

**Reply to the Speech from the Throne
by Mr. Shawn Graham,
Leader of the Official Opposition**

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Unofficial Excerpt from the *Journal of Debates (Hansard)*

[Original]

003

13:05

I want to congratulate His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor on delivering his first throne speech. Few people have been as eager to hear His Honour's first throne speech as those on this side of the House. Our Lieutenant-Governor has made a great contribution to promoting our rich cultural heritage and diversity. On behalf of the official opposition, I wish him continued success in this important work.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for your ongoing guidance in this Chamber. The work that is undertaken here is critical to the health of our democratic society, and I thank you for continuing to preside over the health of these proceedings with both fairness and decorum.

[Translation]

I also want to take the opportunity to thank all employees of the Legislative Assembly for the work they do and the help they provide in order for us to carry out our duties.

[Original]

In particular, I would like to thank the staff of the Opposition Office, because, without their work behind the scenes, it would be impossible to carry out our work in this Chamber. I also want to thank the caucus of the official opposition. We come back to this Chamber more experienced, more invigorated, and more enthused than ever before.

[Translation]

We come back to this Chamber with an additional member. I have known Victor Boudreau since we both served as executive assistants, and I know that he understands the great potential and the responsibilities that come with the duty to serve the people of New Brunswick.

[Original]

Welcome to our caucus, Victor Boudreau.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the people of Kent for their support. As a Member of the Legislative Assembly, I find it humbling to think of the responsibility that they have entrusted to me, and I will continue to work hard on their behalf. I thank the many citizens of Kent who have traveled today to watch the speech in the Legislative Assembly.

I also want to thank my wife. Public service is often a difficult challenge. The hours are long. We are home at ten o'clock at night. Without a strong partner, it would be difficult for any member, on either side of the Chamber. It would be very difficult for all of us, and I think today

we should give a round of applause for all of our partners who helped us succeed, and also for our families.

I have to say that, on Friday evening, I had the opportunity to light the Christmas tree for the province, along with the Premier and his family. I must say that his two children were the best-behaved children I have seen in a long time. They were very excited about Christmas, and when I told them that I had seen Santa's little helper behind the Legislature and that he had warned us to keep our speeches short, they wanted to go out back and see where he was hidden.

Our families are also our strength—whether it is Roxanne's family, my family at home, or the families of members present here. We also owe a great debt of gratitude to our families who have helped us in this process as well.

Public service is not simply a job. It is a vocation. It is a calling. Since we last met here in June, we have lost a number of people who understood that.

[Translation]

So, I would take this opportunity to pay tribute to two people who recently passed away: Adjutor Ferguson, who was Member of the Legislative Assembly for Gloucester County from 1967 to 1978, and Adélarde Savoie, who represented Neguac from 1948 to 1952.

[Original]

I would also like to recognize the contributions made to our province by Rod Logan and Gerald Merrithew.

I would also like to congratulate Shirley Dysart, a former Leader of the New Brunswick Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition, on her induction into the Order of Canada this week.

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13:10

Public service makes its own demands. Although we live in a peaceful society where our democratic traditions are strong, I cannot help but think of those people who are still fighting for free and fair elections. At this time, a native of Fredericton is in a hospital in the Ukraine, recovering from an assault that took place during his activities as an election observer.

Thursday's throne speech reminds us just how important public service is. Exactly what is at stake in this Chamber? No less than the future of our province.

The year 2004 has been one of reflection for our province, an opportunity to reflect not only on the 400 years that have passed since the first settlement of Acadia but also on the progress that we have made together as a people and as a province.

[Translation]

Today, we are celebrating Acadia. Whether in our theatre, our music, or our soul, it represents an essential part of what makes New Brunswick unique. We were proud to celebrate this year the 400th anniversary of Acadian heritage.

[Original]

I think I am a proud product of both official languages in New Brunswick today. Even though we make mistakes in either official language, we still have respect for those individuals who try.

