

December 13, 2018

[Original]

Highways

Mrs. Harris: Mr. Speaker, as I stood in the House yesterday to ask my questions, my passion and care about the safety of motorists on Route 11 and my compassion for the families that have suffered losing their loved ones certainly came through. It was absolutely disturbing to have the Premier of the province mock me and these families by stating: “I hope that there is a paramedic in the House. The emotions and tensions are rising.” Mr. Speaker, please tell the Premier that this is no laughing matter.

My question is to the Premier, who was over there laughing: When will you show some compassion and concern to the thousands of motorists using Route 11 and admit that their lives matter by moving ahead with these important infrastructure investments?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a new level of passion and acting in this House. We have seen it over and over again. I think that if we want to talk about the real concerns and we want to talk about the statistics around making highways safe in this province, then we talk about all the highways that people are travelling on. We do not overexpend, and we do not underexpend. We expend the right amount of money to make it work for the New Brunswick citizens.

The problem is, irrespective of what money is being spent, we have not gotten the results that we need. There does not seem to be any rationale between how much money is spent and how many tax dollars are charged in order to pay for it. There does not seem to be any rationale at all. Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a new rationale today. We are concerned about taxes, and we have said that we are not going to increase taxes. We are concerned about highways, and we are concerned about highways throughout the province—not just a construction project to keep people busy but a plan to rebuild New Brunswick, a plan to see tourists back in our province, and a plan to see our province survive another day through financial success, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Harris: Mr. Speaker, I guess that the Premier has nothing to say to the families that have lost their loved ones.

The Premier says that passing lanes and moose fencing are the real solutions. However, passing lanes will not address the approximately 60 conflict points of the Glenwood-to-Miramichi kilometre stretch and moose fencing cannot be installed because of all the different driveways. From 1999 to 2017, the Glenwood-to-Miramichi stretch saw 308 collisions, including 8 fatalities, and it saw 66 moose-vehicle collisions. On the southern end during this same time period, there were 294 collisions and 11 fatalities, including 39 moose collisions.



If there is one thing in politics that is worse than being wrong, it is being heartless, and somehow, the Premier manages to do both. My question to the Premier and his Alliance friends is this: What do you have to say to the families that have lost loved ones on Route 11?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, despite the words, at least the tone is reduced today, so there is a positive step.

I think that in relation to the statistics, Mr. Speaker, there are very clear statistics on highway construction.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: There are very clear statistics. And, yes, you can pick out the few that work in order to try to make your point. But if you look at standards around highway construction around Canada—not just New Brunswick because we have been overbuilding for years—and you look at cases such as Route 1 to St. Stephen, you will say: The only things we are missing here are cars. People remark on how few cars they see while we miss our coastline.

To sit here and quote a few statistics and not understand the highway standards of the province or the highway standards of the country in terms of best practices... Yes, we would like to have everybody travel on separate roads, no question, so that people would never meet each other on the highways, but, Mr. Speaker, some things are not practical. You have to make decisions that make sense. I appreciate that the one decision that never makes any sense to the members opposite is how much money we can spend because they really do not care, Mr. Speaker.

Capital Budget

Mr. Melanson: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Premier clearly outlined the way that he does things. He said: I do not need 50¢ on the dollar for projects I do not need.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that many people listening were very much concerned with those comments. Can the Premier do the right thing this morning and apologize to all New Brunswickers, including road builders, construction workers, municipalities, educators, students, and, yes, mothers? The Premier seems to care more about what he needs than what they need.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the opposition members would like to make this about me. But do you know what? It is about New Brunswick. It is about New Brunswick. They can spend their time trying to take personal shots at me and how I look at things, but, Mr. Speaker, I look at futures in New Brunswick, for our people, for our kids. I look for kids to come back here, live here, and work here. I look for service that goes above any



service level in any province, and I look for working with the people whom we are working with every day in the civil service to help us get there, to help us make sense of the decisions. I want to see a nursing surplus, not the nursing shortage that is planned over the next three years. I want to see education results that are not eighth in the country but actually first in the country. And I want to see our province not be rated as the lowest economy in the province, at 1%, but be number one and be the best it can be.

