

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



March 18, 2026

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[*Translation*]

BUDGET

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

[*Original*]

Madam Speaker, here is the sad and tragic history of this government's fiscal accounting. By sad and tragic, I mean sad and tragic for New Brunswickers. Government members promised balanced budgets in all four years of their mandate. They made a verified \$1-billion accounting error in their costing platform. Then they backed away from having balanced budgets every year to having balanced budgets only in years for which they were fully responsible. Now, we see that they are backing away from balanced budgets in any year for the rest of their mandate. This budget is being universally panned as a document of mismanagement and irresponsibility.

Did the Premier ever truly plan on balancing the books, or was that promise not worth the paper it was written on? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The budget that we have put forward does something that I can understand the members opposite might not be familiar with. It tackles years of underspending in health care, and it puts New Brunswickers first—not bankers or creditors in New York, but New Brunswickers. It delivers the kind of health care that they are looking for, with the largest increase in health care going to our most valued health care professionals in every corner of this province to ensure that New Brunswickers get the care they deserve from a government that cares for them and people who care for them.

We are going to have to dig ourselves out of a hole that the previous government created. We will do that by investing in our health care system and transforming the way we deliver care, the way we attract and recruit the people who care for New Brunswickers, the tools that they use, and the spaces that they use. Our government will not do that on the backs of New Brunswickers. We are putting New Brunswickers first.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): The backs of New Brunswickers are exactly where this is going to be done, Madam Speaker. We will talk about the Liberal math on health investments. We'll talk about that later.

Madam Speaker, the deficit from last year's budget now stands at \$1.4 billion after an estimated \$550-million deficit. That is a staggering \$1 500 of overspending per New Brunswicker. The government missed its budget target by almost triple. In the context of less access to primary care, underperformance, chaos in our education system, and less

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affordability for New Brunswickers, how can this government and this Premier defend overspending their own budget by \$1.4 billion and getting nothing for it? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Our government is here to support New Brunswickers and meet their priorities. We have invested in health care and collaborative clinics. The former government didn't open any clinics, despite its promises. It didn't open a single clinic. During its first year in office, our government opened 11 clinics. This year, we will open 12 of them because we're investing in New Brunswickers' priorities.

The Leader of the Official Opposition would rather cancel all the contracts we have signed. For example, nurses have a good contract that gives them the respect they deserve and ensures their retention. The Leader of the Official Opposition would like to take that contract away from them. There is a nationally competitive contract for family doctors, and it encourages them to come work here to provide care for New Brunswickers. The Opposition Leader says: No, no, no, I want to tear up the contract; I don't want to invest in New Brunswickers' health care. We have seen that our government prioritizes health...

[*Original*]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): I appreciate that answer, Madam Speaker, because it continues to show who this Premier really is. She can't take responsibility for anything. She wants to blame anything and everything on everybody else. But I will tell you this, had they really, truly opened or built 11 new collaborative care clinics, had they truly removed 14 000 people from the wait list instead of adding 40 000, and had they done it with a balanced budget the way they promised they would, we would be having a very different conversation, Madam Speaker—very different.

Now, I want to ask the Premier this. We're looking at a \$1.4-billion deficit from last year. We're looking at no movement of the needle on fiscal responsibility. Everybody is saying that this is not sustainable. What can this Premier say to New Brunswickers to make them believe that the government is actually going to stick to this year's budget? It missed the last one by almost triple.

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Our government has listened to New Brunswickers, and they have told us that they want us to deliver the health care they deserve. They want their lives to be made more affordable. We have the capacity to make sure that New Brunswickers don't have to pay for the failures of previous governments.

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So we are investing to make sure that we improve health care for New Brunswickers with those 11 new clinics, with the 12 clinics we're going to open this year, and with the health care technology that New Brunswickers need. That is a \$50-million investment this year. We are making sure that patients have to tell their story only once to get that information into the system so that every health care professional can provide them with efficient care.

