

**Reply to the Budget Speech
by Mr. Michael Murphy,
Finance Critic**

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[Original]

Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today for this, my first speech as Finance Critic. I would like to thank my wife for her support and specifically for the corralling of our five children as I pored over briefing books in preparation for my role and for these remarks today. I also want to take this opportunity to thank our party and our Opposition Leader for this opportunity. I would be remiss in not thanking members of the caucus for their support and for their ideas to form this, our reply to the budget.

I also want to congratulate the people of Nackawic on their perseverance and on their community cohesion during these last few very difficult months, knowing that those difficult days are now in the past.

[Translation]

It is a pleasure to rise in this House to fill the same role that has been played in the past by Bernard Richard, Raymond Frenette, and several other members of our party.

[Original]

I have just gotten back here. I was on a vacation outside of the country with my wife, Moira. I got back just a day before the House resumed, and I, like the member for Madawaska-la-Vallée, had to read all the newspapers I had missed, which took some time. I have to tell you that I was shocked to see, on the front page of the *Times & Transcript*, three days dedicated to a UFO. It seems there was this exploding ball of flames, with a long, fiery tail, in the skies over New Brunswick. It was terrifying, and I felt bad, because I knew exactly what that fireball would have been. It was Peter MacKay exploding after the Conservative convention, with Belinda and Percy hanging on. I knew what it was all along. No Air Miles were used for that.

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13:50

Today, we have three things that we want to outline in response to this budget proposed in the House a couple of days ago. First, we want to talk about what cracks we have in our fiscal foundation. Second, what are the tools that we need to fix the cracks in that fiscal foundation? Third and finally, what must be the strategic fiscal framework in which we will strengthen our foundation and build our future? It sounds rather complex, but it is quite simple. What are our challenges? What do we need to meet them? How will this make our lives better? These are simple questions, but important ones when a government is lacking vision.

On the first aspect, let me say that our challenges are many and that they have been neglected. For six years, members of this government have run away from change. For them, a perfect day is one where nothing changes except the world around them. They were given an historic

opportunity this year, with the largest influx of federal money any provincial government has had in a generation. Yet again, they were smaller than the moment. They tossed only enough money at health and at education to keep a flailing status quo. They ignored engines of economic growth like job training, venture capital, and innovation. Once again, they have failed the acid test of ideas.

A province that needs to gain ground cannot stay the course. The government was given the money to innovate, but it chose to stagnate. It may blame the feds, and it may blame the Liberal bogeyman, Frank McKenna, now in Washington. Maybe the Premier will tell us his potential was stunted during the 1917 reciprocity debate. We know that some excuse will be out there. It has been said that you are only a failure once you start blaming all those around you. This government has lived up to that expression in its full.

The long and short is that our fiscal foundation is not strong because this government refuses to pick up the tools for opportunity. This government has failed to promote economic development. We need to be aggressive. This government has failed to create jobs with growing wages. We need jobs and we need immigrants. The north of our province is losing hope. We got 594 new immigrants in six years under their program. That is 100 per year. Unbelievably, they put that in the speech for the Minister of Finance to brag about. Our population is now about to decline. We need innovative measures to keep the people of northern New Brunswick in their homes, and we desperately need young people and families to move there.

Let us be clear. We need to address the fiscal imbalance in this country through strong positions. We need to ensure that the capacity for new programs is here, not just in Ottawa. We need to insist on getting that federal money in a sensible way, rather than through a provincial free-for-all.

We are not here to blame the federal Conservatives when they were in power, nor to defend the federal Liberals of the present day. We are here to say that something must be done, because, soon, we will not have any flexibility unless we take measures in hand through federal/provincial relations. Also, with this in mind, we must build as fast as we can with the tools we already have within our jurisdiction. I will get to those tools in a moment.

Let me talk a little bit more about the first fiscal crack in the foundation: this Premier's photo-op federalism. The Valentine's Day accords, I believe, cut to the very heart of equalization in this country, which was begun in 1957. My father sat in that Parliament as the member for Moncton and Westmorland County on the very day that that program was announced. He, like others, told me just the other day that they believed at that time that this program would put the country on the rails toward equal services and wealth throughout this country. For a time, it did, but we are now off that track in this country.