I have seen the potential. I saw it last week in my discussions with the First Ministers. It is not about somebody handing us a 50¢ dollar and saying that it is good. We do not need 50¢ dollars, Mr. Speaker, for things that we do not need to build. That is the point. We want 50¢ dollars on things that we have to have.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Mr. Melanson: Mr. Speaker, it is not we who are making the issues about him. You did it yourself, Mr. Premier, yesterday, when you used that quote.

Being the Premier and governing New Brunswick is about more than what the Premier needs. It cannot be about the Premier. It should be about the people's needs. With the capital budget being cut by over \$265 million, can the Minister of Finance explain to New Brunswickers what the impact will be on jobs, small business, public safety, appropriate education conditions, our municipalities, and, yes, rural New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Steeves: Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, thank you for the question. This capital budget is about fiscal responsibility. It is about managing the assets that we have right now. You cannot afford a BOGO if you cannot afford the first piece, right? In a buy one, get one free, if you cannot afford to buy the first piece, then you cannot afford the second piece for free. That is what this is about. It is about protecting all New Brunswickers.

It is about protecting moms and students and families. It is about protecting future generations. It is about not saddling our children and our grandchildren with crippling debt. That is what this budget is about. It is about helping New Brunswickers and understanding their needs and their wants and the difference between the two. Their needs are what we are trying to take care of, Mr. Speaker. Their needs are what we are trying to take care of.

[*Translation*]

Memramcook Institute

Mr. J. LeBlanc: Disappointed, senseless, surprised, shocked, frustrated: these are the words used in the media by people from Memramcook to refer to the cancellation of the Memramcook Institute renovations. The Mayor of Memramcook even went so far as to say that the Conservative leader lied to him. In fact, during the election campaign, the Conservative leader went to see the Mayor of Memramcook, and they talked about the institute. Now that



the Conservative leader is Premier, he is cancelling the renovations, and the mayor is publicly saying, and I reiterate, that the Conservative leader lied to him. The accusation is serious. Can the Conservative leader explain to us precisely what he said to the Mayor of Memramcook?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, the mayor and I did talk about the institute and about the future of the institute. We discussed what it was going to be used for, and he did not know because the federal government had pulled out of a plan to have it being used. He said: Would you continue to invest money? I said: Well, I do not want to see the building half-built. So we said that we are not going to continue with it right now.

But what I want from the mayor and that town is to figure out what it is going to be used for because spending \$40 million and having no clue how it is going to be used... I find that to be a bit of a problem, and I think that if we are going to continue to spend money, we should have some idea of what it is going to accomplish. My comment back to the mayor is: Let's make a plan. Let's figure out what it is going to be used for and not just build an empty building and hope that something will happen. Let's do it right.

After all, I listened to the member and the Green Party talk about what has changed. In 1963, the decision was made to create the Université de Moncton. I appreciate the cultural value of that institution, but the decision was made to move, so let's do what makes...

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

New Brunswick Museum

Mr. J. LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Leader is cancelling the New Brunswick Museum project in Saint John. I would like to point out, in case he does not know, that that museum is not a warehouse. Art and artifact collections are not barrels of oil. Since he decided to cancel the museum project, does the Premier have a plan for the care and conservation of the collections?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: We do have a plan, but we will do it with my colleagues and we will do it with the people in the museum community in Saint John and in other aspects in the area. But we do not have a plan to spend \$100 million—that is true—because that is not necessary in order to save our artifacts and in order to do what is right. We know that there is an opportunity in the current museum, we know that it is a heritage site that we value, and we know that there are artifacts there that we must protect. We are not saying any of that, but building a \$100-million structure on a property that has real infrastructure problems on the seawall... That is another \$6 million or \$8 million that did not really register in the current plan. It was just a headline. It was just another headline with another little clip about how we will spend more money.



There are other innovative ways to create an opportunity for our artifacts to be displayed along the waterfront, and we are working on that. Do you know what is going to save New Brunswick, Mr. Speaker? It is being innovative. It is not just throwing money at things.

Government Contracts

Mr. McKee: The government proposes in the capital budget to cut very important projects, including projects that are under way. Some are 50% to 60% completed. Businesses that depend on those contracts for their livelihood will feel the pressure. I have no doubt that the proposed budget cuts and the resulting termination of contracts will have major effects on businesses working on those projects. The Premier is surely familiar with private industry, and I know that the affected businesses will not take this lightly.