The story of this province is the story of believing in and working toward a better life. For over four centuries, our province has been built by people driven by faith and hope, from the private struggles of farmers or fishermen carving out a life for their families on the land and the sea to the more public fight of leaders like Louis Robichaud, who believed that we could defy the skeptics and create a province that valued all people, regardless of language or religion. We are a province of builders. We are a province that believes hard work ought to be rewarded. We are a province where our greatest resource is the ingenuity, the skills, and the determination of our people.

New Brunswickers want to see a government that understands them and that shares their values. I do not believe that New Brunswickers expect government to do everything, but they do expect their government to do something. They expect a government whose deeds match its words.

On Thursday, this government delivered a throne speech that included 20 ideas that were either drawn from Liberal platforms, Liberal speeches, or Liberal legislation or raised by Liberal members. These ideas range across the whole scope of the government's throne speech, including the Office of the Public Trustee, the Child Advocate, better enforcement of child support orders, better protocols for victims of abuse, welfare reform, better treatment of volunteer firefighters, tax exemptions for nonprofit housing, fiscal responsibility, and more.

Members opposite have not taken these policies because they believe in them. They have taken these policies because they have finally admitted what New Brunswickers have known for some time: the government front bench has no ideas and no vision of its own. They sure can talk like Liberals, but can they govern that way? No, because they might have taken our ideas, but they have not adopted our values.

Living by the right values, the right rules—that is what matters. That is what marks the difference between a government that fundamentally changes lives for the better and one that only administers policies and pushes paper.

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13:15

We have heard a lot of talk recently about how to get citizens more engaged in the political process. Some say we need to change the way people vote or how someone is sent to this legislative body, but I think it is more basic than that. We need to make sure that the work we do in this Chamber respects and reflects the values of the people of our province.

I have had the opportunity to travel to all corners of this province, and, no matter where I go, there are some pretty common rules that guide New Brunswickers on how they live their lives. If you start something, you finish it. If you do a job, you work hard at it. If you say something, you mean it. If you give your word, you keep it. If you make a mistake, you admit it and you fix it. And above all, treat other people the way you yourself would want to be treated.

Imagine if we had a government that believed in the dignity of labour, in economic opportunity for all, in self-reliance, and in self-determination.

[Translation]

Imagine if we had a government that promoted respect for others and believed that a job well done should be rewarded.

Imagine if we had a government that believed that every single New Brunswicker had within himself or herself the potential and the possibility for a better future.

Imagine if we had a government that created opportunities for people to fulfill their potential.

[Original]

This does not have to be a dream. It would take a Liberal government to make it a reality.

[Translation]

This does not have to be a dream. It would take a Liberal government to make it a reality in New Brunswick.

[Original]

First of all, a Liberal government would be committed to being open and up-front with the people of this province. We will not raise expectations or make false promises. We will be true to our word and true to our purpose.

We have a plan for fiscal responsibility and transparency that will match the public's demand for integrity and accountability. We reject the notion that citizens must read the fine print when it comes to understanding the true fiscal position of the province.

This is why, during this session, we will reintroduce the *Fiscal Transparency Act*. This Act will include such basic guidelines as audited quarterly reports on revenues and expenditures, three-year revenue and expenditure forecasts, updated business plans from departments and agencies, a set budgetary calendar, and reporting milestones.

Our approach to fiscal responsibility will be built on both openness and honesty—something that we have not seen for five years under this current administration. This government should give the public some credit. Our citizens know the difference between a surplus and a deficit. They are not fooled by Alice in Wonderland economics where “balanced budget” means only what the current Minister of Finance wants it to mean.

In addition to being open and accountable, we would also set an activist agenda, because we believe that New Brunswickers are up to the challenges that confront us. We also know that they want leadership that is prepared to listen and ready to act.

[Translation]

We will be a government that believes in progress and in the value of not only having a good plan but implementing that plan. That is what makes us different from this government.

[Original]

And, boy, does that make us different from this government.

006

13:20

Nowhere—nowhere—is that clearer than on the future of NB Power. Of course, it is expected that an opposition party would differ from the government when it comes to the role played by Crown corporations. I am sure that we are forgiven if we tend to be a bit skeptical about the objectives the government has set out for this important publicly owned utility.