We're also making people's lives more affordable, with \$98 million removed from their power bills. The folks on the other side don't care and wouldn't have given them that relief because they're only interested in the bottom line. We're interested in New Brunswickers' bottom line, and we will make those investments to protect them.

HEALTH CARE / SOINS DE SANTÉ

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, Madam Speaker, we'll see how much New Brunswickers appreciate this government when the bill comes due.

Last December, in this House, I asked the Premier and the Minister of Health to back up their claims that they had actually taken 14 000 people off the primary care wait list. We had evidence to prove that, at that time, 24 000 people were actually added to the patient wait list. The Premier could not answer, so she set up her Health Minister to answer. He came back with an incorrect answer referring to population growth. Not one month later, they revealed that the actual number of New Brunswickers waiting for access to primary health care is 40 000, not the 14 000 that they said, here on the floor of this House, that they had taken off the wait list. Will the Premier or this Health Minister get on their feet and admit that they either did not give New Brunswickers the right information or just didn't know? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Our government's priority is to improve access to health care for New Brunswickers. The situation was disastrous because of the lack of action and respect from the former government, which made drastic cuts. Our government has invested in nurses, family doctors, and education for these professionals. We have created new clinics. We have hired new professionals and taken over 15 000 people off the wait list.

We are asking New Brunswickers to put their names on the wait list because, that way, we can match them with a clinic like the one we opened in Fundy Shores, which will care for people on the wait list in the community. The same applies in Nackawic. We have added space and professionals, and the clinic will care for everyone in the area whose name is on

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the wait list. This is an improvement to our health care system and a transformation our government supports...

[*Original*]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): That is absolutely incorrect, Madam Speaker. I can tell you that New Brunswickers are not feeling it. There are 40 000 more. The facts speak for themselves. Regardless of what the government's communication strategy tells them, New Brunswickers are seeing something completely different.

Madam Speaker, in the Health budget, we can see another example of Liberal mismanagement with no results. Their estimated spending for last year was \$4 billion, and they came in at over \$4.5 billion. They now claim estimated expenditures of \$4.8 billion for this year, or another \$277 million, not the \$710 million they are claiming. Health care is in crisis now—today. It's in crisis under their tenure. For the extra half a billion in overspending, we have more people waiting for care. That is a fact. We have wait times that are not getting better. We have elderly folks waiting for care, shoved into spaces where they should never be. How can the government defend this overspending with absolutely no results?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Madam Speaker, our government has made the health care system and the people who deliver care for New Brunswick our number one priority. We had to stabilize a system that was in complete free fall. We had nurses leaving the province because the folks on the other side told them to go to Alberta to find a better salary. We had to demonstrate respect and give them the retention bonuses they deserve to stabilize that workforce in this province, and we had to give them a competitive contract that makes it attractive to be a nurse here. Do you know what? We've seen more nurses stay in and come to New Brunswick than we have in a very long time. That's helping us to deliver the kinds of health care services that New Brunswickers need.

It was the same for doctors. The folks on the other side said this: Oh, all the doctors should just work a little harder and take on a few more patients. Our government said: No, we understand that our health care professionals are doing everything they can. We're going to give them a contract that rewards them for taking on patients and expanding their hours of care. It's the best contract in the country. It's worth every penny, and it's going to help us improve the health care system.

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BUDGET

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): There it is, Madam Speaker. Trust us. It's coming. Trust us. It will all materialize. Trust us. We will balance the books. Trust us. You will get better health care.

None of it is happening, Madam Speaker, and people are waking up to that. We had students protesting on the lawn of the Legislature. They are collateral damage from this government's mismanagement and its communications strategy. The actions of this government... The government members didn't think or didn't care about the impact of the trial balloons on the student population of our province. Does the Premier wish to recognize the harm she has caused and apologize to the students of this province? Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston—Vallée-des-Rivières, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs; Minister responsible for Immigration; Minister responsible for Military Affairs; Minister responsible for the Research and Productivity Council, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As you know, the provincial government invests over \$436 million per year so that our colleges and universities can provide world-class education here in New Brunswick. We make sure we are working with our postsecondary institutions. Madam Speaker, I think it is important to note and emphasize that.

