

March 26, 2019

[Original]

Mr. D. Landry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

I, too, want to welcome the students, the teachers, and the school bus drivers who are in the Legislature today. They are our future, and I really respect the fact that they want to come and listen to us today.

[Translation]

I am taking advantage of my good mood to wish all members in the House a good week.

Exports

My question is for the Premier this morning. Last fall, you were quoted in a news release from ACOA concerning trade with China.

[Original]

Many New Brunswick companies do business in China and the results from this trade mission prove once again that China is an excellent export market for our province.

[Translation]

In your view, Mr. Premier, how important is the Chinese export market for private sector growth in New Brunswick?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. I am not sure that I completely understood the question. If you are looking at China as important to our export growth in the province, absolutely. I am certainly thinking about the fisheries sector, particularly lobster and oysters. We were talking... When we were out with the Consul General just this past week, we were chatting about the timeline that it takes. Fresh lobster comes off the boat, and, let's say, 12 hours later, it is on a table in China.



Of course, we know that a lot of that increase has resulted from the situation in the United States and what has changed there in relation to its exports. I value all trading partners, and I certainly value China as one of them. We will continue to grow that market because the people in our province depend on that. They depend on growth opportunities, and we are going to continue to look for private sector growth opportunities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Mr. D. Landry: I want to put things into perspective. Our businesses did \$633 million worth of trade in 2017, and the Chinese market for our lobster was 10 times what it was 10 years earlier. I want to ask the Premier this: Given the importance of this market, how concerned is he by some of the comments his Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development has made about China over the last few months?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Once again, thank you for the question. You know, I have met with several of the Chinese officials, such as Dr. Francis Pang, who recently won the Order of Canada, and we had these discussions in relation to the Consul General as well. We will look at opportunities on the export side. We will look at opportunities on the educational side, but I think that our goal in New Brunswick is this: How do we ensure that we are meeting the standards?

In the budget speech, my colleague, a week ago, talked about how we are failing at the basics in our province. We are eighth in the country in education, and that is not acceptable, Mr. Speaker. We cannot teach both languages in our province. Less than 10% of our kids in the English system are bilingual. The conversation that we had was around this: How do we get good at what we are doing? How do we ensure that we respect and understand each other's cultures? How do we ensure that our priorities are first and foremost in our own classrooms? Those are the discussions we had.

In terms of the contracts we have and how we move forward in that regard, we will honour those contracts because it is important that we do that to maintain an open relationship, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, Canada's former Ambassador to China, Guy Saint-Jacques, appointed by the Harper government, said that our Education Minister had clearly overstepped his bounds on this one. Chinese officials took note of these very inflammatory comments. Given that, has the Premier's Office ordered the Education Minister to stop espousing his personal opinion about China?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you again for the question. I have spoken to the ambassador in addition to the other gentleman I mentioned. And, yes, I think that in talking about the statements that we make individually, it is important that we recognize the challenges that we have and it is important that we understand each other, our personal views and our views as members of the



Crown. I think that we recognize... We recognize that in all cases, you know, a lot of us say things and then say: Okay, well, maybe I could have said that differently.

Let's not turn this into more because what that does is strain the relationship that we want to ensure we maintain. That is the goal. We can make political hay out of it, we can make headlines out of it, or we can work together to try to maintain a relationship that is so important, as my colleague opposite pointed out. It is so important that we do not lose that... You estimated it to be under \$400 million of trade. That impacts the New Brunswickers who we want to ensure have a market for their goods. Let's not make this a political-hay day. Let's make it a relationship that we can continue to foster. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. D. Landry: I completely agree with what the Premier just said. However, given what the minister said on this issue, have you considered removing him from this file?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: You know, I think in terms of the Minister of Education, I am proud of the work that he is going to do for us in education. For the first time, we are getting under the hood of why our education system is failing. For the first time, we are talking to teachers, something we encouraged the previous government to allow to happen and something we encouraged by saying that we wanted voices from the classroom, and I remember speaking directly with the member opposite in his former role about this situation.