The termination of contracts will no doubt make the government vulnerable to several legal challenges. If this government wishes to maintain public confidence in doing business with it... My question for the Attorney General is whether consideration has been given to the potential legal challenges and whether compensation will be made available to businesses for the government's unilateral termination of contracts.

Hon. Mrs. Anderson-Mason: First, I want to thank you very much for my very first question in the House.

I can assure the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, that these decisions have not been taken lightly. They have been thoroughly reviewed and are under review in the department. If the member has any further questions, I have indicated in the past that my door is always open and that I am very willing to discuss them at any time. We have taken this very seriously, and we will continue to do that. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. McKee: The issues are under review, but the decision has already been made in the budget. So, it seems the government does not take the consequences of breaching contracts seriously. Several projects were already underway, and there will be major consequences for the companies involved.

We saw yesterday that the cancellation of the courthouse project at the Centennial Building represents a loss of at least \$16 million. You may rest assured that major legal action will be brought against the government for breach of contract. Without compensation, these breaches of contract will undoubtedly undermine people's confidence in doing business with the government. They could even lead to a credit rating downgrade.

So, I am again asking whether the Attorney General has provided the government with an opinion on the legal consequences of the breaches of contract that are expected to follow the proposed budget cuts.



[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. The breach of contract is a breach of contract that the previous government had with the citizens of this province, with taking their taxpayers' dollars and throwing them everywhere. The situation was about spending more money on things that are not necessary and just keeping on dumping down that hole, thinking that was the right path for our economic future. It was a situation of saying that we will continue to tax people more.

DBRS was on the radio this morning talking about, Well, if the government has an opportunity to tax more, but we are not sure necessarily that New Brunswick does... That was kind of... We are kind of up at the max with other provinces here, and can we tax more to pay for this? That was a concern that DBRS had.

The issue, as DBRS said, is that we need to have a funding model that is not all public sector money. We appreciate that pulling the public sector money out is going to have an economic impact. We need to replace it with private sector money. My experience goes to dealing with private sector investment, not creating an economy through tax-funded dollars. There is a strategic difference to allow for the future of our province to be successful.

[Translation]

Schools

Mrs. F. Landry: We were shocked to learn that the planned midlife upgrade for the Cité des Jeunes A.-M.-Sormany in Edmundston would be cancelled. This project represents an investment of \$25 million to \$30 million over six years.

The work that began at the school in 2017 in the first gymnasium included redoing the floor and putting in locker rooms with wheelchair-accessible showers. The second gymnasium in the school has serious problems with water infiltration and accumulation under the hardwood floor. We even have to heat the gymnasium in summer to get rid of the water.

I am therefore asking the minister what savings are significant enough to justify not giving disabled people dignity and greater autonomy. Also, honourable minister, I would like to know why students from Hanwell take priority over the thousands of students from the only high school in the Greater Madawaska area.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. Go down the same road again. This government is making decisions in the best interests of the schoolchildren of this province and the taxpayers of this province and all the citizens of this province. We were left in a position...



(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Cardy: We were left in a position where that government, with the now-absent former Premier, who seems to be off hiding in Ottawa attending Christmas parties rather than tending to the business of the House...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Cardy: Rather than standing up in this House and being able to answer questions about where the money went... We have \$1 billion in new taxes that went to no public services and did not result in economic growth. We have money that went into the pockets of people who were supposed to organize games and who lined their own pockets and did not produce games.

What we see now is a government on this side of the House left to clean up this mess, to use the words of the member opposite from a little while ago. What we are having to do is to make difficult decisions, but we are going to make sure that every child is looked after, that schools are safe, and that children are protected.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

[*Translation*]

Bridges

Ms. Thériault: During the last election campaign, the Conservative leader went to Shippagan. The man who is now his Deputy Premier said at the time that, once elected, the Conservative leader, himself an engineer, would go look at the bridge between Shippagan and Lamèque and that it would not be necessary to get advice from the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure to announce the construction of a new bridge within the first six months of his mandate. So, my question is for the Premier: Since no new bridge was announced in the capital budget, should people in Shippagan-Lamèque-Miscou assume that the engineer from Quispamsis cannot make such a decision?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I did visit the bridge, actually. It was before the election. I did it with my colleague. We went out in a boat and went underneath the bridge. I am not a civil engineer, but I am an engineer.



