

November 27, 2018

[Translation]

Child Care

Mr. Gallant: We urge the Conservatives to continue to roll out the programs established by our government in order to provide free child care to families that most need assistance and to ensure that no middle-class families spend more than 20% of their income on child care. The plans and the budget are already in place to finish implementing these child-care programs throughout the province and to make them available in Restigouche-Chaleur, the Acadian Peninsula, Miramichi, and Rexton in January and February 2019.

Can the Premier confirm to us that he will immediately conduct the assessment he wants to do of these programs so that his government meets the deadline set by our government for implementation of these child-care programs in each region of our province?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we will indeed do a quick assessment of the program. It is like the many programs that we are looking at to make sure that there is value for the dollars being spent. It would be our hope and anticipation that we could stay on schedule as well. It is certainly a priority for us. Having the appropriate child care spaces, the child care support for families, is a key element for us as well. It would be my hope that the plan that has been put forward is indeed one that is working, will work, and will meet the needs of families. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Tuition

Mr. Gallant: We greatly appreciate the Premier's comments today, and we support the idea of assessing this program immediately so that implementation can be completed in January and February 2019, as our government planned.

In addition, we created the Free Tuition Program and the Tuition Relief for the Middle Class program. These programs support the development of our workforce, our economy, and our postsecondary institutions. These programs also help to keep our young people here. Can the Premier please confirm that his government will maintain these tuition relief programs?



[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, we are assessing that program as well, as we committed to do in our platform. I think that one of the issues that is a big concern is whether the program actually retained our graduating students. As we know, we lost the tuition rebate and it impacted a lot of families in relation to the tax credits. We are evaluating that program in a timeline that would probably be in the order of two to three months, but with the intention of ensuring that it is getting the intended result.

We are indeed keeping our kids here if at all as possible. We do reflect the contributions of working families and students who are gaining an education with an opportunity for them to have a program that allows them to stay right here in New Brunswick. There is a lot to look at in this program, but I want to make sure, once again, that it is getting the intended results. At this point, I am unaware of the details but we have already started the process, which will be completed within the next two to three months maximum.

Mr. Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me just say first that the tuition rebate program is one which, at the time, the New Brunswick Student Alliance said did not work. It did not help keep young people in our province. The Student Alliance asked for up-front financial support to help students become students in the first place and, of course, to help them during their studies to be able to focus on their work. Of course, afterward, they would graduate with very competitive levels of debt if they had to have any debt at all.

With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, we created the Free Tuition Program and the Tuition Relief for the Middle Class program. Last year alone, over 6 200 students were able to study at a New Brunswick university or college for free. Could the Premier please confirm for the thousands of New Brunswickers who benefited from these programs whether or not they can depend on having these financial programs still there for them for many years to come?

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier clearly indicated, our goal is to make sure that every program in place gets the outcomes that we need for the students of this province. You know, the former Premier indicated a minute ago that based on talking to some of the student union leaders, the tuition tax cash back credit was not working. But I will tell you, we got thousands and thousands and thousands of e-mails and an electronic petition, which was circulated around this province, from folks who said that the tuition tax cash back credit was keeping them here in New Brunswick. For that reason alone, we need to evaluate each and every program and make sure we are getting the outcomes that our students deserve.

Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, obviously, it is a bit of a switch this afternoon in terms of the roles of the opposition and the government members. If they want to bring in the tuition rebate again, they can fill their boots. They gave the indication to people that they most likely would do that, but there are two things I would like to point out this afternoon.



First off, we do not think they should. Mr. Speaker, the studies and the data show that that program was not working. With that said, though, as an opposition, normally, we would just be asking for everything under the moon. I want to be very clear: We do not think that that is the right program to be investing in to help university and college students pursue their studies here in New Brunswick.