However, the dire situation that NB Power now faces cannot be dismissed as mere partisan differences: The ill-conceived attempt to sell Coleson Cove; the on-again, off-again, on-again breakup of the utility; the \$2-billion Orimulsion fiasco; the confusion over who, if anyone, is involved in negotiations on the retrofit of Point Lepreau; the wholesale firings at the executive level and layoff notices for NB Power workers . . . Now, the new CEO is threatening dramatically higher rate increases.

The trend is obvious. In the beginning, we thought government simply did not know what it was doing, but surely no one is that incompetent. No, at the root of these failures is something much more troubling.

[Translation]

The fact is that this government does not like NB Power. It does not believe in the idea of a publicly owned utility.

[Original]

The government does not believe in a publicly owned utility. If government has its way, the electricity supply that New Brunswickers depend on would be at the mercy of the private sector, just like we are with auto insurance. This is where we see the values of this government and the values of New Brunswickers part ways. The fact is that New Brunswickers do want a publicly owned utility. They want the stability in pricing that a public utility can give them. They want the guarantee of service that is the fundamental feature of a utility.

So what is a government to do when it is dogmatically opposed to something that the public values? Well, if you are this government, you drag your feet on important decisions, you botch billion-dollar deals, and you let opportunities pass by. You encumber the utility with increasing levels of debt. You let service decline. Then, when rates skyrocket and availability of supply becomes questionable, you want people to get so fed up with NB Power that selling it does not seem like such a bad idea. Indeed, the Conservatives would let the situation at NB Power worsen to the point where there is no other option.

To prevent this, as Liberals, we want to put the needs and future development of the province back into the *Electricity Act* once again as the number one priority of the utility. During this session, we will be introducing changes to that legislation to do just that. In the meantime, the government will continue to let opportunities in the energy sector pass by, ignoring the exciting

possibilities in this sector.

We have long advocated the development of incentives to encourage energy efficiency. We are pleased that the minister has taken some very tentative first steps in this direction, but we should perhaps clarify: When we encourage the conservation of energy, Mr. Fitch, we are not talking about your own. In fact, if this minister could expend a little more energy to bring in time-of-day savings, it would be greatly appreciated.

The Liberals are also committed to the refurbishment of Point Lepreau as part of our diversified electricity generation plan.

[Translation]

The refurbishment of Point Lepreau is vital to the future of New Brunswick in so many ways. First, this plant reduces our dependence on foreign suppliers, which basically sends our wealth out of province. This situation makes us vulnerable to political instability and price fluctuations.

[Original]

The ongoing use of Point Lepreau will also help us keep greenhouse emissions down. This will not only help Canada meet our current Kyoto Accord targets, but it could generate a new source of wealth once the market for emissions trading matures.

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13:25

There is also the “first mover advantage” that can be gained by being the first jurisdiction to develop experience and expertise in this area. Early in 2004, we encouraged the government to move more quickly to partner with Atomic Energy of Canada Limited to be the first to refurbish a CANDU reactor. Due to this government’s inaction, we have lost that edge to the Koreans, who have moved to refurbish their CANDU reactor in Wolsong. We may no longer have the opportunity to be the first to develop these advantages in the global market, but we can still be the leaders in refurbishment technology in North America. This is a key market for New Brunswick engineering and specialty manufacturing companies, such as ADI, Neill and Gunter, and Precision Metal Works.

Yes, there are significant numbers of dollars involved in refurbishment, but the alternatives are limited and unrealistic. Point Lepreau accounts for 635 MW of our generating capacity. That is a significant amount of capacity to replace if we were to decommission the plant. Although we are optimistic that investments in new electricity generation technology, such as wind power, solar power or tidal power, will create realistic alternatives over the long term, these options cannot now deliver the capacity that we will need in the near future.