I asked a simple question when I met with the community. The minister and I met with the community at that time, and we talked about the report that it had put together. I had one simple question on the report that was put together on the justification for the bridge. I only had to be there for probably only 10 minutes or less to realize that there needed to be a bridge. No one had to deny that, but the committee members gave me all this time to justify all the businesses, all the traffic, and all of this. I said: I do not need justification for any of that. I would like to know the assessment on the condition of the bridge.

We will rebuild the bridge based on the assessment and the timing necessary to ensure that there will always be a bridge that will be reliable and will provide safe transport. It is not difficult, Mr. Speaker. It is an assessment, which did not exist.

Domestic Violence Death Review Committee

Mr. Coon: Mr. Speaker, the secrecy surrounding the work of the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee is just unacceptable. It was recently reported in the media that the daughter of a woman who was murdered does not even know whether her mother's case was ever reviewed. The committee's recommendations are not public. They are never made public. The public never knows what it suggests should be done to reduce the rate of murders of women by intimate partners. Will the Minister of Public Safety ensure that family members are asked for their input into the committee's review, and will he commit to making its recommendations public on an annual basis, as is now the case for the Child Death Review Committee's recommendations?

Hon. Mr. Urquhart: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will advise the... Of course, we will not speak of specific cases, but that is one board that... I have already directed the department to assess the way the board does the reviews: Is it proper? What information is not being released or is being released?

I can assure you that changes will be coming, hopefully, sooner rather than later. We will be making sure that the reviews are done in a proper fashion and that information involving the families... Because I feel that families should be involved, they will be involved.

Mr. Coon: Mr. Speaker, in addition to the secret nature of the recommendations of the committee, this Legislature has no mechanism to ensure that they are actually implemented by the ministers who receive them from the Chief Coroner. How is the work of the committee supposed to reduce the number of women murdered by their intimate partners if its recommendations not only remain secret but also go nowhere?

The committee has examined the murders of eight women in the past six years, but we have no idea whether any resulting action has been taken by the ministers responsible to prevent future murders of women by their intimate partners. Will the Premier establish an accountability mechanism within this House to ensure that the recommendations of the committee are actually implemented? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



Hon. Mr. Urquhart: Again, thank you, member. That is one of the recommendations that I have also asked about. How do we present it back to the Legislature? I cannot give you an answer today, but I will certainly take it under review. I also encourage you to meet with my department with your concerns, and I feel that between the two of us, we can bring regulations out that will satisfy you and the people of New Brunswick.

Taxation

Mr. Austin: Mr. Speaker, the capital budget had some significant delays to infrastructure, which I agree is a needed measure. The previous government's tax-and-spend free-for-all, offering free ponies to all citizens of the province, has contributed to the debt load and fiscal burden for future generations, and a more realistic and prudent approach to the provincial budget is critical.

The People's Alliance has worked tirelessly to promote keeping government out of people's pockets. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, with New Brunswickers paying an enormous amount of taxes and fees that cut into their ability to maintain their basic needs, will this government commit to working with our caucus to lower those taxes and fees for ordinary New Brunswickers within a balanced budget?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. Yes, indeed, our goal is to reduce taxes. There is no question about it. I want to do that. We started very quickly with looking at impacts on small businesses as well as how we can make small businesses here more efficient to hire more people and to get more people in the workforce who are not just on the government payroll.

We are trying to get our costs and our spending down so that we can take the next step, which is to reduce taxes for the citizens so that people will not be looking at New Brunswick from afar and saying: I cannot go back there because expenses are just too high and taxes are too high. I can live here more cheaply. We want New Brunswick to be a destination of choice, and part of that choice is a tax system that is not only fair and equitable but, hopefully, the best in the country.

Roads

Mr. DeSaulniers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I may sound like a broken record as I stand in this place, but I am going to do it again. I am very much concerned about the safety of the people on our roads and highways during the winter, and I hope the folks in the red-green show will agree with me that we need to take this thing seriously. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure assure New Brunswickers that cuts to the capital budget will not place people's safety at risk while driving on New Brunswick's roads and highways this winter?