Second, if they want to reinstate the tuition rebate program, it should not be at the expense of the Free Tuition Program or the Tuition Relief for the Middle Class program. Will the Premier please indicate that if they do reinstate the Tuition Rebate, it will not be at the expense of the Free Tuition Program or the Tuition Relief for the Middle Class program?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we are looking at the entire program. Is it effective? Is it effective to provide students with an opportunity to go to postsecondary institutions when they otherwise would not have gone because money was not available? We are very clear that we want every child in our province to have the opportunity to go to postsecondary institutions. We also want the opportunity for the money to follow the students, so they decide where they go to an accredited university or college here in the province—one that is accredited by our government and that is certified.

The point is, we will look at the whole package. We are not going to break it up into pieces. We are going to understand the ability, the success rate, the capability to do more, and the opportunity to ensure that we meet the needs of students and families—to keep their kids here and to have them go to school but, more importantly, after all of it, to have a job here in New Brunswick.

Mr. Gallant: Again, we are not going to try to push the government to do something that we would not have done. The tuition rebate was a nice program for people, but it was not effective in retaining our young people here. The New Brunswick Student Alliance said so itself. It wanted up-front support, and that is what we gave it with the Free Tuition Program and the Tuition Relief for the Middle Class program.

Now, if the Premier and his government want to reinstate the tuition rebate program, they can fill their boots, of course, but we ask that it not be at the expense of the Free Tuition Program and the Tuition Relief for the Middle Class program. Also, if they want to keep those programs and expand them to private colleges and universities, again, we will certainly encourage them to fill their boots.

All we want today is a confirmation that the Free Tuition Program, which benefited over 6 200 New Brunswickers last year alone and helped them to study for free at a university or college here in our province, and the Tuition Relief for the Middle Class program will still be intact after this evaluation is done.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: I think the point is not to understand how many students actually went to a university—that is part of it—or postsecondary institution. That is obviously part of it. Why did



they go? Have they been successful? Are they staying there? Are they on track to graduate? Or was it something that they did because it was free? The idea is for us to ensure that programs are working—they are working to achieve the intended goal of helping people who want to help themselves to move with advancement in their careers in our province.

It is a combined process. It is looking at the whole picture, and that is what we will do. We will look at the whole picture and ensure that it is most effective. We will compare it with competition that we have from other provinces. People might leave here and go to an institution outside the province. I want to find reasons for people to stay in New Brunswick, and I want to find reasons for people to work here in New Brunswick.

The goal is that we will not leave the stones unturned. We will not cherry-pick one over the other. We will look at an all-encompassing package, and we will base the decision on the results that we find—not on emotions or intuition but on the results that we find as to whether it is working. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr. Bourque: The company Corridor Resources, which wants to start hydraulic fracturing again here in New Brunswick, has announced that it is prepared to inject up to \$70 million if the government lifts the moratorium. Can the Premier or minister responsible for this file tell the House if they have met with representatives of Corridor Resources or any other company involved in hydraulic fracturing?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Holland: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member opposite. You know, there is another narrative in this story that has not been told yet. Prior to September 24, there had not been a lot of mention of collaboration or progressive working with other parties. It is interesting that after the election on September 24, that became the word of the day from the members opposite because they had to—they were in a situation where collaboration had to take place.

I would like to make the point that prior to the election, part of our platform and a big part of who we were as a party was talking and working with regions and municipalities to ensure that, regardless of it being about resource development or any other issues that affected them, they had a voice at the table. We wanted individuals to have influence, and unlike the members opposite when they were in government, we put in our platform that it was a government issue that we would stand on, Mr. Speaker.



Mr. Bourque: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is certainly an interesting narrative when we compare it with the throne speech, which said that the government would provide straight answers to straight questions.