A distinct benefit of refurbishment of Point Lepreau is that most of the lifetime operation expenditures of the Point Lepreau plant are spent here in our province. As well, the vast majority of materials and expertise required to refurbish Point Lepreau can be found right here in our province. We have the skilled workers, and New Brunswick companies are making the necessary investments so they can compete for these contracts, not only for Point Lepreau, but also for the opportunities that exist in Ontario and elsewhere. We cannot wait for the Conservatives to make

up their minds. As Liberals, we believe that now is the time to renew Point Lepreau.

We also have the opportunity to become real leaders in 21st century energy sources. Hydrogen cell technology, alternative sources of natural gas, and tidal energy all harbour great possibilities. By being leaders in these technologies, we can not only ensure the availability and sustainability of our energy supply but also further reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and enhance the benefits to our environment.

Striking the balance between progress, sustainability, and the protection of our natural resources is a challenge we face every day. Nowhere is that challenge being more keenly felt than in our forestry industry. This industry is New Brunswick's largest. It is as important to us in New Brunswick as the oil fields are to Alberta.

It is not just about the large forest-based corporations. It is also about supporting the scores of smaller companies that operate sawmills, particleboard mills, and shingle and veneer mills, such as Fawcett Lumber in Petitcodiac, Chaleur Sawmills in Belledune, and North American Forest Products in Saint-Quentin. It is about the people who work in those mills and how their livelihood depends on the forest industry. That is why I was disgusted by the actions of the Conservative members last Friday. When we put forward a motion to debate real changes that would help these workers in this Chamber today, Conservative members chose to quit work early and head home.

The forestry industry stands at a crossroads today in not just the quantity of what we produce but also the quality. We should be forging ahead with more value-added investments and opportunities. We should ensure that, every time a tree is harvested, it is used in the most effective value-added process available. When we export unprocessed wood fibre, we export jobs.

008

13:30

I know there are a number of concerned citizens from the Miramichi here today. We have to be very clear, as elected officials: We cannot allow the exportation of wood chips to occur, out of the province, over the long term. That wood fibre must remain in the province to create the most value-added jobs for these workers who are here today.

Many companies have done well by investing in the communities in which they are located, ensuring that these facilities are the most modern and technologically advanced that they can be. However, there are a number of communities where necessary investments by forestry companies in their facilities have not been made. As we have seen in the past months, the lack of forward planning is taking its toll on hundreds of men and women who rely on forestry jobs for their paycheques.

I have had the opportunity to visit the Miramichi on a number of occasions. This city and the region has been hard hit by the upcoming closure of the UPM - Kymmene kraft mill. A few weeks ago, a large rally was held there, and hundreds upon hundreds of Miramichiers turned out to express their hurt and their confusion. They wanted to hear from their political leaders about

their commitment to the region and the plans for the future of their industry.

Arriving at that meeting and knowing there were no easy answers, I had a few options on what to do: I could turn the car around, skip out on the meeting, and leave my MLAs to handle it on their own or I could go on stage and tell the workers whatever they wanted to hear, knowing in my heart that I was setting up both unrealistic hopes and expectations, or I could walk in and tell the truth. Sure, the first two options would have been the easiest, but only the last option was right. So I told the truth, and the truth is: We cannot turn back the clock. We may never be able to make things exactly as they were, but that does not mean that we cannot make things better.

I reject the view that the sun is setting on our forestry industry. I dare to believe that the best days are ahead in the forestry industry and in the Miramichi as well, but it requires change, which all elected officials have a moral responsibility to bring forward in a passionate way.

[Translation]

We need incentives that will reward those companies that invest in the best technology, the best facilities, and the best-paying jobs.

[Original]

We need to modernize our pulp and paper mills, and we need to make a commitment to a 10-year silviculture fund for private woodlot owners in order to foster stability and long-term planning. With strategic decisions today, we can prove to the world that not only can New Brunswickers compete but that we can lead the way with value-added employment and product opportunities. We have to see our current challenges in forestry as an avenue to opportunity and hope. The citizens of Nackawic and Miramichi today expect no less.

