items in our budget with which we strongly support people who have to go elsewhere when they cannot get their care here. I would say that might be the case in Campobello, to

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some extent. As I said earlier, I promise to investigate where the hole is, to determine what's really happening in Lubec, and what people are really being charged. I thank you for bringing this up through the series of questions today. I do plan on investigating. Thank you.

BUDGETARY DEFICIT

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. A couple of weeks ago when we were in the House, I asked the Minister of Finance a question regarding the record \$835-million deficit that this government has racked up. In the process, the Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services decided to get on his feet and answer the question, so I thought: Okay. Let's see what he has to say. When I asked about how the government members managed to get themselves into a \$835-million deficit, the Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services said: Well, we've lost revenues. Well, we have heard from the Auditor General. You can look in his report. It's right there, all in nice colour: Revenues are up in every single category. Spending is up. I'd like to ask the Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services whether he would like to retract what he said last week about having a loss of revenue, or would he like to disagree with the Auditor General? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Mr. McKee, K.C. (Moncton Centre, Minister of Justice; Attorney General; Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health Services; L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. What I said was that the spending increase year over year was the same from their government to our government. Spending is not what is increasing year over year. What I said this week is that we are digging ourselves out of a hole because of a mess that they left us in. We're investing in affordability measures. We're investing in an infrastructure budget because of the infrastructure deficit that they left us in. They think it's funny when I bring out statistics like this. Another report that was released said that the GDP per capita at the end of the Higgs government era ranked us 60th out of 60 jurisdictions in North America because of the neglect that they had for New Brunswickers and New Brunswick businesses. We are cleaning up that mess. We're digging ourselves out of that hole, and we will get there, Madam Speaker.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

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