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13:55

It is not that Brian Mulroney began to negotiate the federal oil and gas reserves to the provinces. It is not that the current Prime Minister negotiated these accords. What troubles us is that solutions for regional disparity in this country are seemingly now driven by personalities.

Whether it is Danny Williams, Frank McKenna, Claudette Bradshaw, or Jean Charest, the fact is that solutions for regional disparity must never be driven by personality or by circumstance. They must be driven by principle, or else, at best, we will have unilateral federalism, and, at worst, we will have Roll up the Rim to Win federalism. Provinces that have Premiers of weak and indecisive leadership will be left with empty cups, and that means that we have big problems right here, right now.

[Translation]

What did the Premier of our province do while these accords were being developed? He said nothing. Our Premier had the chance many times to say: No, that must certainly not be done, for it would detract from the country we have built and it would be the beginning of a slippery slope for the Equalization Program that ensures equal services across the country. Our Premier's silence was really tacit support for Mr. Williams.

Out of political opportunism, the Premier preferred to weigh his political interests in the leadership of a federal party that does not believe in equalization against the desire to get money in the short term, here in the province. This is a development that, in the long term, will be harmful and will tend to benefit the rich provinces. The harm done by Mr. Williams and our Premier may have a long-term impact on the federation.

[Original]

What else happens due to the Premier's silence? First, we do not know what we are going to get in transfer payments after two years on equalization. It is no longer what the federal government must transfer based on a formula, but how much we will get of the slice that they—the feds—decide to deliver to the provinces. With a declining population and the weak, indecisive leadership of this PC government, we may face in the near future a fiscal abyss.

This new approach to equalization may have staggered the principle of equalization, but this government and this Premier had a second chance. They had a chance to speak up when it mattered, to speak up and insist on principled equalization for all Canadians. What happened? Not a word. These Valentine's Day accords delivered an arrow to the heart of equalization that has stood for 50 years. What did our Premier do? Nothing. He stood and watched as two provinces gained huge economic advantage over us, in our backyard.

We believe this Premier has sold us out. He has sold out to political opportunity the fundamental principle of equal services under the Constitution, all for his 30 pieces of political silver to come from the federal Conservative Party in its next leadership. Even Elsie Wayne stood up and said that the Conservative Party had turned its back on the Maritimes, which helped build this country.

There are more current cracks which were caused solely by the people on the other side of the House. Here are a few to mention. We had an opportunity to keep power rates very low in New Brunswick, the lowest in Eastern Canada, and perhaps the lowest on this side of the continent. Recently, David Hay, the President of NB Power, said that there would be a \$70-million operating deficit. He cut costs and is pushing rates up by 10%. My constituent, Mrs. LeBlanc, called to tell me that she is now going to have to ask her adult children to help pay her power

bill. This is all the result of arrogance and timidity.

They were going to save \$100 million per year by burning Orimulsion. We lost that. We retrofitted Coleson Cove for \$744 million, eight years before the end of its life span. All because of the mismanagement of this government, we will have lost almost \$2 billion in savings to New Brunswickers. That is one of the biggest financial fiascoes in Canadian history.

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14:00

What does the Premier do? Today, in the newspaper, he says: We reserve the right to say we will not agree to retroactivity. The problem is that the application by NB Power went to Cabinet. The Premier okayed it. Essentially, what the Premier is saying to New Brunswickers today is: Do not worry, I might not let myself get away with this.

Here is something else: When the government took the tolls off the road, it assumed the debt, and it must now pay interest on that. Also, it paid as much as \$165 million in shadow tolls to MRDC. The Minister of Finance said this morning that you must pay for the services that you use. Then, these guys, instead of saying that this is what they are going to do, say: Are you going to put the tolls back on the road? No, but we are going to put this government and this Premier back on the road.

