

**October 24, 2018**

[Original]

**Mr. Holder:** Just before we start... I assume we have moved to oral questions.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes.

**Mr. Holder:** Just before we do, it has been the tradition of the House over the last number of years that when we come back after a break or after an election there is an extension of 15 minutes for question period. I would ask for unanimous consent for that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Do we have unanimous consent?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Holder:** Also, Mr. Speaker, I am just wondering if we could also because these are very different times... This is a very historic moment, and we have not worked out the rules of the House. I am wondering if we could get unanimous consent that each of the two new parties get two questions and two supplementary questions for each of those two questions.

**Mr. Speaker:** For today or...

**Mr. Holder:** Just for today.

**Mr. Speaker:** Do we have unanimous consent?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

## **Carbon Tax**

**Mr. Higgs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is asking this House for its confidence. We in the official opposition have said all along that the throne speech is not only about the words on the page. The vote is about confidence. The Legislature will place its confidence in an executive whose job it is to deliver on the throne speech and to deliver for the people of this province. Today, I want to give the Premier a chance to have the job interview that he has asked for and to show us whether he deserves that confidence.

The Premier spent the entire election campaign insisting that his carbon pricing scheme would meet Ottawa's standards. Very recently, we learned that either he failed to convince Ottawa to accept his plan or they were never going to. Given that misjudgment, why should this House have confidence in him going forward to be able to handle this file? Thank you.



**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I first want to start off by congratulating the 49 women and men who have been sent to Fredericton to represent New Brunswickers. Of course, we should take a moment to reflect on how much of a privilege and honour it is to be chosen by our respective communities to represent the women and men of this province. I would humbly suggest to all MLAs that every single time they sit in these chairs they remember how lucky and honoured they are to be here.

I also want to thank all the candidates who put their names forward. Of course, 49 were elected to represent New Brunswickers. Many put up their hands, wanting to run to better the province. Unfortunately, only 49 could win, but we thank all of them for their dedication and passion toward New Brunswick.

Lastly, I want to take a moment to thank all New Brunswickers who voted, regardless of whom they voted for. Our democratic institutions and processes are important.

*[Translation]*

I am sure all members recognize that work must be done to combat climate change. As a government, we will do this responsibly, with all political parties.

*[Original]*

**Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, I guess we start where we left off in the last session. I am looking for a response here in relation to how this matter is going to be managed. Part of leading a Legislature is based on frank discussion and real cooperation and being straight with the facts. It also means owning up to mistakes or taking responsibility. The Premier has struggled with that in the past, and it seems he is struggling with it today.

The Premier's plan to spare New Brunswickers the cost-of-living increase and job cuts of the carbon tax was the one he swore during the election would work, and even his friendly federal cousins were not buying it. Can the Premier admit today that he has a new plan or that he miscalculated? If he cannot, how can this House have confidence that he can manage this file going forward? That is the question.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I think the vast majority of, if not all, New Brunswickers recognize that we have to work together to combat climate change. We need to protect our environment, and climate change is the largest challenge facing humanity at this moment. We all need to step up. That means every country, and that means every province and territory within that country, and that means every citizen within that country. Therefore, we put forward an action plan with over 100 action items. We did that with the help of the other parties in the Legislature at the time through a select committee that went around to listen to New Brunswickers on how we can combat climate change together.



With over 100 action items in that plan, we are confident that we can play our role here in New Brunswick. We will phase out coal—electricity generated by coal—by 2030. We will also put a price on carbon for large emitters in the industries in our province, to make sure that they are still competitive but that they are still paying their fair share. We want to have a plan that will not have a further impact on consumers in this province.

**Mr. Higgs:** The question is this. The carbon plan that the Premier was putting forward was not accepted by the federal government. That is the question, and the answer is now there. What I am asking is: What is the new plan? Is the new plan... Is the Premier is going to accept the federal plan? Are we going to see more taxes in every sector, on businesses and on energy consumption, so that we make it more difficult for people to work and live in New Brunswick? That is the question. The plan that the Premier put forward and touted throughout the entire election campaign as the plan for New Brunswick was rejected by the federal government. The question is: What is next in the Premier's plan to deal with the carbon tax? That is the question, Mr. Speaker.