Here is a straight question to the minister opposite or to the Premier: Again, have they met with people from Corridor Resources or from any other company that would be open to fracturing in New Brunswick? Have they met with them? That is a straight question. If so, I am also interested in another question. Will they provide this House with the proposal that they have discussed? We feel it is important that these things are discussed openly in the Legislature. Will they do that? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, during the campaign actually, I spoke with the manager at Corridor Resources and asked him about his interest and whether he would come back to New Brunswick. If you recall, he said that Corridor was looking to invest \$70 million here in our province on the leaseholds that it currently has, the ones that have been in service for 15 or 20 years. I am asking the member opposite... We are not asking for everything here. Let's look at opportunities. That has been the discussion. I have had recent discussions about whether it is possible and still real, and that has been the extent of it. Is it still real?

What is real, Mr. Speaker, is that our gas prices are, by far, the highest in Canada right now, and it is real because our domestic sources have run out. Now, we are getting gas from the Midwest, and that is coming out... It is all pipeline charges. What is real, Mr. Speaker, is that we have a potash mine that has shut down and has little hope of restarting with the gas prices the way they are today. What is real is that we have an opportunity to help New Brunswick move along in a manageable fashion that works for New Brunswickers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bourque: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the answer from the Premier.

The Premier said to the media on November 21, I believe: "They should let this region do what it wants to do." It is referring here to the Sussex region, I believe. "Because we're going to have to do things like this all over the province." That leads me to believe that maybe... We are talking about the Sussex region, but are there other regions that are being discussed? Namely, is the region of Turtle Creek also on the table? My question is this: Is there openness not only to the Sussex region but also to the Turtle Creek region? That is my question. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, the fearmongering continues. I am sure that the member opposite knows exactly what I was talking about when I referenced that. We will have to do what is right for different communities and do it in different ways that work for them. That is what that was about, and he knows that very well.

To bury our heads in the sand and try to throw a blanket on it is not our goal, Mr. Speaker. Our goal is working with communities in their communities, working with them for what works for them, and making those communities prosper in their own way. That is the goal. It is region by



region, not a blanket approach. We will work on a number of issues in a number of regions and on their priorities to make them successful because the status quo or going behind is not going to be acceptable for this government, Mr. Speaker.

Hospitals

Mr. Harvey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to ask my first question in this House. I have a question for the Minister of Health. Last Friday, the Minister of Health stated that New Brunswickers must choose between proximity and quality regarding their health care. It is no secret that the members opposite wish to close rural hospitals. New Brunswickers deserve to know the facts moving forward. Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask the Minister of Health this: Which rural hospitals will this government be closing? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Flemming: We are not closing any rural hospitals.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Flemming: Mr. Speaker, if I had known it was that easy, I would have done it long ago.

All kidding aside, we are not closing rural hospitals. One of the things that we need to do is to have the highest level of health care we possibly can in those rural hospitals. We own the buildings. They are there. They are built, and they are, for the most part, paid for. Nobody is going to take a wrecking ball to them. We are going to look at the needs of the communities. We are going to look at the highest and best use of those buildings to bring good, quality health care to the people in those communities. As I said before, I was not talking about anything other than the people...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Harvey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health, I appreciate that answer. It was a very clear answer. No rural hospitals will be closing in New Brunswick now or in the future.

I appreciate the answer in the sense that it was an answer, but I want to mention to the honourable member across the way, the Minister of Health, that when we on this side were in government on that side, we did an exercise with the SPR. We know exactly what it costs to run rural and urban hospitals. I looked at it specifically in my own riding. I know that we get good efficiency and good value for that money, so I invite the Minister of Health to come to our area and to visit all the rural hospitals across the province. I think that he will see the valuable services they provide in primary health care. I invite the minister to visit our area in Perth-Andover. This is a very easy question: When are you coming to Perth-Andover?



Hon. Mr. Flemming: If you are my host, it will be sooner not later. I would be happy to go to Perth-Andover. As a matter of fact, when I was appointed Minister of Health some six-odd years ago, one of the first things I did was to visit every single hospital in New Brunswick. I met with the medical staff. I met with nurses, and I met with doctors. I had a personal mission to understand each individual hospital and what its strength was, what it could do, and what it could do better. I am more than happy to do that again. I would also say that I would not restrict myself to the people of Perth nor to my friend, the member for...