That is \$165 million. Wow. That is money out of the Consolidated Fund. That is money out of our pockets in this province. How many doctors could we have brought to this province? How many cath labs could we have brought to every corner of this province with that kind of money? How many economic development projects could we have financed? We cannot change the poor judgment of the past, but we, as a Liberal government, will make sure that something like that never repeats itself.

Another crack in our fiscal foundation is our soon-to-be-declining population. The Canada Health and Social Transfer will be less and less if we do not grow our population and if the rest of the country does. Everyone has seen this coming for years, but, while our future burned, this government did not even fiddle. In 2003-04, there were only 118 applicants for the Nominee Program as potential immigrants. There are presently 251 new files, meaning a potential of 723 immigrants. That is nothing. Meanwhile, Manitoba attracts 7 000 immigrants per year. Where is our minister responsible for immigration? Why is our secretariat on this not inside the Department of Training and Employment Development, instead of Business New Brunswick? People are not a business. People are our future.

Here is another crack in the foundation. In 2003-04, there was a total of \$6 million more in tax revenue to the province from insurance bills than there was in 2002-03. They will probably remember this part. The government predicts that, next year, it will get \$38.5 million in tax revenue from insurance, from New Brunswickers. That is \$2 million more. Why is that? It is because this government allowed global corporations to wreak economic havoc on our families, on our young, on our old, throughout this province.

Members opposite protected their friends in the insurance industry. They bought into the

insurance industry propaganda. They bought into that baloney. I will bet those people still buy Milli Vanilli albums over there.

[Translation]

We have seen insurance premiums go down slightly in the past year. Every time insurance company profits are announced, the government announces that the reforms are working. However, these reforms are a failure.

Does it make sense that a 22- or 23-year-old guy buys a car for \$4 000 but pays \$5 000 in insurance? We in the Liberal Party have the solution: we will introduce public insurance as soon as we are elected. This will mean that \$400 million, \$500 million, or \$600 million in insurance premiums will be reinvested in a public insurance corporation here in New Brunswick. The money will be put back into circulation in our province instead of being sent to New York, Toronto, or Zurich. We will have the flexibility to use the profits for regions that, in the province, need them, such as in the north.

[Original]

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14:05

A final point with regard to cracks in our fiscal foundation is that nothing has been done for northern New Brunswick. Families are being forced to leave their homes and move to other parts of the country and province in droves. We are beginning to believe that this government follows the dicta of economist Andrew Sharpe, who recently said that “those who are dependant upon seasonal employment should be encouraged to leave where they live and move away”.

The government’s response to this crisis in the north is less health care, fewer hospitals, fewer doctors, and less chance at life. The Lord government’s message to the north is no jobs, no population, no services—you have no hope. The Liberal Party of New Brunswick will never, ever, abandon the north.

[Translation]

We will continue to lose the population base in the northern region if the tools available in the government tax system are not used. Unfortunately, most young people are leaving the northern region in order to find jobs. Yes, even young Joel Bernard had to leave in order to find a job.

[Original]

What are some of the answers? That brings me to the second aspect of our remarks today. What tools do we have to strengthen our fiscal foundation? What tools do we have right now? Let me say this. This government does not know how to make money. We are going to tell members opposite how to do it, and they can steal as many ideas as they like, as they did in the throne speech. It is time to take up every single ability within our jurisdiction and make it work for us. Here are a few things that this party stands for.

First of all, in some areas of this province, we need to bring in more people. We propose that it is time to study the feasibility of mortgage interest deductibility within our provincial tax system. Such a tool can be targeted to first-time homeowners who qualify for CMHC, to attract them to

regions of the province where we want to bring people. If an average mortgage was \$60 000, for example, and we encouraged 1 000, 2 000, or 3 000 people to go to areas of the province with declining population, the cost could be as little as \$7 million over four years, but the economic windfall would overshadow any losses.

The more people we can get in this province, the more we can stimulate the economy and acquire better health care and educational opportunities. The economic spin-off will more than offset any provincial lost revenue, and we will document a cost benefit analysis. For areas most affected, like our north, this one tool, with many more to come from this party, can be hugely beneficial. Imagine: new homes, new families, new jobs, new hope, new lives—a new time for the north of New Brunswick.