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** We are very disappointed by the response from Ottawa, since we think our plan will, in fact, ensure New Brunswick does its part to fight climate change so that we can be responsible, continue to grow the economy, and look the next generation in the eye and say that we did everything we could to protect the environment.

We are very disappointed that the federal government did not accept the fact that New Brunswick consumers should not pay a penny more. However, I want to note that the other parts of our plan are working very well within the framework set by the federal government. I am talking here about our request that large industry emitters pay their fair share and about our commitment to eliminate coal-generated electricity by 2030.

We will stand up to make sure we get results that will help consumers in the province.

*[Original]*

## Government Agenda

**Mr. Higgs:** Getting answers has always been difficult. Let's talk about these added costs that workers and businesses are going to see in this province. We know that certainly in the case of carbon tax it seems as though the Premier is just accepting what the federal government is going to impose upon him without any pushback—not that that comes as much of a surprise.

There is the situation that we see in the throne speech about the change in the minimum wage. We also see and we know—but it was not mentioned in the throne speech—about the increases in WorkSafeNB rates. Over the last while, the last four years, we have seen it go from \$1.11 to \$1.48 to \$1.70, and it is proposed to go to \$2.50. There has been a workforce that was



put together... There have been recommendations put out, and they have been out for probably four to six months now. So my question is this: Is there a sense of urgency or not with this Premier to deal with issues in this province that are keeping people from working, living, and surviving here? We need action. Is that going to happen on these rates?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** In fact, since we have been in government, we have reduced the small business tax rate by 44%.

[*Original*]

By cutting small business taxes by 44% since we became the government in 2014, Mr. Speaker, we are putting more money in the pockets of entrepreneurs so that they can reinvest in their businesses, they can hire more people, they make sure that they are as productive as possible, and they can help us grow the economy. Over the past four years, the economy has grown because of those measures and others, but mostly because New Brunswickers are working hard, entrepreneurs are working hard, and our job creators are working hard. They are competing nationally and internationally to create growth in the province.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we will continue to fight in this Legislature for things that are going to ensure that we have a fairer economy. We want the economic growth that we have seen to be shared with as many people as possible. That is why we, as a government, raised the minimum wage, and we want to continue to do so. That is why we have advanced pay equity, and we want to continue to do so. That is why we want to offer free tuition and free child care for those who need it the most, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Higgs:** In terms of economic growth, during the previous mandate, we saw the promise to create 5 000 new jobs. Ultimately, nearly 8 000 jobs were lost in the private sector, and we cannot continue to lose more.

In response to people who fear that the same policies might produce the same results, can the Premier assure us that he will be able to honour the economic commitments made in the throne speech?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** By the way, over the last four years, we have seen that there are a lot more full-time jobs in the province and that the unemployment rate is down by over 2%. On top of that, wages have gone up significantly. In fact, twice during the last four years, wages here in New Brunswick increased at the fastest rate among all provinces in the country. Our deficit was reduced by more than half, to the point where we had a budget surplus. We have also seen our population grow over the past four years.



However, we understand that New Brunswickers are still experiencing challenges. In fact, there are still families that are facing challenges covering everyday costs. We saw this following the message that was conveyed on election night. People said there had to be increased collaboration here, in the House, to help families more, in order to grow our economy so that more people can benefit from it. Our services must also be improved. We got the message, and we are willing to work with everyone in this House to achieve this.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, New Brunswickers are extremely concerned about the reckless spending and increased debt under this past government. During the campaign, we learned that even when extra revenues produced a surplus, the Premier's election spending binge plunged us into a deficit the very next year. Yesterday's throne speech contained no mention of debt reduction. There was an indication that maybe they will reduce the deficit a year earlier, but there were no details on how to actually make that plan work. It was just another statement on a line.

The last time that the Premier got a mandate, in his first budget, he raised taxes, fired teachers, made record cuts to school districts, and still failed to balance the budget. My question to the Premier is this: Specifically, what different policies will you pursue this time that will give this House confidence in you to deliver? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** First of all, we are proud of what we were able to accomplish over the past four years with regard to the financial situation of our province.