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Flemming: Chuck, that is a stretch. You are a stretch. I would have to get a few concessions out of you before I went. I am not sure that I could handle all...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Homeless Shelters

Mrs. Harris: Mr. Speaker, our province's most vulnerable population is being left out in the cold, fighting New Brunswick's harsh winters in tents. The number of people using Fredericton Homeless Shelters has risen by 50 since 2015. The Outflow men's shelter in Saint John is at 128% occupancy so far this year. The YMCA's ReConnect outreach program of Moncton reported that 120 people are sleeping outdoors. This is also arising in other municipalities and in the rural areas of the province. There is a serious need for more emergency shelter space across this province, and we are hearing it from all parties in this House. My question is for the minister. What action is this government taking?

Hon. Mrs. Shephard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. As we have stated in the House before, since the very time that winter has been upon us, we have been mobilizing to make sure that we can put services in place. Those energies are now on the ground and are being implemented. We will have a more formal announcement of what is happening in, at the very least, a maximum of 48 hours. We will be looking to make known what that program will be in more than one community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Waste Management

Mr. Coon: Mr. Speaker, among a number of things that are missing from the government's throne speech is any commitment to address the waste and plastic concerns that so many New Brunswickers have. New Brunswick produces 600 kg of waste per capita compared to 400 kg in Nova Scotia. Recently, I was quite shocked to learn that, in fact, microplastics are being found in the clams and mussels from our shores.

On Friday, all the Environment Ministers from across Canada met and agreed to initiate a process to cut Canada's waste in half by 2040 and to eliminate plastic waste. My question is for



the Minister of Environment and Local Government. What action will he take here in New Brunswick to cut our waste in half and to eliminate plastic waste?

Hon. Mr. Carr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the leader of his party. I was on a call on Friday with the other ministers of the country. It was my very first conference call with those people. I had a chance to go over the draft and to agree in principle with those goals.

I was also happy to speak very briefly about waste reduction as well as about the conference call on Friday with the member who asked the question, and he diligently tweeted about it right after the announcement was made. We spoke briefly on Saturday about our getting together with perhaps the critic from the opposition party and a member from the other party just to go over some strategies on what we can put together for ideas going forward to reach these targets. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. Coon: The lack of importance given to waste reduction and recycling is a concern often raised at the community meetings we organize in Fredericton. It is the kind of issue that requires the involvement of the provincial government. Since Bernard Lord's departure, no government has had the courage to take steps that will make a real difference in this matter. Does the Minister of Environment and Local Government intend to take action in order to eliminate plastic waste and truly meet the expectations of New Brunswickers with regard to improving recycling and composting services?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Carr: Once again, Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the question and the interest from the member opposite. I have to say that, as I have been reading in the department files on environmental services, waste reduction, and the education needed, we all need to play our part in reducing, reusing, and recycling. Any suggestions that members opposite have to make my department and New Brunswickers successful in this endeavour are more than welcome. Thank you.

Roads

Mr. Austin: Again, with winter upon us... As I ask this question, we are in the middle of another storm, one of two that are about to hit us in the next little bit. I do have serious concerns about the safety of our roads heading into the winter season, especially based on past years. Frankly, the roads have been less than acceptable. There were long waits for roads to be plowed, and we have plow operators who are facing burnout, after working many, many hours of overtime in previous years. My question is, Can the Minister of Transportation assure this House and the people of New Brunswick that the assets are ready, both human resources and tangible assets, to make sure that our roads are cleared in an appropriate time?



Hon. Mr. Oliver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for my first question in the House, and I hope to be able to answer to his satisfaction. At the present time, I want to make the member aware of the fact that 89% of our assets are now active. It was a problem that we inherited. We were short on a number of our assets, but we are quickly putting them back into service.

Certainly, we acknowledge that winters in New Brunswick are putting more of a stress on the department than they have in the past and that it is our job to make sure that our infrastructure is ready and safe for all operators to get home or get back and forth to work safely. It is an endeavour that we will continue.

