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Porter O'Brien's New Brunswick Cabinet Analysis 2024

After six years of PC rule and a pandemic which had ripple effects on the economy, Susan Holt and her team are promising change. Thirty Liberal MLAs, not including Holt herself, were elected on Oct. 21, forming a majority government.

In the next couple of months the party will aim to get some key promises delivered out of the gate. With a focus on healthcare and affordability, some of these commitments include establishing 30 community care clinics and removing the PST from residential electricity bills and multi-unit housing builds. However, a leader is only as good as the people behind them.

One of Holt's first - and most crucial - decisions to make are her cabinet picks. Since being elected in late October, she has held meetings and discussions to establish her cabinet, the core group of trusted associates to help guide New Brunswickers through the first months of the Liberals' mandate. Holt announced her team today preceding a swearing-ceremony to be held at the legislative assembly tomorrow, which will include her being sworn-in as the province's first female premier.

A DIVERSE CABINET

As first female premier of New Brunswick, Susan Holt is already making history. From today's results, we can see that Holt considered regional and language distribution when making her decisions. Holt has chosen to honour New Brunswick's status as the only officially bilingual province in Canada by selecting a cabinet with a high number of Francophone and bilingual members. In addition, Holt is increasing the number of cabinet committees, which will significantly change how government decisions are made.

MONEY ON THE MIND

René Legacy is this government's "Minister for Everything". As the Minister of both Finance and Energy, as well as Deputy Premier, he will be responsible for keeping the government's budget in check while also being charged with managing the province's complex energy portfolio. Legacy will be in charge of most of Holt's key affordability campaign promises, as well as making sure the Liberal ship stays fiscally afloat.

A trusted and well-known MLA from the northern riding of Bathurst, he is a former critic for finance, natural resources, and energy development, he's closely familiar with the topics under his portfolio. It's a strategic move for Holt, who was haunted by accusations from the PCs during the campaign that she would put New Brunswick further in debt with her dozens of promises. The Liberals have promised fiscal responsibility and a balanced budget. Legacy, with Holt close by, will be responsible for making sure these promises stay on track and on budget.

HEALTHCARE: THE TOP PRIORITY

Following his nomination in PC titan Trevor Holder's former riding, former Horizon Health CEO John Dornan was considered a top pick to lead the Health Department. His appointment today as minister of Health therefore comes as no surprise. Other than affordability, healthcare is perhaps the biggest priority for the Liberals.

The party kicked off their election campaign with the announcement of 30 community care clinics. Their platform also included retention payments to nurses, improving foreign credential recognition, increasing residency spaces, improving wages for physicians and personal support workers, improving mental health support, and supporting seniors and their caregivers. They even included free female contraception, one free round of IVF, and access to at-home PAP tests for women.

It's a massive portfolio, and Dornan will have a huge task in front of him. All eyes will be on his department's performance when it's time to head back to the polls in four years.

AFFORDABILITY: A TEAM EFFORT

Affordability will be a complex issue to tackle with multiple departments needing to collaborate and break through the bureaucracy. Finance and Energy Minister René Legacy, Social Development Minister Cindy Miles, Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Claire Johnson, and Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation David Hickey will all have to work together to find solutions and move the Liberal mandate forward.

Some of Holt's promises on affordability included a universal school breakfast program, cutting the provincial sales tax on residential electricity bills and multi-unit housing construction, a 3 per cent rent cap, eliminating the carbon adjuster, and building 30,000 new housing units. Hickey has been an advocate for housing in Saint John as city councillor since 2019 and Miles will bring her background as a youth and mental health advocate at Partners for Youth to Social Development. Claire Johnson will bring her background as a dietician and her PhD in population

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health to lead the charge on the Liberals' planned universal school breakfast and pay-what-you-can lunch program.

PRIORITIZING INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Throughout her campaign, Holt made it clear that she was ready to repair relationships with Indigenous peoples in the province. Keith Chiasson, MLA for Tracadie will be dedicated to Indigenous Affairs as the department's new minister. With it being his sole portfolio, he'll be able to dedicate his time to making connections and improving nation-to-nation alliances.

Holt has promised to try to resolve current Aboriginal Title Claim disputes rather than continue them in the courts. As well, she plans to renegotiate the tax agreements with First Nations and review Dr. Manju Varma's report on systemic racism. Minister Chiasson has worked in government as an MLA or within the civil service for a decade, which will make him familiar with governmental operations. His assignment to this position signals that Holt values Indigenous Affairs highly; as he's one of the few cabinet ministers with former legislature experience.

FULL LIST OF CABINET

Susan Holt

- Premier
- President of the Executive Council
- Minister responsible for Official Languages

René Legacy

- Deputy Premier
- Minister of Finance and Treasury Board
- Minister responsible for Energy

Lyne Chantal Boudreau

- Minister responsible for Seniors
- Minister responsible for Women's Equality

Chuck Chiasson

- Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure

Keith Chiasson

- Minister of Indigenous Affairs

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Jean-Claude D'Amours

- Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs
- Minister responsible for Immigration
- Minister responsible for Military Affairs

John Dornan

- Minister of Health

Pat Finnigan

- Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries

Robert Gauvin

- Minister of Public Safety
- Minister responsible for La Francophonie

David Hickey

- Minister responsible for the New Brunswick Housing Corporation

John Herron

- Minister of Natural Resources

Claire Johnson

- Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development

Aaron Kennedy

- Minister of Local Government
- Minister responsible for Service New Brunswick

Gilles LePage

- Minister of Environment and Climate Change
- Minister responsible for the Regional Development Corporation

Rob McKee

- Attorney General
- Minister of Justice
- Minister responsible for Addictions and Mental Health

Cindy Miles

- Minister of Social Development

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- Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation

Luke Randall

- Minister of Economic Development and Small Business
- Minister responsible for Opportunities New Brunswick
- Minister responsible for NB Liquor and Cannabis NB

Isabelle Thériault

- Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture

Alyson Townsend

- Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour

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