[*Original*]

Over the past four years, Mr. Speaker, we were able to reduce the deficit by more than half, to the point that we had the first balanced books in the province in a decade. Mr. Speaker, we recognize, however, that New Brunswickers want us to do more. They want us to address the deficit more quickly, and they want us to do it in a way that we are investing more in the things that are important to them: economic growth, education, health care, advancing women's equality, and protecting the environment.

Mr. Speaker, that is why in our speech from the throne we listened to the other parties, who all said that we should be balancing the books by the second budget of this mandate. We listened to them, and we humbly accept that New Brunswickers have asked us to do this. We have to make sure that we learn from that, and that is why in the speech from the throne, which lays out our agenda, the fiscal plan is to have a balanced budget by the second budget of this mandate. Mr. Speaker, the collaborative process that we will undertake with the other parties will help us to accomplish just that.



**Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier needs to accept that the policies of the last four years were not working and will not work. They will not work going forward, and they did not work in the past four years. In the last mandate, he raised spending by over \$1 billion and raised revenue by over \$1 billion through increased taxation. The tax room is now gone, and there needs to be some discipline on the spending side. Setting up a committee to study corporate welfare will not get it done.

For those who believe that he cannot balance a budget without raising taxes, what specifics can the Premier offer to give us confidence in him? A line item in a throne speech does not cut it. What are the specifics? He is just saying: I will do better. We have heard that over and over again. In fact, many of the comments today are ones that we have already heard. I could have pressed replay. Let's get the details, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, over the past four years, we have created more jobs. The unemployment rate has gone down by two percentage points. Wages have gone up significantly, to the point that we had, during those four years, the largest wage increase of all the provinces in Canada. The deficit has been reduced by more than half, to the point that we had the first balanced books in 10 years, and the population has grown.

Mr. Speaker, we have helped over 6 000 New Brunswickers in one year alone to get free tuition to go to a university or college in our province. We have provided tuition relief for the middle class in our province. We have given free child care to hundreds of people who need the most support so that they can get into the workplace or pursue their studies. We have worked very hard to address issues of wait time in this province, and we have ensured that we will continue to invest in health care, including in rural New Brunswick.

However, Mr. Speaker, New Brunswickers sent a message on the night of the election that it was not good enough. They have not given any of us a government to govern alone. They have not given us a majority. They want the 49 women and men in this room to figure it out on behalf of all New Brunswickers.

## Paramedics

**Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, let's move to the social side of things. The Premier has noted that much of the budget is spent on health, education, and senior care. That means that managing social programs well is a big part of what the executive branch must do.

Yesterday, after insisting that everything was fine, the Premier proposed setting up a committee to study the dangerous shortage of paramedics and ambulance coverage in New Brunswick. I am not convinced that we need a study. We need action. Can the Premier tell us whether he has had the civil service prepare a list of options for solving this issue and, if so, how long it will take for that request and to look into those options? Can the Premier tell us whether he has met with the Paramedic Association of New Brunswick to discuss its views and review its proposals, detailed report, and recommendations? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, on the night of the election, New Brunswickers sent, I think, a pretty strong message to all political parties, but the ones that should have heard it the most are the Liberal Party and the Conservatives. For the first time in 100 years, neither one of our parties got a majority government. The story is the six individuals sitting over there, whom people voted for so that things could be different in this Legislature.

The Leader of the Opposition will gain political points, there is no doubt, mocking committees. He will gain political points mocking studies and reviews that will involve the 49 women and men in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker. But we understand the message that was sent, and that is what New Brunswickers want. They want us to open up the door so that other political parties can play their role.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is very unfortunate that we gave a document in confidence to the other parties yesterday and, just as he did when he was the Leader of the Opposition over the past four years, the Leader of the Opposition is using that. He knows that there is a document prepared by government with options because we gave it to him yesterday to try to include all political parties. It is unfortunate that the Conservatives are going to try to score more points with this old style of politics. Things need to change. New Brunswickers have asked us to make a change, and we are committed to having a change.

**Mr. Higgs:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, once again, all I want is the answer to a question. The theme continues. The question was this. I will ask a couple of short ones. One is: Does the Premier intend to continue the appeal of the arbitration hearing that outlined some of the solutions related to supplying ambulances with paramedics? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition would use question period for what it is for, he would ask these types of questions to keep us accountable and to shed light on things. He knows that there was a report given to his party yesterday. It was given to the other political parties as well. He knows that this will actually be tabled today, and he is using that in question period to try to score political points. Not only is it unfortunate, but it goes in complete contravention of what New Brunswickers have asked us to do.