I would say that we are always on the lookout for experienced operators. If you or any other members in the House have some people that you would like to propose, we would be more than happy to accept their résumés. Thank you very much.

Mr. Austin: I would like to thank the minister for that honest answer.

I do have some concerns. Again, I am all about efficiencies within government and I commend this government on looking for those efficiencies within government. However, when it comes to transportation and safe roads, they should be enhanced, not cut. I do have to remind folks that it was the Alward government that made significant cuts to DTI. I want to be assured again by the government that, indeed, there will be no further cuts to DTI and, instead, this essential government service will be enhanced for the people of New Brunswick.

Hon. Mr. Oliver: I want to thank the member again for his question. Certainly, it is our intent that we will address all the issues that face us on our roads.

Our budget is set for winter maintenance. However, we know that we cannot predict the weather and we cannot predict the road conditions. We always make sure that we spend above and beyond if we have to in order to make sure that the roads are safe. That is a commitment that we have made. The Premier has always said that he wants to make sure that our rural roads are in good condition so that we can enjoy them and not worry about whether they are safe or not. That is our commitment to you and to the people of New Brunswick, and we hope that we can meet it satisfactorily.

[*Translation*]

Government Finances

Mr. Melanson: My question is about public finances. It is quite common knowledge that, over the past four years, the previous government always fulfilled its financial obligations and that the quarterly update showed that the trend was still positive.



I understand that, since September 24, election day, the government has changed and the former Minister of Finance has provided an update on the first quarter in July, which showed that the financial situation had improved by \$1.3 million.

Today, I am asking the Minister of Finance if he could tell us when he will provide an update on the financial situation of the New Brunswick government in the second quarter, since, after an election, such a report is usually tabled in November.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Steeves: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member opposite, thank you for the question.

We have different views as to what was successful in the last four years financially speaking, but this government is about efficiencies. It is about spending money in the right places for New Brunswickers. The second-quarter announcements will be coming out very shortly. We are working on those, and I want to assure the member of that.

The money has to be spent in a smart way. The savings have to be found where they can be found without hurting anybody in New Brunswick. We have to find exactly the dollars that we need to make this government run perfectly, to make it run well, to pay off the debt, and to get that deficit down if we can. That is what we are trying to do.

Mr. Melanson: Mr. Speaker, I guess the question specifically is this: When will the Minister of Finance table the second-quarter update? Normally, after an election, it is tabled or made public in the month of November. I know that the transition has been very different this time around since September 24, but we are in the last week of the month of November. I would ask the Minister of Finance to give us a specific timeline as to when we can have the Q2 update of the financial situation of the provincial government.

Hon. Mr. Steeves: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you, to the member for the question. I would expect that you will have that within the week, member.

NB Power

Mr. Kenny: It is my honour to ask my first question in the opposition this time around. At this time, I want to thank all the great women and men who work for NB Power throughout the province, especially at times when we have storms throughout the province. They put their lives in danger to make sure that we have power throughout the province, and it has been a difficult time.

With that said, I would like to ask the Minister of Energy and Resource Development whether he was briefed or consulted in advance of the termination of employees that occurred at NB Power last week.



Hon. Mr. Holland: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to stand and answer a question from the member opposite. We have known each other for quite a long time and have spent many days talking about making New Brunswick better.

To respond to that question, first of all, I am sure the member understands that it relates to HR issues and a minister cannot speak directly to hiring, HR, or anything related to that. Second, NB Power is a public utility and a Crown corporation that operates at arm's length, with a great deal of autonomy. As a result, the focus has been on the performance of the organization. I have not met with anybody in relation to HR. The other thing, the third point, is that it has been days since I have been the minister, but I have met with NB Power several times. Our conversations have been focused on a vision for a greater New Brunswick through better results for the ratepayer and for all of us as New Brunswickers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kenny: I thank you for the answer...

Mr. Speaker: Sorry. Question period is over.