Let's consider the investments we are making in our colleges and universities. In addition to investing in the operations of these institutions to ensure their viability, we are also ensuring, for example, that CCNB Bathurst has adequate infrastructure. We are also working with the Moncton campus of Université de Moncton to provide world-class sports infrastructure. We are working with NBCC Saint John to ensure that work continues on the infrastructure that will enable students to progress. Madam Speaker, these are just a few examples, and we will continue to...

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): As usual, Madam Speaker, the answer has nothing to do with what I asked. That, however, is the standard set by this government.

[*Original*]

Among the 14 trial balloons that were put out by this Premier and that have caused fear and anxiety within our post-secondary system were the suggestions that universities pay property taxes, which would ultimately fall on the backs of students as an increase in tuition, that St. Thomas close, and that Mount A be privatized. These were suggested

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without ever proving to the people of this province that there is even a need to change the number of universities in our post-secondary education system.

Those institutions have been devalued by the uncertainty created by this government. Between the Premier and her PETL minister, they have caused irreparable harm. We will not even know the ultimate impact on student enrollment until the fall. What will it be as a result of their trial balloons, which were only necessary because this government can't balance a budget?

Madam Premier, I will ask again: Will you apologize for the reckless destruction that you have created for our student population?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston—Vallée-des-Rivières, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs; Minister responsible for Immigration; Minister responsible for Military Affairs; Minister responsible for the Research and Productivity Council, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank my colleague opposite for his question. It will enable me to build on my response to the previous question.

You know, Madam Speaker, in addition to investing in our colleges and universities, we are investing—and I have given examples of this—in our university infrastructure. Even better, in my opinion, to understand what is happening and determine needs, it is important to commit to travelling around the province, meeting with representatives of our colleges and universities, and visiting them individually to understand the reality on site and the way they are teaching our students.

However, Madam Speaker, questions must also be asked. It's important to hear what the opposition members have said recently. They said: Let's make cuts, cuts, and more cuts. According to them, we didn't make enough cuts. Madam Speaker, I would really like to know what cuts opposition members would like to make to post-secondary education in New Brunswick. I would like to hear their observations.

[Original]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, I'll tell you, Madam Speaker, we had universities tell us that they weren't consulted. They had no idea this was coming. The students certainly didn't know it was coming.

In the Finance Minister's budget speech, on page 2, it says that the government is "prepared to make decisions that will help control spending over the longer term and ensure that taxpayer dollars are used as efficiently as possible."

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What? This is not happening at all. This government is doubling down and is going even further into debt. It is literally the most out-of-control government this province has ever had. This government has posted a record deficit and, in this year's budget, is literally anticipating that it is going to go even further into debt, breaking its own dismal fiscal record.

Can the Minister of Finance or the Premier explain how they believe they are controlling spending? New Brunswickers are seeing something very different. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston—Vallée-des-Rivières, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs; Minister responsible for Immigration; Minister responsible for Military Affairs; Minister responsible for the Research and Productivity Council, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I have already mentioned, I meet with representatives of the institutions in the community. I also meet with the presidents and CEOs of our colleges and universities. These meetings took place before the budget planning, and the Leader of the Official Opposition should realize that meetings also took place during the budget process. We met with the heads of the colleges and universities.

However, one of the things that I would like to hear from the Leader of the Opposition is why, when the opposition members had pre-budget meetings, they weren't even able to invite all the public colleges and universities in New Brunswick. Is that because they don't know all the post-secondary institutions in the province? Madam Speaker, that is the important question right now.

We understand the situation and we are getting the work done with our post-secondary institutions. The opposition members are really out of touch. They don't even know what institutions are in New Brunswick.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The minister continues to show the true nature of this government. I asked that question to the Premier or the Minister of Finance. Neither the Premier nor the minister answered, and that's because they are afraid to face the people of our province, Madam Speaker.