I get it. Look, we get it over here too. Our two parties have been entrenched to fight each other, but that is not what New Brunswickers have asked us to do. For the first time in 100 years, neither of our parties got a majority government. New Brunswickers want us to work together, put our petty politics aside, and do what is best for all New Brunswickers of this province.

**Mr. Higgs:** Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Do you know what New Brunswickers want? They want us to answer questions. They want us to put the facts on the table. The question was, Do you intend to continue with the appeal of the arbitration hearing on how the issue around paramedics could be solved and how we could get ambulances back on the road? That was the question. I will ask it one more time: Is it yes or no? It is pretty simple. I think New Brunswickers want to hear the facts, and I am sure they want to hear the truth. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Fair enough. The Leader of the Opposition is right. I did not answer the question directly. I mean, I think it is pretty obvious that I answered that there is a report. But let me answer it very directly: Yes, there is a report. It is the one that the person sitting to his left, the House Leader, received at four o'clock yesterday. That would be the report that he is referencing, so I am quite aware that he is aware that the report exists.

For him to ask this question, I think, demonstrates that he has not gotten the message. If we are to do what New Brunswickers have asked us to do, whoever the government will be, we need to be able to brief other members, understanding that we are not going to be using this stuff for political gain. Unfortunately, on his first test, he has failed.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that when it comes to ambulance services, New Brunswickers have spoken loud and clear. They want those services to improve. They want them to improve significantly, and they want that to be one of the agenda points of this government. We will work with the other political parties to make sure that we figure this out once and for all. The review that we have asked for will ensure that members from this Legislature will be on a committee to discuss this important issue with the facts and with New Brunswickers' feedback.

**Mr. Higgs:** For the third time, I will ask for a very straight yes-or-no answer. Does the Premier intend to continue to appeal the ruling by the arbitrator in relation to the paramedics returning to service and getting ambulances back on the road very quickly? No more studies, no more committees. Get our ambulances on the road. Let health care be first and foremost. Yes or no, will he end the appeal of that process to put health care number one? That is the question, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, I completely understand what the Leader of the Opposition is doing. He wants to get the headlines and he wants to get the clips on TV through the...

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, we want to work with the other political parties to figure out this ambulance challenge once and for all. That is why in the speech from the throne, we have made it very clear that the agenda of this government would be through a committee on which we would have members from all political parties sit here for six weeks—we are not talking about years, but we are talking about six weeks—to hear from the stakeholders, the unions, the ambulances, the ambulance system people, the paramedics themselves, and the Department of Health—to hear from all stakeholders—on what are the challenges, issues, and the legalities of ensuring that we provide the best health care possible and the best ambulance services possible and on how we can address the paramedic shortage together, Mr. Speaker. That is what New Brunswickers have asked us to do, to work collaboratively, more so than ever before. That is what this government is prepared to do.



**Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, I guess the answer is that they will continue with the court challenge, so we will continue to spend taxpayer dollars to keep ambulances off the road and put health second. That seems to be the message that I am hearing because I cannot get a straight answer, but it seems that is the case.

The other case is that we are going to delay the process to get people's health put as number one. My question was on the Paramedic Association and its report. I know it asked to speak to all of us in relation to its recommendations on how to get ambulances back in service quickly and on how to deal appropriately with the paramedics. Now, I ask the question: Has the Premier seen that report? I think he got an invitation to meet with the association. I do not know whether the report that he produced contains any of these. It does not appear to, or very few, so I would ask this: Has he seen the report from the Paramedic Association to discuss its views and review its extensive list of recommendations? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Yes, we have seen the report. In fact, the Minister of Health had a great meeting with the paramedics to understand what some of their recommendations would be.

[*Translation*]

I can tell you that I have had a discussion with the Minister of Health specifically about this report. As a caucus, we have also had a discussion about the report, which will be submitted to the House later on. It contains ideas and is thought-provoking. This report outlines the key points that people will have to know when we discuss how we can improve the state of the ambulance system and deal with the paramedic shortage in this province. This report will be submitted to the House in a few minutes.