Teachers have to take control of the classrooms, control of the curriculum, and control of how we educate and how we graduate our kids because, as we have said over and over again, eighth place is not good enough. Do you know what? Our Minister of Education, working with teachers, is going to move that bar. We are going to move on up to third, to second, and to first. We are not going to sit idle, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. D. Landry: It is amusing to see the Premier get up in arms about this, but he still has not answered my question. We really did not have such a bad relationship with teachers when our government was in office.

What I asked the Premier was whether he would remove his minister as a result of the comments he made on this file.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: We are working with the Chinese. I am, and the minister is. We are working with them on this file. The Minister of Education will continue to be the Minister of Education.



We will continue to address and move forward other items in the educational world. But, Mr. Speaker, the point that I wanted to make and was trying to make very clearly is that having a relationship with the teachers and listening to teachers about their concerns in their classrooms is very different, and we could not get interest in that regard.

When the move was made from Grade 3 to Grade 1, it was the teachers—it was the teachers—saying: Do not do this. It was the department saying: Do not do this. But it did not matter. It did not matter. It forged ahead anyway. What did we find out? Teachers could not be found. People could not be found, but it was okay: Let anyone who might even remotely speak French come in to teach. Mr. Speaker, that is not good enough.

I do not think that talking to teachers is the same as listening to teachers and reacting to their concerns, and that is the fundamental difference, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, I am going to try my luck in English. I did not ask the Premier to take the minister out of his department. I am asking him to recuse him from this file. That is totally different. I think that the minister is doing a good job. I do not want him to lose his job. I just want to ask the Premier whether he will be recusing the minister from that particular file.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: I guess that the short answer is no, but in raising the issue in terms of my active involvement in it, it is to ensure that they understand that we have to work together as a government. We have to ensure that other issues are not impacted negatively because there is a lot more at stake here in relation to our trade and the individuals around the province. We will continue. I will continue to be involved. I will continue to be involved with the Minister of Education, but we will work to ensure that the relationship is sound, that the working relationship continues to grow economically, and that we will have an export market that works for the people of this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

French Immersion

Mr. C. Chiasson: Yes, Mr. Speaker, he is doing a good job at messing up a lot of things.

My question is for the Minister of Education. A large number of people, including experts, came forward to slam the minister for his ridiculous so-called survey on French immersion. People called it extremely biased, designed with a specific outcome in mind. Mr. Speaker, were those SurveyMonkey questions actually written by a monkey alone, or did the minister collaborate by inserting his extremely biased opinion? Would he disagree with the experts who said that it was a terrible survey, given the obvious bias in the questions themselves?

Hon. Mr. Cardy: I thank the member opposite for that very well-crafted question. I can assure the member opposite that when it comes to survey questions, there is a big difference between public opinion polls and surveys done on a quantifiable basis using randomly sampled members of the population and things such as—the member opposite might have heard of these—Internet polls.



For example, when I go onto a website and try to get information about a particular story, oftentimes, I see that newspapers, websites, and different groups try to encourage me to move to a website to access the information that is there. That was the purpose of the survey. It was to drive engagement with our website to get information from folks who may have wanted to click a few times on only a couple of questions, but the point of that survey was to get information in long form from folks across this province. They have responded by the thousands. It was one of the most successful surveys in the history of the province, and we will keep it up. We will keep it going. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. C. Chiasson: The survey was designed to lead people to a website where you could fill their heads with more propaganda. Mr. Speaker, it is now late March, and parents and teachers are looking ahead to the new school year and facing a tremendous amount of uncertainty. Can this minister please give an update on where he is with his so-called review on French immersion as well as with the Confucius Institute? How soon could he be pushing through the changes that he seeks to make to the French immersion program?

Hon. Mr. Cardy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the member opposite, it is very important here—very important—that we use words precisely. The word “propaganda” implies something that is not true. The figures that are included in the survey that was circulated by the Department of Education and by this government were figures provided by the experts in the Department of Education. Those are called facts, something the member opposite may occasionally have difficulty even seeing. We appreciate that the members opposite have a tendency to have affection for those who perhaps are less interested in facts, but, at the same time, what we need to do today is to make sure that we have a conversation based on reality.