[*Original*]

Since they mismanaged last year's budget so badly, for this budget cycle, the government members embarked on a blame New Brunswick tour where they did their 14 little trial balloons. It was sort of similar to Brian Gallant's strategic program review, which, by the

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way, he did nothing with, just like these guys. They wanted to create fear and anxiety, and then they backed away from it all.

New Brunswickers shouldn't have to pay, and they shouldn't be blamed. The government members are blaming New Brunswickers, saying: Oh, you didn't want this, so we didn't make those cuts. They're blaming New Brunswickers whether or not New Brunswickers wanted it. Why should New Brunswickers share in the blame for your mismanagement?

[*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): Madam Speaker, again we see the difference between the government and the opposition, which formed the previous government. Everything we're hearing from the Leader of the Official Opposition is blame, blame, blame. It's always someone else's fault. We have an open discussion with different groups. No answer is acceptable to the members opposite, because, if we discuss things openly, they say we don't have a plan. If we present a plan, they say we didn't discuss it or we didn't consult anyone. So, the discussion is open and ongoing. The budget exercise doesn't last one day. It extends throughout the year. Many things happen.

The Leader of the Official Opposition mentioned that our expenditures were simply higher than our estimates from last year. He always forgets about revenue. Here's what's even more interesting: We are told this year that our shortfall corresponds to the revenue generated by the former government in 2020. So, the official opposition members took the credit for the revenue projections. Then they blamed us again...

[*Original*]

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Oh, man, here we go, Madam Speaker. You know, I remember a television show from back in the 70s, when I was a kid, that was called *The Six Million Dollar Man*. We now have a finance minister who is the six billion dollar man, and not in a good way, Madam Speaker.

It is horrifying that this government thinks it can sell New Brunswickers a deficit spending program that it has no plan to get out of. The government isn't even trying. Bay Street is rubbing its hands together because it knows it will get hands on more of our money, which could be going to services. There is a \$300-million delta between the two. In his speech yesterday, the minister said that it was \$710 million. The reality is that, because of the government's half a billion in overspending, it is only \$277 million. Can the minister please explain?

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Had they not spent that extra half a billion, then I would agree with his numbers. Why won't he just be real with New Brunswickers and state the fact that it's not the spending that they are trying to sell to people? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[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): Madam Speaker, as I mentioned yesterday, there is a \$710-million difference from one budget to the next. We had the same discussion last year. We are playing around with the numbers. We are improving. We are having fun comparing the third-quarter results with the budget and making budget-to-budget comparisons. The situation was the same when the previous government was in office. The difference this time is that we have taken into account the actual expenditures over the last fiscal year.

In addition, we have strategically put more funding into the computer system in clinics, the doctors' contract, nurses, and medical clinics. These are concrete investments that we are making in the health system to improve... We heard the people of New Brunswick. They've been waiting too long for services. They've been waiting too long.

The former government didn't do anything. It announced record investments because it was investing \$200 million more a year. They were record investments because they were greater than the previous year. However, these weren't investments, this was actually a change in the numbers. It was just a change to the bottom line. Yesterday, this government made a strategic investment in health care, which will make a difference in this province.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): These are the government's numbers. It isn't even capable of respecting its own budget. Its deficit is three times higher than it should be, Madam Speaker. How did the situation get so much worse? Initially, the projected deficit was \$500 million. Now it is almost three times more than that.

[Original]

The government members had quarterly updates, Madam Speaker. They had an opportunity to shift or to realign themselves based on those quarterly updates. Each one showed a worsening situation. Why did they not rein in spending midyear, when they saw that they were so badly out of step with their budget and that New Brunswickers were not getting any better results for the money the government members were spending? That is their job, Madam Speaker.