Also, we have received reports from other stakeholders. This brings us to what we were saying: We think it is wise to have a committee whose members will work together for six weeks, from now until mid-December, to make recommendations after having listened to all stakeholders. This is what New Brunswickers have asked us to do: work with all political parties and the people of this province.

[*Original*]

## Literacy

**Mr. Higgs:** The throne speech spoke of the importance of education, and we completely agree. It is simply a fact that the Grade 2 literacy scores, the most important indicator of future success, were lower in the last round of tests than they were when the Premier took office. Could the Premier tell us why he thinks the literacy scores went down on his watch and what specific actions he can offer that would give us confidence that he can actually manage our schools better and that our kids will see results? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** In fact, for years, the literacy rates in the Anglophone sector were going in the wrong direction. We finally saw, within our mandate, an increase—1.9%—in a positive way when it came to the literacy scores. We, as government, play a small role in that because we allocate resources to certain programs, but it is the women and men who are educators and the women and men who are providing support in different programs across the province that we should be congratulating on finally ensuring that the curve is going in the right direction.

We are investing more in education than ever before in this province. We are investing strategically in literacy programs such as ELF. I am sure many members opposite are aware of that program. It is one that we think is going to have a lasting impact on the children and the education system of our province. We are investing in other things to help with the mental health of our children and to help with the health of our children in general because we understand that they have to be healthy if they are going to be able to learn properly.

## Health Care

**Ms. Mitton:** The people of New Brunswick are facing many challenges in accessing the care that they need in our health care system, often facing unreasonably long wait times to see a health care provider and in some cases not having access to the care that they need. Assuming that the Premier, like all New Brunswickers, wants shorter ER wait times, wants access to family doctors for all New Brunswickers, and wants to improve our health care system, I respectfully ask the Premier what he plans to do differently than in the past four years to make sure that these goals are actually achieved. To be clear, this is a forward-looking question. I do not want to know what has been done in the past four years, but rather what will be done differently moving forward to address these critical health care issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Health care is of the utmost importance to the families and communities of our province. I understand the member opposite trying to put the frame around the question, but if we want to display to New Brunswickers what will be different, they have to know what was done. We invested more in health care. We invested to hire more family doctors and more specialists. We invested in our hospital infrastructure. We invested in rural hospitals as well. We invested in mental health to help support those who are having challenges. We have invested to advance women's equality, which helps the health of our families and our communities. We have invested to help seniors to stay in their homes longer, and if they need a nursing home or memory care bed, there is one for them.

Moving forward, what is going to be very different is the fact that we received the message from New Brunswickers. We need to listen to the members opposite, and we need to listen to all political parties and to ensure that we have a collaborative approach to address wait times in our health care system. Health care was hotly debated and discussed during the campaign, as it should have been. Many good ideas came out during the campaign from all parties, and we look forward to working with them to enact those great measures.



**Ms. Mitton:** In light of the many challenges facing New Brunswick's health care system, we need to make some fundamental changes. One such challenge is the lack of family doctors across this province and the strain that puts on the emergency rooms and the health professionals that staff them. Would the Premier agree that we need to change how we run our system by eliminating the government-imposed caps on Medicare billing numbers, which would allow doctors to open practices in regions where there is demand for the services? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** The very short answer is yes. Let me get back to the specific question in a second.

First, let me say that since we have been the government, we have hired more family doctors in the province. The New Brunswick Medical Society, in 2014, asked political parties to commit to hiring 50 more family doctors, and we have done exactly that over the past four years. We are committed to hiring more family doctors and more specialists to address wait times. We also put midwifery into the system, which can help ensure that we are alleviating some of the wait times.

Let me say that we understand that people want changes when it comes to the billing number system. We will be completely honest with everybody in this room. We were the only political party that said that we would not touch the billing number system, and we did not get a majority of the seats, which means that we have to listen to the other parties. This is one that was clearly, unanimously accepted by the other parties, so we are willing to make the necessary changes to the billing number system to allow all New Brunswickers to have family doctors and to have doctors in all regions of this province.