This morning, we heard some disturbing news. Just last Friday, the Minister of Training and Employment Development assured the member for York that the pension plan for the workers at St. Anne-Nackawic was in good hands. Yes, it was underfunded, she said, but the government expressed confidence that the provincially appointed administrator was up to the task of doing his best to save the pension plan. Well, this morning, we found out that only those workers 55 years of age and older will receive a pension, and only a partial pension at that.

009

13:35

It is clear that the former management of the mill has some questions to answer about why the pension plan was underfunded, but there are also questions for this government as well. Regulating and providing oversight on pension plans is a provincial responsibility. Where was the provincial pension commissioner? Why did the commissioner not alert the government when the pension plan was in trouble? Why did the minister stand by and let this happen? Perhaps a solution to this crisis can be found.

I would urge the province to sit down with the union and the federal government to see if there is an opportunity to save the pension. As a first step in ensuring that this does not happen again, the office of the pension commissioner should conduct an annual review of pension plans that are in an underfunded position, rather than relying on the current review of pension plans only once

every three years. Further, the pension commissioner should be required to make more frequent status checks on those pension plans that are currently underfunded and compel the quick return of those plans to fiscal health. We should not, and will not, as members of this Legislative Assembly, abandon the workers and their families in a time of need.

To build New Brunswick, you need to believe in the excellence of our ideas, our abilities, our products, and our people. That means that you do not give unfair advantages to billion-dollar multinationals at the expense of our homegrown businesses. It means that you do not give a free ride to outside companies that are lobbying to hurt New Brunswick companies in other provinces. It means that you do not let outside workers come in and take our jobs when their province forbids our workers to go there to work. It means that you fight for our province, our businesses, and our workers every single day—something you have not been doing, Mr. Minister.

[Translation]

We believe that the free enterprise system creates better choices and employment opportunities when there is competitiveness. That is why we believe in reducing the barriers that prevent the free trade of products and services between provinces, but we cannot unilaterally lower tariff barriers that protect our domestic industries and our workers without agreements with our provincial trade partners. It is a matter of fairness.

[Original]

On this side of the House, we believe that fairness is a two-way street. That is why we are going to reintroduce the *Construction Labour Mobility Act*. This legislation would end the practice that gives construction workers from other provinces free access to our building sites while our workers are prevented from enjoying the same rights in their province. After all, fair is fair. You have had a year and a half and have done nothing in that time.

Fairness is important inside our province as well. Whether you choose to work in rural New Brunswick or in one of the urban centres, we want to make sure that you have the tools and the opportunities for growth. One of these tools should be the creation of an investment tax credit program for New Brunswick. This program would encourage increased and sustained corporate investment in New Brunswick with benefits over the long term, rather than seeing our companies close their doors or flee the province once the grants run out or the terms of the forgivable loans are met.

We would also create a climate of opportunity for research and innovation by partnering with businesses, universities, and colleges throughout New Brunswick. Innovation is not just the domain of the urban knowledge economies. Rural communities across this province know that ingenuity can transform their traditional industries as well.

[Translation]

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13:40

Developing communities of all sizes is key to our progress. We are committed to working with our municipalities to ensure that they have available the infrastructure needed to grow—roads,

water, telecommunications, or ferry service.

[Original]

That is why we are committed to invest in transportation, including a dedicated rural road fund, as well as a three-year infrastructure plan for northeast New Brunswick, including Routes 11 and 17.

We must reverse the trend of population decline in this province. This is possibly the most important long-term issue that any government can face, and action is needed. We need to retain the people we already have, and we need to attract others who choose to come and build their futures here. We can achieve population growth if we commit ourselves to an immigration policy.

What can we do? Our universities present a wonderful opportunity in that regard. Many postsecondary students come from other provinces or even other countries, seeking a quality education at our postsecondary education institutions. Our own students benefit from this interaction and, too often, may be attracted after graduation by opportunities that may be found elsewhere. To encourage these graduates to stay, those born in New Brunswick as well as those from elsewhere, we would institute a new tax benefit. This benefit would allow graduates living in New Brunswick to pay off their student loans faster and help them establish their lives in our communities and our cities.