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): Madam Speaker, I find it very interesting that the member opposite asks



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how things got so bad. During the previous government's six-year tenure, it increased the public service by almost 8 000 people. It just threw positions at everything. We went from 40 000 public servants to 53 000, just throwing positions everywhere. That's the reality. That's the real cost—funded positions. They were not always filled. They were funded positions. How did we get here? The reality is that it was the previous government's mess throughout its mandate. It took six years to do. You're going to have to give us a minute to fix it.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Well, Madam Speaker, there's an old song that says: "You're out of touch". The government members are out of touch. My heavens. It's insane to think that this government thinks it's actually benefiting New Brunswickers by sending hundreds of millions of dollars more to Bay Street. The government members are indebting us for generations. New Brunswickers are going to have to pay it back.

Do you know what? Do you know who is watching? Bankers are watching. They're watching right now. When you look at our credit rating, you see that it was left in a good position under us. I know the banks watch closely. I know they meet with FTB every year during budget time. I would like the minister to get on his feet and actually reveal this to New Brunswickers: When is our credit downrating coming? How much will it be? I know he knows. He met with the bankers. We would like to know now.

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): Madam Speaker, the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, seems to know a lot of things. The reality is that, when you meet with the bankers, they don't come out at dinner on budget day and tell you: This is what's going to happen. I did have meetings with the bankers. They said that they fully understand that every province in this country is facing a similar situation. We are not unique. This is not a New Brunswick problem. Every province is facing this situation.

How we manage it is actually interesting. The bankers know we have a plan. They know we're working toward improving that situation. We're using what we have at our disposal right now to make a change and to bring forward strategy, as opposed to just tweaking the sides and pretending we're actually making a difference. That is not what we're doing. That is not what we're doing. We're fixing health care, improving education, and making things more affordable for New Brunswickers. That's what they asked us to do. That's what matters in this province.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, Leader of the Official Opposition, PC): Like I said, Madam Speaker, I'm gobsmacked at the arrogance of this government. With its little communication strategy, it thinks New Brunswickers are going to believe it because it said it. The facts say something completely different, and everybody knows it. The rate of



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growth of this debt... We were at a 25% debt-to-GDP ratio. Under these guys, we're now at 30%. With the government's budgetary estimates, we're talking about being at around 40%, right back to where we were during the Gallant years, when economists were saying we were about to fall over a fiscal cliff.

New Brunswickers need to know whether this government has any plan to bring us back to balance or whether it is just going to keep trying to sell us this line: Trust us. It is going to get better.

The government hasn't even talked about how it's going to pay this back or how long it will take to pay it back. It just says: This debt is how much we are going to put on your backs. Madam Speaker, this is wrong. The Finance Minister—

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): Madam Speaker, how does a province get to a 25% net debt-to-GDP ratio? The answer is very simple: focus on one thing. For every dollar you get, put it on the debt. Don't worry about infrastructure deficits. Don't worry about health problems. Don't worry about school systems that are failing. Don't worry about affordability issues and the problems New Brunswickers have. Just take care of that bottom line. That's what we had for six years, and it was wrong, because that was also being left to future generations. We are fixing that. That's what is going to happen.

The reality is that the opposition members don't need to trust us. New Brunswickers should have an opposition that will debate issues, as opposed to just putting out hot air and talking about nothing. If you want to debate the budget, then bring forward an idea.

LONG-TERM CARE / SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, PC): If we want to talk about issues, Madam Speaker... Early in February, we were informed of a horrendous finding at the Loch Lomond seniors' facility. It was discovered that a dozen or more vulnerable residents had become victims of sexual assault. Minister, seniors and families want to know that this will never happen again. What measures have been taken to give family members assurance that their loved ones are secure and protected in this facility?

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Boudreau (Champdoré-Irishtown, Minister responsible for Seniors; Minister responsible for Women's Equality, L): Madam Speaker, thank you very much to the opposition member for the question. Our government is certainly extremely upset about what happened. We are really devastated about the situation, which certainly shocked us all. Right now, we are working very hard with our team to review the policies. We are



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identifying current challenges and analyzing best practices to improve safety in all nursing homes in the province.