What we are going to do is make sure that we listen to New Brunswickers. After that, we are going to make a quick decision. We are going to make sure that we make that decision because we have a short-term problem with Grades 1 and 2 French immersion. The problem is around the shortage of qualified teachers. We take that seriously. My department came to me and said: Either you can be political and not talk about this, or you can do the right thing and talk about it. I did the right thing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. C. Chiasson: I certainly thank the member opposite for his definition of “propaganda”. I suppose we should ask him now what the definition of “leading question” is.

Before he was Premier, this Premier clearly said: Stop making changes to the education system. The Auditor General has said: Stop making changes to the education system. All this turmoil can do more harm than good in the long run.

What part of “stop” did this minister not understand? Will he listen to his Premier and the experts, or will he forge ahead with his own rogue agenda?



Hon. Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, thank you very much for that question. What we need to talk about here is, again, something called facts. If the member opposite would take the time to actually read the Auditor General's report, he would come to the part where the Auditor General specifically says that there is a problem with the Grades 1 and 2 French immersion system. That problem is reflected in statistics that she talks about in her report and that we talk about in our survey. Make sure that you are not selective in the use of facts—always words that I have chosen as being good to live by.

The Auditor General, whom I met with after this consultation was launched, said she felt that our surveys, that our consultation process, met the standards that she defined for how changes in the education system should be managed. I would strongly encourage the member opposite to reach out and chat with the Auditor General. She is a wealth of information, and perhaps he would be able to come to this Chamber better informed before question period.

Trade

Mr. Harvey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the Minister of Economic Development. I want to quote from the *Telegraph-Journal*:

If the education department of New Brunswick terminated Confucius Institutes, the educational exchange institutions, the friendly feelings between the Chinese and Canadian people would be harmed and exchanges and cooperation between China and New Brunswick in various fields would be negatively affected.

This is according to the Chinese Embassy in Ottawa. The question is to the minister: How concerned are you about the reaction to the Education Minister's statements across the globe, and how is this negatively affecting New Brunswick's reputation in the business community? Thank you.

Hon. Mrs. M. Wilson: Thank you to the member opposite. I am excited to stand for the very first time to respond to a question. We did have the honour of meeting with the Consul General of China last week. It was a very interesting meeting and was very well done. I did not get any feeling at all from the individuals in the meeting that we have compromised our position at all in being interested in exporting to China. It is very important for the small business sector here, especially with reference to our agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, and small businesses. I truly felt that they were very interested. We had a fantastic meeting, and I do not see a problem at all. Thank you for the question.

Mr. Harvey: Thank you to the minister opposite. We took many years in New Brunswick, through the Canadian government of both political stripes federally... The New Brunswick government had built up a good reputation in China through many trade missions. I am thinking specifically about blueberries, maple syrup, lobster, oysters, and other seafood, as your seatmate would very much understand.



My question, though, seriously, is... I am hearing some negative vibes out in the industry, and I am trying to quash those. From people in the industry, regarding these statements from the Education Minister, are you hearing them, and are they affecting our reputation abroad?

Hon. Mrs. M. Wilson: Thank you again for the question. Seriously, no, I was not feeling any negative feedback when meeting with these amazing people from China last week, Mr. Speaker. If anything, I was doing my best in that meeting to make sure that they put New Brunswick on the map. It was really interesting how much they love the seafood coming from our country and our province. They referred to Boston lobster, and I said that if I have any goal between now and the time that we meet again, we want to refer to it as New Brunswick lobster and New Brunswick blueberries. Let's put New Brunswick on the map. We are going to do that. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Schools

Mr. G. Arseneault: On this side of the House, we can agree that the community of Hanwell needs a new school. However, several other areas also need new schools for K-8 students, including in the riding I represent, more specifically, in Campbellton. However, the project in my riding has been cancelled, while the one in the minister's riding is going ahead.

The day his Cabinet was sworn in, the Premier stated: When we defend our choices, we will do so based on evidence and facts. What evidence can the minister share with the House to justify giving a school in his riding precedence over one in my riding?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for the question. I chatted about this a bit before Christmas, and I am happy to come back to it again. We use these things called facts, and we use these people called experts, in a place called a department. What we did was look at the requirements that were laid out for school projects that absolutely had to move ahead. There were two for this year. One is in the Moncton area. We will be making an announcement about that pretty soon, and I am looking forward to your harsh and serious condemnation of that one when it comes out, member opposite. Also, of course, we had one in Fredericton-West-Hanwell.