Another tool pertains to immigration. We propose a minister responsible for immigration. This will help equally the north and the south. We believe that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs can use some of his 5 million or 6 million Aeroplan Miles to go to Ottawa and demand status in the embassies around the world as an Atlantic Canadian province.

My old law partner came from Egypt. He tells me that he was sitting in the waiting room of the embassy in Alexandria, Egypt, watching videos of this beautiful country called Canada. It was not until he got here a year later and had been here for a while that he realized the videos were all of Ontario and Quebec. We need more than this. We also need to assist immigrants over the barriers for accreditation for their professions.

Another tool is that we propose to use our provincial tax system to help people pay for medical supplies and travel for medical reasons. Many New Brunswickers are burdened with out-of-pocket expenses for health care, and we are ready to assist those most affected. This program will complement and top up the federal tax break to a set cap.

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14:10

There are more tools at our disposal. We propose to create short-term goals within government departments. As an example, for tourism, we need to set targets that will show that we will go from \$1 billion to \$2 billion to \$3 billion in revenue over 4, 8, and 10 years. This will generate an additional \$164 million in direct tax revenue, which will go to provide better services. Indirectly, the tax windfall to job creation will send a message: New Brunswick is on the march.

Tourism has needlessly remained stagnant for the last several years, but our Tourism Critic can explain that this is one of the single most powerful fiscal and economic tools we hold. Tourism presently generates \$82 million in taxes on \$1.1 billion in revenue. We need targets year by year, so that, after Year One, there is \$20 million more to invest in tourism; after Year Two, \$40 million, and on, and on, and on. What does this government do with this powerful economic tool? Nothing. It increases the budget by a few thousand dollars, which will allow the Minister of Tourism and her friend from Grand Bay-Westfield to continue to play checkers over there.

Another tool that will prove powerful is accountability. We propose that government must be required to evaluate programs in light of clear and precise targets. Just as in Tourism, all

departments need to do this. Recently, this government discovered it was losing \$1.4 million per year on nursing home beds which were not being used and which could have been shifted to an underserved area. That amounts to \$5.6 million since 2000, which the government recently just discovered. Does that sound like an ongoing evaluative process?

Not every decision within the government needs to be financial within the parameters of fiscal responsibility. What I mean by this is that we must make this province a great place to live. We propose the need for the rise of a creative class which permeates all socioeconomic levels and which makes New Brunswick the greatest corner of the greatest nation on earth. This is done by attracting and retaining creative people. We want to invest in entertainment, parks, convention centres, and waterfront developments, just to name a few. Something must always be happening. We need energy, commitment, and an ability to make decisions, all of which have been missing since 1999.

Our point is this: Every single tool at our disposal must be picked up. We believe that we can create nothing less than an economic revolution in this province and that we will create more per capita income than any other province in this confederation in the next 20 years. We believe, on this side of the House, that our strategic policy directions will transform this province from a have-not province to a have province in the next generation. We will create the most aggressive economic agenda in the history of Canada. We will elevate expectations, not lower them. We will create hope, not dash it. We will make decisions, not bumble them. We will illuminate the ambition of our people, and we will not cloak fear by blaming others. We will not blame the past and protect the status quo. We, the Liberal Party, under Shawn Graham as Premier, will build the future of this province.

We propose that, as a government, we must be held accountable. We want to be pushed. We want fiscal transparency, and we will take measures to enact it—real transparency. The *Fiscal Responsibility Act* of this government to come will, most likely, be as hollow as its promises to take less taxes and fees out of our pockets.

There are just so many places this government has failed, not the least of which is in our countryside. As an example, 50 years ago, there were 26 000 farms in New Brunswick. Now, we have 5 000. Those who have worked a farm all of their lives want to pass it on to their children. They want to work with their hands. They want to work the land. They want to work the land of their parents and of their grandparents. You see, farming in New Brunswick was never just a business, it is a way of life.