We are working with our licensed nursing homes in New Brunswick and the New Brunswick Association of Nursing Homes as part of the initiative. We are very affected as well. We certainly hope this doesn't happen again. We will do everything we can to ensure that every senior ages in a safe place staffed with compassionate people who have taken the necessary training to support them. Thank you.

[Original]

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, PC): I will ask this: Is a consultative task force collaborating with long-term care facilities to develop protocols for the safety of residents? Is that the answer? What concrete changes will the minister implement to prevent sexual abuse in long-term care? These include enhanced background checks, staffing ratios, mandatory reporting, trauma-informed training, and independent oversight. When will those measures be put in place?

[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 the question, which gives me the opportunity to provide a bit more of the information that I am able to give you today.

As I mentioned, we are reviewing procedures, policies, and all safety measures. I have had the opportunity to travel around the province to meet with as many of the people who currently work in nursing homes as possible, and I do exactly the same thing during each of my visits. I look at the environment, and we talk about situations. We look at ways people in nursing homes can access services and resources, inside and outside nursing homes.

Currently, there is a team working closely with all nursing homes to look at ways we can improve the current situation, get an overall picture of the situation, and support residents in nursing homes as well as families and volunteers. It's important for us to ensure that all seniors live in a safe place where they can get care. Thank you.

[Original]

Ms. M. Johnson (Carleton-Victoria, PC): I'm glad the minister is speaking to people in residences. I'm glad she is speaking to staff because nobody knows better than the people with boots on the ground what is needed to make these facilities more secure and to keep the residents protected.

These assaults did not happen in a vacuum. They occurred in a regulated facility under provincial oversight involving residents who often could not advocate for themselves.



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Thank heavens that some of them were able to come forward. What about those who were incapacitated? What about the non-verbal? What about those with dementia?

What immediate steps has the minister taken to ensure the safety of residents in that facility and across the long-term care system? What can the minister do to confirm whether emergency inspections and unannounced audits are now under way in the province? What can we do to assure people that they can go to bed at night knowing that their loved ones in care are protected, safe, and secure?

[*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 member opposite for her question. Indeed, as I mentioned, our government cares deeply about the safety of our seniors. We will continue the work. As soon as we learned about the situation, and even before, we wondered how we could improve all the services provided to our seniors in nursing homes. We know they are extremely vulnerable. In our opinion, it's important to amplify the voices of our seniors and families.

At the beginning of my mandate, the motto was this: Nothing About Us Without Us. I also want to make the invisible visible, meaning working continually with the people on-site. You mentioned that. We recognize the work people do on-site, and it's very important to do so. We know that they know their environment very well. It's also important to continue working with families and, of course, volunteers. However, we and the team continue to review policies and best practices to improve the situation in nursing homes. Thank you.

[*Original*]

UNIVERSITIES / UNIVERSITÉS

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Madam Speaker, this government's budget freezes funding for universities. Given the rate of inflation, it represents a cut in the status quo, let's say. Our universities have been seriously underfunded for years. Provincial funding has not kept pace with inflation over the past decade. A freeze in university funding will make it difficult for our four public universities to meet their obligations to their students even though they have already done a considerable amount of belt tightening over the years to deal with underfunding. To make matters worse, the forced reduction in the number of international students, which was brought about by the federal government, has further eroded revenue at our universities.

How will the Premier ensure that no students will lose their right—their right—to access postsecondary education when they can no longer afford the tuition?

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[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston—Vallée-des-Rivières, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs; Minister responsible for Immigration; Minister responsible for Military Affairs; Minister responsible for the Research and Productivity Council, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I have already said, the provincial government invests over \$436 million per year to support our public colleges and universities in New Brunswick and ensure that they provide world-class education.

As we know, students from around the world come here to study at our colleges and universities, because they understand the importance of the way we provide instruction and educate people here in New Brunswick.

However, that's only one aspect of what we do. Investments are one thing, but it's also important to continue concretely supporting our colleges and universities. I mentioned a few specific examples earlier concerning infrastructure, but we could go on. We know that our colleges and universities, especially our universities, have needs related to residences. We have invested over \$1 million...