[*Translation*]

## Herbicides

**Mr. K. Arseneau:** Going door to door in my Kent North riding during the last election campaign, I met thousands of people who are genuinely concerned about the spraying of herbicides such as glyphosate under our power lines and in our public forests.

Glyphosate, which is classified by the World Health Organization as probably carcinogenic, is a public health and ecological disaster for the people of this province, our Acadian forest, our deer populations, our wetlands, and biodiversity in the province. Moreover, glyphosate spraying costs provincial taxpayers millions of dollars every year.

Yesterday, in his throne speech, the Premier indicated that he would propose a motion to direct a legislative committee to consider recommending a phased-in ban on the use of herbicides, such as glyphosate, with the scope of the ban to be based on tangible evidence. Now, this is the same government.



My question for the Premier is this: Is he or is he not against glyphosate spraying under our power lines and in our public forests?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** The environment absolutely must be protected for the next generation of New Brunswickers. We are facing enormous challenges when it comes to the environment and to protecting it. So, everyone must work together to combat climate change, which is a topic we have already addressed. In fact, our government is the one that imposed a moratorium on hydraulic fracking.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the member on being elected in Kent North. I am convinced that, when he was going door to door, people also spoke to him about the importance of having a moratorium on hydraulic fracking across the province. Again, as a government, we have said that, if Health Canada ever considered glyphosate to be a potential health hazard, we would ban it immediately.

That being said, people from the other parties have gone further, and I think this was obviously one of the reasons people voted for them. So, we are prepared to go further, by working with the other political parties, to figure out how we should address these important concerns about glyphosate.

*[Original]*

**Mr. K. Arseneau:** With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, we sat here yesterday and listened to a throne speech inviting us to do politics differently and indicating that we have a historic opportunity. We have also seen the Premier go to the media and say that during the past four years, he has learned from New Brunswickers and that politics has to be done differently. I am a new member here, and what I saw growing up following politics was politicians who did not answer questions and who found creative ways to say nothing. I think that if we want to do things differently, maybe we could start by owning our convictions and answering the questions asked of us by the people of New Brunswick.

Over 34 000 people in New Brunswick have signed a petition asking for an immediate ban on glyphosate under our power lines and in our public forests. I am not the only concerned citizen here that deserves an answer, so I ask this again: Is the Premier for or against a ban to end the spraying of herbicides such as glyphosate under our power lines and in our public forests?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, protecting the environment for the next generation is crucial. We owe it to the next generation to do so. That is why we want to fight climate change by working with the other political parties, as we did in the past four years, on that important subject. As a government, we put a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing, which I know that the member opposite... In his community, I humbly suggest that there is a big concern to ensure that there is a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing across the province. When it comes to glyphosate, we, as the political party in government, have always said that if Health Canada ever found that it should be banned, we would ban it without hesitation.



Mr. Speaker, I am a bit surprised to hear the member opposite ask us to make a unilateral decision. I do not think that is what New Brunswickers have asked us, as a government, to do. I think that they have asked us to work with other parties. To determine the scope of a ban on glyphosate is important. For those who participated in the session not too long ago with the Minister of Environment, it was very clear that the scope of the glyphosate ban has to be discussed because there are a lot of things that people need to consider. Going to an all-party committee to establish that is what we think New Brunswickers would expect of this minority government.

### Paramedics

**Mr. Austin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three years ago, when I was Deputy Mayor of the village of Minto, we had no choice but to call in representatives from Ambulance New Brunswick about the long wait times in our area. Since then, I have had two experiences with ambulances being called and having to wait over 35 minutes each time in the village of Minto. Mr. Speaker, I did read the report given by the government. What I did not read in the report is why this government is not going with the arbitrator's ruling to stop putting language over lives and get people the response time they need when they call 911. My question is: Will the Premier go with the arbitrator's ruling to get paramedics back out in the field and get our buses moving again? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the leader from the third party for his question, and again, I congratulate him and the other third party. I use the term "third party" loosely. I know that is probably not the best way to describe them, but I do congratulate all six of them for being here.