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14:15

We owe support to the farmers of New Brunswick. We believe that this government should have supported every conceivable measure against the United States, so that it would open the borders. Whether it is through the bogeyman—Ambassador McKenna—or through Ottawa, the provincial government owes it to the farmers of New Brunswick to get on the job, and now.

On this very point, New Brunswick is more reliant on the current of international trade than any other Canadian province. However, we need a captain. Remember Brian Tobin at the

United Nations? Unfortunately, this whole dilemma has become all about Saving Private Lord. We need a fighter, a brawler. We need leadership. Has anybody seen Premier Lord in Washington, fighting for farmers?

I mentioned a few moments ago that not every decision has to be financial within the parameters of fiscal responsibility. We need to make New Brunswick known as a place that cares. That is why we were so shocked when we heard the Premier say that New Brunswickers could afford the recent hike by NB Power.

You see, NB Power bills are paid by seniors, by families, by workers with their take-home pay. We propose that those with low incomes, seniors on fixed incomes, or those on social assistance should be given a form of tax break against their provincial taxes. Why? This government is making between \$5 million and \$10 million more in HST because the electricity rates are going up. That is all caused by its mismanagement.

The Minister of Finance says that those numbers look stupid. He says that those people will spend less money on other things, so there will not be more HST. If people have to spend less money on other things, it means our seniors on fixed incomes, or the working poor, or those on income assistance. What are they going to spend less on? Food? Clothing? School supplies? Instead of a strong voice, we hear from this government of the much vaunted Prosperity Plan. Let me tell you something: If senior citizens are afraid to turn up their heat in this province, there is no prosperity.

While we are on the Prosperity Plan, it was supposed to achieve 3% GDP growth, year over year. Not once has the government reached that target. The Conference Board of Canada said a few weeks ago that New Brunswick's economy will post the slowest provincial growth in 2006, at 2%. The Prosperity Plan is clearly not about performance. It is about propaganda. It is a shallow plan, but deep in rhetoric. Our Liberal plan will rely on only one thing: our deep and abiding faith in New Brunswickers, our belief that they deserve the best health care, the best economy, and the best government.

I want to talk about something very serious. I want to talk about one reason, specifically, that we need a lot more revenue in this province. One good reason is that we need to diminish the VLT usage out there in licensed establishments. The amount of VLT use in this province has become toxic. Whether we respond by not allowing usage at certain times of the day, or on a Sunday, or by diminishing the number of VLTs, or by a combination of all of that, the fact is that we cannot turn a blind eye to the plight of some of our neighbours and friends any longer. We need to restore some sanity to VLT use in this province. We need to tell Tim Smith that he was right. We owe this initiative to those who have lost their lives, both figuratively and literally.

The Minister of Finance now has a surplus. He has wiggle room until he can replace some of this income. What is he going to do? There is suffering out there, and we need to know what he is going to do.

On the budget as a whole, the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies recently indicated that the provincial budget should be judged on its usefulness as a tool to stimulate economic growth. I

could not agree more. However, how can this shell game of a budget we have before us do any such thing?

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14:20

This government has a notorious record of playing games with public finances. The Auditor General had to remind the Minister of Finance of what a deficit is, and we are here to remind him that, if he had not gotten a federal windfall, we would have had a third year of deficits. We would have been \$136 million in the hole.

I look at the pension funds that we have under management in this province. They total \$6.1 billion, and they are all neatly tucked away in stocks in New York and in Toronto. How can we tell people to have confidence in us and to invest in us if we do not even invest in ourselves? We need to make easier access to a small portion of some of these pension funds for investment in New Brunswick businesses and projects. This is available now through the Crown Investment Management Corporation, but it is not working. Here is a point on that very issue: We need to ask this government why the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan has a chance to invest in the new highway project, but not our own pension funds.