[*Original*]

Mr. Coon (Fredericton Lincoln, Leader, G): Madam Speaker, the government presented a long list of proposals to the presidents of our four public universities that would reduce costs if implemented. The Premier, for now, has taken three off the table: the closure of St. Thomas University, the privatization of Mount Allison University, and the 10% funding cuts that were threatened. However, the Premier is withdrawing us from the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, which will be a topic of another question.

Other things on the list included requiring universities to pay property tax, divesting UNB and Université de Moncton of some of their assets, limiting aid to in-province students, merging the CCNB Dieppe campus with UdeM, combining NBCCD and NBCC, merging the Maritime College of Forest Technology with the forestry schools of UNB and Université de Moncton, and tying the amount of funding to student retention. Can the Premier tell us whether these proposals have been taken off the table?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. D'Amours (Edmundston—Vallée-des-Rivières, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs; Minister responsible for Immigration; Minister responsible for Military Affairs; Minister responsible for the Research and Productivity Council, L): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank my colleague opposite for his question. When we assess the situation throughout the province, we must take the time to have discussions with our postsecondary institutions. As I



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mentioned, colleges and universities are essential to the future of our province. They are also essential to the education of the people who will enter the job market. New Brunswick will need educated people in the future.

Discussions took place well before the budget was tabled. Since I assumed responsibility for the postsecondary education portfolio, I have had meetings with college and university leaders to understand the needs and realities of each institution. I continue to work on the file. Madam Speaker, I believe it is also necessary to recognize that, when we want to innovate and look to the future, these discussions must continue.

Discussions took place during the pre-budget period. We will continue the work on getting a good understanding of the needs of our colleges and universities as well as the needs of students.

[Original]

ENERGY / ÉNERGIE

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Some \$3.5 billion is the ballpark amount that NB Power is going to make New Brunswickers pay for the American-owned fracked gas and diesel plant it wants to build in Tantramar. This morning, we learned in a CBC story that there's another, cheaper option. An Ontario-based company submitted a proposal to NB Power and the Minister of Energy showing that it can deliver a 400-MW battery storage project for \$1.75 billion—half the cost of this expensive gas plant. The best news? Batteries can be charged from any source of energy, from renewables to the conventional sources we already have. Even on the coldest days of the year, they can be charged during off-peak hours. Considering this new information, will the Premier request that NB Power change course to avoid building this costly gas plant that will drive power rates even higher?

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): Madam Speaker, thank you very much for the question from the member opposite. We actually met the proponent of the battery project. They met us informally at a conference. They mentioned that they had a project that they wanted to present. It was an unsolicited bid. We said: Bring it in. We wanted to see what they were presenting. They presented a proposal. The RIGS project is to cover, when the wind isn't blowing, about 36 to 72 hours. When they presented their project, at the price they were looking at, it was for between 8 and 16 hours. There were some variables there. They're not comparable.

We mentioned that they should go through the REOI for battery storage that was put out by NB Power last fall. To my knowledge, I don't know whether they have put in a bid for the REOI, but the proper way of doing that is through NB Power. The Energy Department is

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more than interested in seeing new technologies and new ways of doing things, but that goes through NB Power.

Ms. Mitton (Tantramar, G): Madam Speaker, my understanding is that battery energy storage systems can meet NB Power's needs and address these problems. Compared to conventional power plants, which often run overbudget, the Oneida 250-MW battery project in Ontario came in under budget and ahead of schedule. In addition to providing power during demand peaks, battery systems reduce the need to buy more expensive energy during peak times throughout the year, which would save us money by allowing us to import and store lower-cost energy during low-demand periods.

The reasons for abandoning this gas- and diesel-burning plant are stacking up. The reasons to go with a battery energy storage system are clear— not just the 50-MW one that they're talking about but something significant. Again, I implore this government to look at the facts. Again, I ask this: Will the Premier insist that NB Power change course and avoid making this terribly expensive mistake on her watch?