Mr. Speaker, we have made it very clear that we want to work with other political parties to address the ambulance challenges that we have in the province and to address the shortage of paramedics that we are experiencing. These are challenges, I would add, that every other province across the country is experiencing as well. There is a discussion paper that was provided to the other political parties that outlines some of the suggestions that have been raised by stakeholders and New Brunswickers and outlines some of the responses from the department. These are civil servants giving their professional advice on exactly what measures could be put in place, the consequences of those measures, and other considerations when it comes to those recommendations. We look forward to having a robust discussion, Mr. Speaker, about all moving aspects, including the one raised by the member opposite. Doing it with all political parties together in a collaborative and transparent way is what I think New Brunswickers have asked this minority government to do.

### Ambulance New Brunswick

**Mr. Austin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is all fine and good, but the reality is that over the past four years, the Health Minister himself said that everything was great in Ambulance New



Brunswick. There were no issues. Yet, we have seen over and over and over again long wait times for ambulances, to the point that we have citizens literally putting patients in the back of SUVs to get them to hospitals. Mr. Speaker, this is not a Third World country. This is New Brunswick, a place that we should be proud of. Emergency services should be there when we need them, so I would ask the Minister of Health whether his opinion has changed on Ambulance New Brunswick and response times accordingly.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the members opposite, at one point, will be more frustrated when they are asking questions of the Premier and the ministers get up. However, I will get up if that is okay, even though the question was directed to the minister.

Again, I want to assure New Brunswickers that we got the message. There were a few messages sent during the election. One was that we have to address the ambulance challenges in the province, and one was that we have to address the paramedic shortage in the province. These are challenges—I want to underline again—that are being felt across the country in every province. Mr. Speaker, another message is that they want us to work more collaboratively. If they did not want us to do that, they would have given a party a majority government, and they did not. They have put us in a minority government situation, no matter how you slice it, so we need to work together on behalf of all New Brunswickers.

When it comes to the arbitrator, it is important for the member opposite to know, as he has been briefed, that there was a court ruling and then the arbitrator's ruling, which conflicted with each other, so it makes it very difficult for the government to know whom to follow. If we follow the arbitrator, we may be in contempt of court. Mr. Speaker, there will be a review done in a few weeks that will clarify what the legal obligations are in this matter.

## Government Funding

**Mr. Austin:** Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General is one of the most important legislative officers in New Brunswick today. Her role and the role of her staff are to look at the numbers to find where things are going wrong in government policies and programs, yet the Auditor General here in New Brunswick has one of the lowest paid and resourced Auditor General offices in all of Canada. The question that I have for the Premier is this: Why such a change of heart to increase her budget when for four years, the government had the opportunity to do so?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, I actually appreciate very much the opportunity to clarify this matter a little. First, the Auditor General's budget was increased over the first mandate of our government. I think that is important for New Brunswickers to know. I want to be really frank with everybody here. It is a bit odd to put an Auditor General or any legislative officer in isolation into a speech from the throne because all of that should be considered through the budget process. All the legislative officers would want more funds and a larger budget for the important work that they do.



We definitely wanted to demonstrate that we heard the message from the other political parties. I believe that in their platforms, two or three of them said specifically that the Auditor General should have more money. We agree with that. That is why we gave a larger budget during the past four years. The legislative process would be for the Legislative Administration Committee to meet and discuss, and then it obviously would go through a budget process. However, to show that we want to listen and work with the other parties, we included it directly in the speech from the throne.

**Mr. Austin:** Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's role is critical among all legislative officers in the reality that we have a debt that is over \$14 billion. It is very, very important that this government realizes that her office is important not only for accountability but also to help the province move forward on what is working and what is not working. That is why I would admonish the Premier to look again into good funding for the Auditor General, and I would ask him for specific numbers or to give us some idea of exactly by how much funding the Premier is intending to increase her budget.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the comment, and I want to give the credit to the member opposite and his political party. Others have raised it as well, but he certainly raised it in debates during the campaign and at other venues, saying that he wanted to see the Auditor General's budget increased. We were very clear in our speech from the throne, by laying out the government's agenda, that there were parts coming from other political platforms. I can tell you that the increase in the Auditor General's budget is coming from the member opposite's party platform and others. I want to give credit where credit is due. This is because of the advocacy of the other political parties, including that of the member opposite.

I agree with everything that he said, frankly. It is a very important office. All the legislative officers are very important, but there is no doubt that with the fiscal situation that we have seen in this province over the past decade, her office is a very important one in ensuring that taxpayers' money is going as far as possible.