We need to push for investment in microbusinesses and in value-added research products. We need to link university research with private sector investors, allowing all New Brunswickers to benefit from university research. In short, we propose Advantage New Brunswick, an agency mandated to provide this capital from that small amount of pension funding presently available to qualified borrowers. This new agency, with its new culture, will provide yet another signal that, under a Liberal government, New Brunswick means business.

I mentioned universities. We propose the need to draw up guidelines of qualification for universities that wish to issue bonds. This will allow them to rebuild their infrastructure. This will attract more out-of-province students, who will be the future families of New Brunswick. We further propose the elimination of the parental contribution rule. These two ideas, these two tools, have already been given to this government by the member for Fredericton-Fort Nashwaak. It is time to pick up these tools and get to work.

The Minister of Finance will jump up and say that we have already increased funding to universities by 24% since 1999. He does not mention that tuition has gone up by 40% since 1999. He does not mention that Danny Williams, with his \$2.6 billion which the Premier provided in part, is freezing tuition fees over on the Rock. He does not mention that. On education, the government talks about record investment, but the C.D. Howe Institute states that, in terms of real dollars, over the past few years, New Brunswick has been one of only two provinces in this country to reduce spending on education.

What did we get from this government? What did we get as tools for growth? We got stealth taxation—higher property taxes through higher assessments. We got higher power rates. We got price shock in insurance. We got more financial fiascos. We got less health care and less belief in our people. That is a shame.

The Minister of Finance will jump up and plead that members opposite have reduced personal income tax and that they are great fiscal managers. Well, you be the judge. In 1999, our own taxes and fees gave the government \$2.3 billion. In 2005-06, it will be \$3.45 billion. What is that? Members opposite raised taxes and fees. They collected money from the pockets of New Brunswickers over the past six years by increasing taxes by 50%. It is more, more, more. More money from gas tax, more money from fishing licenses—more, more, more. Members opposite are like kids. When you give kids money, they come back, and you say: What did you do with the money I gave you last week? Right then, they look at the floor. No answer.

This government is a government of tax and waste. What is the result of some of this waste? The government is giving social assistance recipients 50¢ per day. Two welfare mothers can go to Tim Horton's and split a coffee. That is it.

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14:25

Here is one final point with regard to opportunities lost and tools not picked up. Our forest industry is the biggest industry we have in this province. Did anybody see the government do anything of substance in the budget? There was nothing. In silviculture, the government diminished the budget last year, and it held the line on that. We expected help for the private woodlot owners of this province—the backbone of our industry. There was nothing.

The third and final aspect of my remarks today is with regard to the strategic fiscal framework in which we must work to attain the goals that we have outlined as a party, both within government and in its relationships with the rest of the country and with the federal government.

First, we must eliminate waste within the government. We have, at any time, 200 to 250 senior citizens in this province in hospital beds after being medically discharged, awaiting placement in nursing homes. This was according to the President of the New Brunswick Medical Society, yesterday. That is \$15 million to \$25 million per year out the window. Is that a good investment, or is that waste?

An efficient government must budget for outcomes and must set measurable goals. The Department of Finance should publish six-month reports with regard to the success of some government programs. Also, the Minister of Finance must deliver an accurate six-month fiscal update. A Liberal government will deliver one every three months.

[Translation]

Let us expand on this point. Regional health authorities give a financial accounting to the government every 30 days. However, our government cannot even give us its financial statements publicly every six months. Does that make sense? Regional authorities can provide the information, but the government cannot.

Let us now move on to interprovincial and federal relations. With regard to these relations, it is obvious that, within the federation, the Atlantic Provinces have never enjoyed the opportunities that were anticipated in 1867. For example, during the nineties, for every federal dollar New Brunswick received for research and development, \$46 was spent in Ontario. For several years,

we have welcomed to New Brunswick only 0.3% of all Canadian immigrants, in spite of the fact that we represent 3% of the Canadian population. During the nineties, the population of Canada rose by 14%, while the New Brunswick population rose by only 3%. This affects our federal transfers in the long term. Without immigration, the situation will only get worse.