Hon. Mr. Oliver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for the question. As I have said many times, the safety of our travelling public is primary. It is the most important part of what we do here at the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, and I can assure the member that the allocation for the budget for winter maintenance is there. If we have to spend more than the budget, we always make sure that the winter maintenance program is looked after, and I can assure you that our plows and personnel will be out on the roads making sure that the roads are safe for our travelling public. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. K. Chiasson: This morning, there is a lot of talk about roads and highways, but it is important to note that the roadwork sector is the one most affected by the drastic cuts made by the Progressive Conservative government.

The Provincial Designated Highways Program enables municipalities to enhance their highway infrastructure and stimulate economic growth in their regions. The needs are great, and that is why we increased the funding to \$25 million in 2015. Highways are a provincial responsibility, yet the Premier just announced that he is going to cut funding for this program by more than 60%. So, my question is very simple: How does the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure intend to meet the urgent needs of municipalities, given that he has just taken the axe to this program, which was already failing to satisfy demand?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Steeves: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's not forget that this capital budget has over \$600 million going into New Brunswick to serve New Brunswickers. Let's not forget that over \$321 million of that is going to DTI. It is going to be repairing roads, and it is going to be keeping the infrastructure that we have in place and sustaining that. Before we build new, we have to sustain what we already have. Some \$321 million and more is going toward roads and toward the upkeep of our province. DTI is being funded, and it is doing what it can for all New Brunswickers. Once again, it is needs and not necessarily wants, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. K. Chiasson: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance did not once mention the Municipal Designated Highway Program, yet that was the question that I asked. Maybe he does not even know what the program is for, so I will explain it a bit. This program is extremely important to municipalities because it helps them finance maintenance work done on provincial roads that pass through their towns. Some municipalities might be fortunate enough to be able to get some work done without relying on the government, but the reality is that most are smaller communities in rural areas of the province and they do not have the tax base to invest in such large projects.

Yesterday, the Premier said that we do not need more projects and that the private sector should be the one investing. Mr. Speaker, the Premier is giving me the impression that he is going at this alone, and he seems to be making cuts without consulting municipalities or taking



into account the impact that those cuts have on our regions. Before pointing the finger, I am going to ask the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure whether his government consulted with the three municipal associations before making a decision to cut more than 60% of the funding of this essential...

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting how things that go around come around. There was an excise tax that the previous government got rid of that went to funding for municipal roads and highways. There was gas tax money that came back. Remember the climate scheme that was actually going around and around. That money was being taken out of there. That was money that was all allocated to highways, roads, and bridges and, particularly in those cases, allocated to communities. You look at this process, and you say that a lot of this is just going in circles. There were things that were taken out purposely that affected municipalities directly.

We have a budget that lays it all out there, and we are saying that we are going to work on the priorities in each community. Do you know what? It is not going to be smoke and mirrors. It is not going to be a hidden gem that someone politically pulls in and pulls out of. It is going to be a proper analysis of the needs of each road, highway, and municipality, and the money that was deserved then is coming back to them and will get back to them through the system that was already available to do so. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Bridges

Mrs. Harris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier bragged yesterday that he told the rest of Canada that New Brunswick is not interested in or does not need any of the 50¢ dollars to spend on very important infrastructure projects. I daresay, I doubt all the private companies in New Brunswick agree with that.

My question for the Premier of the Conservative-Alliance party is this. Whereas the Anderson Bridge is a vital link for the people and businesses in northern New Brunswick, providing connections to the Trans-Canada Highway, whereas it is currently down to one lane, with the possibility of shutting down completely due to structural problems, and whereas I believe this cost-shared agreement with the federal government most certainly will help move New Brunswick forward, I want to ask the Premier a clear question and expect a clear answer. Is the money still in place for this project, and will there be shovels in the ground this spring, as planned in our last capital budget?

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Stewart: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker, through to the member opposite. Let's take a little walk down memory lane. Remember the time I came in here, Mr. Speaker, and



had to shame the Minister of Transportation into actually building the bridge. Do you remember that? It happened on two occasions in question period. The former government had no plan for the Anderson Bridge, and it was my hard work that put it on the books anyway. Yes, there is money in the budget this year for the Anderson Bridge. That is the answer. That is the answer.

Mr. Speaker: Question period is over.