I will not say a number, Mr. Speaker, because that would be inappropriate. The LAC committee will discuss what it thinks the legislative officers should get in terms of a budget, but what we have laid out in our agenda is that we are willing to increase her budget, as was asked by the other political parties.

**Mr. Austin:** Mr. Speaker, I think that it is important, again, that we do not simply push this off. It is important that we look at this issue. Very importantly, again, we are indeed in trying fiscal times, and the Auditor General is a huge part of moving New Brunswick forward. I guess that I would ask the government again why there was such a change in heart. It had four years to increase it, yet there were very little increases to make anything significant. It is time to increase her budget. The question I would ask is this: When indeed is the government going to do that?



**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that every day since the election, I have been reflecting and pondering what New Brunswickers were trying to tell me and all the political parties in this Legislature. I can tell you that one of the messages that is very clear is that they want us indeed to listen to the other political parties, work with them, and collaborate, and of course, we also heard that people want us to address the fiscal situation even more quickly than we had proposed. That is why we have these important items such as balancing the budget earlier, giving more money to the Auditor General's Office, and many other measures that will include a very inclusive, collaborative, and transparent budget process.

When it comes to the specific budget item, we are committing that the Auditor General's Office will receive more money in this budget cycle, but I want to underline yet again that giving an amount would be inappropriate. The Legislative Administration Committee needs to meet to discuss this and to make a recommendation. Then, there is a budget process where...

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

### Interprovincial Trade Barriers

**Mr. Higgs:** One of the most important issues for our economy is tearing down interprovincial trade barriers. The Premier has been on both sides of this issue, going to court to save trade barriers and then calling for those same trade barriers to come down. I want to know, going forward, what plans the Premier has for improving interprovincial trade. Can the Premier offer any concrete actions or concrete plans that will convince this House that he actually has a plan to improve our conditions and improve the ability of New Brunswick companies or New Brunswick businesses to compete not only with New Brunswick businesses but also abroad? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I recognize what the Leader of the Opposition is trying to do—gain political points. However, again, New Brunswickers have asked us to collaborate and to listen to all political parties, and that is what we are going to do. You are going to see a different tone from our government, one that is not going to unilaterally decide everything. We want to listen to the other parties. I get that the members opposite will try to use that as a weakness of our government, trying to say that we are not taking action. We are taking action in a collaborative way, in the way that New Brunswickers have asked us to.

Second, when it comes to that important issue, the Leader of the Opposition's tagline and description will be a lot easier for the media to consume. My explanation will not, but it is the truth. There is an independent prosecutions branch that decided to go to the Supreme Court with regard to the case he referenced. It would be highly inappropriate for us to be involved in any shape or form. It was based on the issue of jurisdictional questions. It was not that we had any issue with the substance. It was the jurisdictional question for which they went to the Supreme Court of Canada.



**Mr. Higgs:** Asking the Premier specific policy questions, especially after four years, and expecting an answer is not politics. It is what we should expect. It is what the job comes with, especially after being in it for four years.

## Health Care

The Premier spent the last mandate defending the outdated practice of billing numbers, even as too many New Brunswickers do without access to primary care. Now, he is saying that we can study alternatives, but he has made no commitment to change this policy. Every other province does not have the same policy that New Brunswick has. What new policies can he offer to give this House any confidence that anything is actually going to change or improve should he continue in office? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I just ask that we have a higher level of decorum because New Brunswickers have asked for it. We have to play that role, as does the opposition.

The billing number system was put in place to protect rural hospitals and rural health care. We have defended the fact that the billing number system was put in place for that. However, we recognize that New Brunswickers are never wrong, and the four other political parties all said that the billing number system had to change. I would remind the members opposite, including some who asked questions, that they have rural hospitals in their communities and they have to ask themselves: When we make these changes, how are we going to ensure that we still protect rural hospitals and rural health care?

We are willing to concede that the people of New Brunswick have asked us to listen to the other platforms. All four other parties said that we have to get rid of the billing numbers, so we are willing to make changes in the system. However, we will be there defending rural New Brunswick's health care, and I hope that the members of this Legislature will do the same thing. Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Question period is over.