[Original]

I have a little more to say on federal/provincial and interprovincial relations. You know, the federal government can put \$500 million into the aerospace industry in Quebec, and that is just great. It can bail out Bombardier, and that is just wonderful. It can build the Auto Pact for Ontario, and everybody applauds. Then, when we get one \$700-million fund for all four Atlantic Provinces, according to the federal people—the federal cousins of this Premier—that is a handout. We will admit that that is not something new to the federal Conservatives or to the federal Liberals. This has been perpetuated for decades, and it has had a tremendous effect on our finances.

In 1890, the Maritimes had 24% of the Canadian manufacturing base and 18% of the population. By 1939, we were at 5% on both scores. In World War II, 36 Crown corporations were formed in this country, and not one of them was based in the Maritime Provinces. These same Crown corporations later became the manufacturing base of Central Canada. When this country began, we were never to be anyone's poor cousins. The Liberal Party of New Brunswick will make sure that we are never again anyone's poor cousins.

We undoubtedly live in the greatest country on earth, and I believe that we live in the best corner, with the most potential. Confederation, under the existing federal structure, has not been the great equalizer. We are seeing the fiscal effects of that now, and it is only going to get worse.

014

14:30

This government and this Premier may be inclined to launch a me-too campaign to keep the revenues of mining or forestry. However, we know that this Premier is no Danny Williams. He is not going to get it.

You see, this Premier is very guarded and minces his words, because he has other things on his mind. When he looks toward Ottawa, with his back to New Brunswick, and sends out feigned accolades about Stephen Harper, he has one thing on his mind. He knows that the next step for him is to be Opposition Leader. We are going to help him. We are going to make him Opposition Leader, right here in New Brunswick.

If the Premier wants to come alive and does not want to retreat from battle, as he does now, we propose that this Premier needs to support an initiative for the creation of an institution or a body that finally sees this country as a whole, not as a sum of its parts. We must have a balanced federalism if we are going to create fiscal certainty, fairness to regions, and, ultimately, the flexibility to initiate new programs. This initiative will take nothing less than thought leadership—something new over there.

In conclusion, the budget deposited by this government does not, for a moment, utilize the tools

that are available to us. It does not, in any way, create hope. It creates doubt: doubt that we will be a have province within the next generation. At the end of the day, you cannot even cry in your own beer, because the government upped the price of a case by 50¢.

At a time when we are projected to have the lowest rate of economic growth in Canada, we did not need a budget that would generate the headline “Tories stay the course”. A government that is happy coming 10th in a field of 10 cannot meet these challenges. When I used to race horses as a driver, we called that “finishing up the track”. In our lives, we all hearken back to our own experiences to draw analogies or to describe things. Let me say this: If those members over there were horses on my farm, they would all be heading for the glue factory.

What will a Liberal government do under Shawn Graham? We will be bold, decisive, and unforgiving of governmental timidity. We will take the best civil service in Canada and give it a new life, a new purpose. We will lead it. We will not be driven by ideology or by some dogmatic philosophy of the federal Conservatives. We know that mothers in the dark of the night do not embrace some ideology as hope for their children. They embrace action. We will give those children electrifying ambition for their lives here in this province, the greatest province in Canada.

A Liberal government, under Shawn Graham, will set out on a course that will embrace both risk and opportunity. We will burn the boats. We are not going back. This Conservative government will have no defense in the next election from our ideas or from our initiative.

In the end, it is not about this Premier, and it is not about this government. It is about the fact that we have confidence in New Brunswickers, in the millwright, in the farmer, in the woman who works behind the counter at Tim Horton’s. As New Brunswickers, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, beyond their grasp. We will tell them, as a Liberal government: Expect more, not less. Take us to task, not talk. Demand ambition, impatience, and, above all, from your government, demand fight.

We are here to tell you that we, on this side, will be the government. Shawn Graham will be Premier. We await the next election, but, in the interim, we will keep hope alive for the senior citizens who fear financial ruin if they must go into a nursing home. We will keep hope alive for all those people in the north who fear that they must leave their homes. Finally, we will keep hope alive that time is short to a new Liberal government.