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): Madam Speaker, again, these are not comparable technologies. You're comparing apples and oranges. This does not match what RIGS is going to offer NB Power. The problem is, the minute we get past eight hours... Sometimes the wind doesn't blow for longer than eight hours.

If we just go with batteries, potentially, if the wind isn't blowing, we will have to recharge those batteries with some oil, coal, or whatever else. We don't want to use those traditional ways of creating energy.

These batteries are not comparable to the Renewable Integration and Grid Security (RIGS) project, which will put more wind power on our system and balance it out with some baseload energy. That's what it's there for. If this battery project were comparable, it would be much more expensive to bring in. If you want to have batteries for four times the amount of time, you need four times the number of batteries. It's just simple math.

HEALTH CARE / SOINS DE SANTÉ

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Over the past decade, Progressive Conservatives have developed quite a history of fighting for New Brunswick companies, while the Liberals' history is one of fighting against New Brunswick companies. Whether it's snowplows from Hartland, power poles from Tracyville, fire trucks from Centreville, municipal piping from McAdam, or road salt from Sussex, history shows Progressive Conservatives standing up for New Brunswick companies and putting them first.

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Here we go again. The Liberal government seems determined to take e-health care for New Brunswickers away from eVisitNB, a New Brunswick company founded by New Brunswickers for New Brunswickers. Over the past four years, eVisitNB has done 1 million consults for over 300 000 New Brunswickers. At the start of February, we learned that the Holt government plans to replace eVisitNB.

Can the Premier tell this House when she learned that her government was planning to eliminate eVisitNB for an American firm?

Hon. Mr. Dornan (Saint John Portland-Simonds, Minister of Health, L): Madam Speaker, for years, health care has been hemorrhaging, bleeding from every pore of this province. We recognized that, and we, as a party—and I, as a physician—were not willing to walk to the other side of the road. New Brunswickers support us in supporting the health care workers of this province, those from this province and those who work in this province.

I'm very proud of this budget, which invests money in nursing contracts and physician contracts. I challenge the member opposite: Which one of those would you cut? How would you continue the hemorrhage that's occurring here?

eVisitNB was a company that introduced virtual care in this province. I think that this was a commendable initiative, and we will continue to provide virtual care in this province on April 1 and every day thereafter.

I'm very pleased with the contract that we have secured. It was advertised a year ago. Companies were able to respond—

Mr. Hogan (Woodstock-Hartland, PC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. That was quite an answer. Whenever the Premier was brought into the loop on her government's plans to eliminate eVisitNB, it was her job to say no. She failed in her duty. At the time it was suggested that the eVisitNB contract not be renewed, she, as Premier, should have said: No, that's not how the government intends to proceed.

What we have here is a made-in-New Brunswick success story. It serves New Brunswickers well. In fact, it has served over 300 000 New Brunswickers over 1 million times. If there are refinements or improvements to be made, let's discuss them while we renew the contract. This company is an example of a New Brunswick innovation to trumpet nationwide and to perhaps spread nationwide. Can the Premier explain to this House and to New Brunswickers why she didn't stand up for this New Brunswick company?

Hon. Ms. Holt (Fredericton South-Silverwood, Premier; Minister responsible for Official Languages, L): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm glad that there's one person on the other side of the House who agrees with us that health care is the thing that New Brunswickers care about the most. They want to have health care there for them. We

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moved into virtual health care because the members opposite failed to provide quality in-person health care for New Brunswickers.

We are doing things differently. We can deliver virtual health care even better than it is being delivered today. We are investing in a virtual health care solution that will be integrated with our telehealth solution. It is going to be integrated with the investments we're making in a clinical health care solution. On April 1, New Brunswickers can count on virtual health care that is better than ever, on being paired with primary, in-person health care in their community at the hours they want with the nurse practitioners and doctors they need. This government is putting New Brunswickers first and investing in their health care. We are proud to do it.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

[Original]

Madam Speaker (Hon. Ms. Landry): Question period has expired.