This would be one initiative to ensure that we have a growing, well-educated, and highly skilled workforce in our province. This is also a compelling case for strategic tax cuts, tax cuts aimed at delivering concrete and attainable goals. This would be a step toward building a larger population here in New Brunswick.

Vibrant and thriving communities are critical to keeping our young people in our province. While economic growth is an important factor, nothing makes a community more attractive than a dynamic and diverse cultural scene. New Brunswick takes great pride in our artists, artisans, poets, and playwrights. Whether it is regional theatre or a community festival, our culture in New Brunswick gives voice to both the aspirations and experiences of our people.

[Translation]

While our culture is strong and established, our cultural policy needs updating. A book policy is a good example. New Brunswick should introduce a program to support the publishing and distribution of original works by New Brunswick artists.

[Original]

In addition to works in both English and French, I think it would be a fitting tribute to the late Fred Cogswell, a respected New Brunswick poet and publisher, to set aside specific funding for literary translation as part of this program. This year marks the 50th anniversary of Fiddlehead Poetry Books, which was founded by Prof. Cogswell. It is known to most people today as Goose Lane Editions.

We need to ensure that our schools are providing the best possible education and that our skilled

trades are bolstered, and that no young New Brunswickers have to give up their dreams of a better education because of a fear of student loan debt. That is why I am pleased that, in this session, the member for Fredericton-Fort Nashwaak will be reintroducing *An Act to Amend the Youth Assistance Act*, which will remove the parental contribution requirement from student loans.

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13:45

We need to deal with the challenges of aging infrastructure in our province's universities. The time has come to consider issuing government-backed bonds to fund these important investments in our postsecondary institutions. Rather than limiting ourselves to working with out-of-province financial institutions, let us partner with our credit unions and our "caisses populaires". Not only would a bond issue raise the necessary infrastructure funds for our universities and colleges, but it would also provide New Brunswickers with a secure way to invest their savings.

In case people need reminding, new spending on university infrastructure creates jobs here in the province. If you want to steal that idea like you stole all the other ones, take it and run with it.

When we talk about creating a climate of opportunity, we do not just want to create those opportunities for a few. We will create a climate of opportunities for all New Brunswickers, and that means confronting poverty in this province.

[Translation]

It has been proven to us over and over again that education is a powerful tool in fighting poverty. It is important to introduce an education program in day cares for our children as soon as possible. Such a program will give parents the necessary tools to fight poverty and allow parents to work so that they can take care of their families.

We must examine how the New Brunswick government can meet this poverty challenge. Our educational institutions, community groups, and Aboriginal communities also have a role to play in fighting the poverty problem. Other tools such as tax cuts for these people, increasing the minimum wage, access to social assistance and sports programs, and more social housing are all very important in the fight against poverty. They should all be thoroughly studied in spite of any controversy that may arise.

Poverty in New Brunswick is hardly problematic only for the government of this province. Poverty is a societal problem that affects us all.

[Original]

The Premier likes to talk about how there are 40 000 people living on low incomes who are now tax-free, and that is fine. What is not fine is that never in his boasting does he ask why there are 40 000 New Brunswickers trying to live on incomes of less than \$20 000 per year. That is the real question. That is the real challenge. It is a challenge that tax cuts cannot solve. Only by providing opportunities can we overcome that challenge. Providing access to skills and education, removing obstacles to self-sufficiency, creating stable, well-paying jobs—that is how

you shatter the cycle of poverty. We are ready, as Liberals, to face that challenge.

We will continue to push for answers on the plan for health care. New Brunswickers are still waiting to find out exactly what the health plan is all about and why the government members have made the choices they have made. We know, based on the Saint-Quentin experience, that they did not look at a map.

[Translation]

We know, from what happened in Caraquet, that the government did not take into account linguistic needs and the needs of expectant mothers in Lamèque and Miscou. You need to listen to this: These expectant mothers must now travel two hours to access medical care, when they give birth.

[Original]

012

13:50

We know that the health plan for the Upper Saint John River Valley was formulated without the proper planning studies that should accompany such changes. We know from speaking with health care professionals that the government did not take into account recruitment and retention issues. As recently as November 28, the New Brunswick Medical Society reaffirmed that the resources are not in place to implement the health plan without putting New Brunswickers at risk.

I had the opportunity last summer to visit with the boards of the regional health authorities, and it is pretty clear that they feel that the plan does not reflect their priorities. That is why we will be introducing changes to the *Regional Health Authorities Act* that will see the CEOs report to the regional boards, not to the Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness.

The Premier and his government like to say that health care is not just about beds. We would have to agree, but the problem is that, aside from cutting beds, the government has done little to bring about the promised renewal of our health care system. It has made no progress on revitalizing ambulance services, even though this is a vital link for the many rural hospitals that are losing their health care services. Progress on nurse practitioners has ground to a halt, and the education programs for nurse practitioners remain underfunded. We know that there are 16 nurse practitioners registered with the province but that only 11 are actually employed in this role. No movement has occurred on developing a prescription drug monitoring database, even though it is an important tool in fighting prescription drug addiction and a first step toward a single electronic patient record. On a side note, it was the first commitment that the Nova Scotia government brought forward in its last budget. Public health and mental health are still underfunded and understaffed. The location of hospital equipment is not being based on need. Rather, it is based on soothing the minister's bruised ego as he travels around the province.

[Translation]

This government is ignoring opportunities to work with our neighbours in other Maritime Provinces to look at bulk purchasing of prescription drugs. We should be proactive in identifying opportunities where Maritime Provinces can work together and share their expertise in the area

of health.

[Original]

The fact is that this health plan is not really about renewing health care at all. It is all about symbolism rather than results. It is about cost cutting and playing politics. This government should be ashamed.

We would also like to see the government put more attention on combating physical inactivity and obesity. We know that active parents mean active children. We believe that the time has come to look at the feasibility of a tax benefit for New Brunswickers who take out a membership in a health club or a gym, in order to get more people active. It just makes sense. If you already use the tax system to help people with their medical costs, why not use the tax system to promote healthier lifestyles in New Brunswick today?

We also need to encourage our young people to participate in sports. In August 1972, our province celebrated the New Brunswick games in Edmundston. We have had a lot of success with the Acadian games, and we would continue them. However, I am announcing today that a Liberal government will reinstate the New Brunswick games, alternating between winter and summer games, which will create an event that will bring together young people and young athletes, from all linguistic and cultural communities, in a celebration of sportsmanship, athletics, and pride in our province. The New Brunswick-based games would also be a strong stepping stone for our enhanced participation in the Canada Games, games in which I had the opportunity to participate in 1985.

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13:55

We need to work at making physical education in our schools more of a priority. We are currently averaging 100 minutes per week per student in Anglophone schools and 40 minutes in Francophone schools. The Canadian Medical Association recommends a minimum of 150 minutes per student per week. Making these improvements means adding more specialists and physical education teachers to our education system.

As Liberals, we believe this is an investment in the future health and well-being of our province. This is why the junk food ban, while on the surface a good idea, is incomplete. You are no further ahead by removing junk food if you have undermined funding for sports programs and other extracurricular activities in doing so. The most important thing that we can do to increase childhood activity is to get our children moving in sports and in physical education classes. The current government has failed to give this commitment on this front, but a new Liberal government will not hesitate to act.

[Translation]

Concerning automobile insurance in New Brunswick, the government seems to pay no attention at all to the needs of people in this province. The New Brunswick Insurance Board, appointed by this government, handed down its first decision in November. This decision was issued without paying any attention to policyholders' concerns and before the Consumer Advocate for Insurance for New Brunswick was appointed. This government brags about the First Chance

discount for young policyholders, in spite of the fact that all policyholders pay for this system and in spite of the enormous profits made by the industry. The public insurance system proposed by the select committee would have ended discrimination against young drivers. Under a public insurance system, the cost would have been defrayed by bad drivers instead of being shared by all policyholders.

[Original]

There is no other way for us to move forward. Rather than relying on others to provide us with the automobile insurance coverage we need, we, as New Brunswickers, can rely on ourselves. We have weighed the options, and we believe that a public auto insurance underwriter, working with the network of insurance brokers across the province, can provide New Brunswick with adequate, affordable insurance.

When we first raised the auto insurance issue several years ago, it was initially older New Brunswickers who raised concerns. As in many other policy areas, it is often those with the greatest life experience, our seniors, who identify the trouble spots in our public policy. Today, there are seniors living in fear and concern over the cost of nursing home care. We have been clear: Seniors' issues will take priority with a Liberal government, whether it is changing how nursing home care is funded or how prescription drug programs are administered.

As my colleague from Moncton North stated last week, we are now living in a province where seniors are forced to deal with the government's red tape if they want to access nursing care for themselves or their loved ones. These rules are so convoluted, so nonsensical, that the government would rather see life partners divorce than treat them with the respect that they deserve. We are talking about the people who have built this province, Mr. Lord. What does that say about this province? What does that say about this government?

It all goes back to one of the basic rules that New Brunswickers live by: Treat other people the way that you yourself want to be treated. It is an important one.

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14:00

For all its talk of compassionate conservatism, it is a rule that this government has broken over and over again. If there are senior citizens who have worked hard all their lives and who still have to choose between medication and heating their homes, where is the compassion? If there are teenagers who are out on the streets with nowhere to go because they are caught in bureaucratic red tape, where is the compassion? If there is a single mother who wants to get off welfare but cannot because there is no child care available if she takes the night shift job, where is the compassion? We know what compassionate conservatives think. It reminds me of a statement by John Kenneth Galbraith: Compassionate conservatives think that the big problem with society today is that poor people have too much money and rich people do not have enough. The only compassion they have is for subsidy-hungry multinational corporations.

The members on the other side like to speak of their record in a quantitative way—in dollars or in percentages. They like to reduce the lives of New Brunswickers to a handy bar graph or pie chart. What they forget is that many things that really matter cannot be measured in dollars or

percentages. They can only be felt qualitatively. How do you measure confidence or potential? What unit is there to measure hope?

[Translation]

Do dollars alone in the health care system matter when we cannot find a family doctor or when emergency rooms are closed? Can we truly speak of quality learning in education when school libraries are struggling to keep their doors open?

[Original]

Is the prosperity plan working when you are trying to stretch the same paycheque further and further?

At the end of this session, the people of New Brunswick will know a bit more about the priorities of the Conservative members across the floor, and they will know a lot more about the priorities of the members on this side of the floor. Conservatives believe that government is a necessary evil. On some days, I am not certain that they think it is even that necessary at all. As Liberals, we believe that government can be a force for good. Conservatives believe that government should stand back. What happens to people happens. As Liberals, we believe that governments should be active participants in defending our citizens and in pursuing our collective destiny together. Conservatives believe that it is okay to surrender before you even begin. As Liberals, we believe that you do not quit the race midway. You keep going until you cross the finish line together.

This government believes that New Brunswick can compete as a low-tax, low-wage, low-service society. There will always be a Brazil or a China that will produce more goods more cheaply by paying their workers lower wages, by plundering the environment, or by maintaining low standards of safety and care. We cannot win that race to the bottom, nor should we want to. With the right plan—the Liberal plan—we just might win the race to the top, and we are ready.

I would say to New Brunswickers, to the people in this Chamber who have come forward to hear us: If you believe that our province has reached its full potential, that there is nowhere else for us to go, that this is as good as it gets, you should then make sure the people on that side of the floor stay on that side. If you believe that we have potential left to tap, that we have dreams yet unrealized, and that our brightest days lie ahead, I can assure you that there is only one team for you, and that is the Liberal team. I give you my word that we are in this race together and, together, we will win.

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14:05

(**Mr. Holder** moved adjournment of the debate.

Hon. Mr. Green moved that the House adjourn.

The House adjourned at 2:07 p.m.)