I had a choice, Mr. Speaker, when I got that one. I could have stood up and said: I am actually going to be political about this. I am going to push this school project away just because that would be the easier thing to do to avoid the barking and harping from the members opposite. But, instead, I did the same thing that I am going to do with every other school project as long as I have the honour of being in this portfolio, which is that I said to the department: You tell me where to put schools, and I will sign off on them. This should not be a political decision.



That is what I did for the Moncton school. That is what I will do for Hanwell, and that is what I will do...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. G. Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister should check the history. The department officials picked Campbellton for a new school before they picked Hanwell.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, we support the Hanwell school. The difference is that we would have proceeded with that school and not cancelled or delayed other work to be done at other schools throughout the province. Delaying that work and building those schools is only going to cost the province more in the long run.

Mr. Speaker, without evidence—there is no evidence here—there appears to be favoritism at play here, when capital projects are cancelled throughout the province yet the one in the minister's riding gets the green light even when it was not prepared to be done this year. We are not arguing about the merits of the school in Hanwell. We are just asking the minister to prove how he is not playing favourites here. How would the minister respond to this? Explain this.

Hon. Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, I respond with cheerful enthusiasm, and I invite the member opposite and any of my colleagues across the floor to come with me over to the Department of Education to sit down with the responsible bureaucrats. They will tell you exactly the decision-making process they used and exactly the decision-making process that I used. They will tell you that they have never had a minister, especially from the party opposite, that has ever taken the politics out of the way that those school decisions are made. And I am going to keep on doing that because what we are going to do is use actual evidence. The member opposite says that he does not think that there was any evidence.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Cardy: I do not recall the member opposite being in my office or in the department on the days that these decisions were made. I again invite him. In all sincerity, I invite him and I invite all the members opposite who are interested to come with me to the department to talk about the process that we are using. If you do not do that, then I would encourage you to find alternate lines of questioning in this House because you are wasting our time.

Cabinet

Mr. Coon: This government recently reintegrated the roles of Justice Minister and Attorney General after they had been independent of one another. Retired Court of Queen's Bench Justice David Smith has called upon government to separate the roles to ensure that the



Attorney General can carry out his or her work free of the kind of political interference that was brought to bear on Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould. Mr. Speaker, I want to know whether the Premier will commit to separating the roles of Attorney General and Justice Minister to ensure that the Attorney General's role is not compromised in any way.

Hon. Mrs. Anderson-Mason: I am not the honourable Premier. However, I do feel that this is an appropriate question for me to respond to, and I thank you very much for that question.

When I was given this appointment, I was more than honoured and privileged to receive it. Much to my surprise, when I entered the department on Day 1, they handed me a briefing binder to explain to me what it meant to be the Minister of Justice and what it meant to be the Attorney General. I was able to push those briefing binders back and say: I understand this very well. Now, let's talk about the job that we need to do.

When I consider the appointment that I have been given, I consider the thought that was put into this appointment and into whether I was the right person for the job, and I can say that I have not, at any point in time, had to struggle to balance between being Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Coon: I do not understand why the Premier would want to evade that question, so let's see about this. We have yet to see the mandates given to any of the members of his Cabinet. New Brunswickers and members of this Assembly need access to the mandate letters that the Premier has provided to his ministers. It is the only way we know what priorities the Premier has for each department. Without mandate letters, MLAs cannot fulfill their roles of holding ministers publicly accountable.

On January 23 of this year, the President of Treasury Board said in committee that the mandate letters were on the Premier's desk waiting for signatures so that they could be made public. That was two months ago. Will the Premier table the mandate letters in the Legislature this week, before we adjourn for the next five weeks?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. You know, I appreciate that mandate letters have been out in the past, and, a lot of times, there were a lot of generic words in the mandate letters. That was about it. If you look at our budget, if you look at what we are doing collectively, at our priorities in the House and how we work together to achieve them, if you look at what we have been looking at today and a number of factors...

The mandate letters were on my desk two months ago. They are not now because I was not satisfied that they were going to adequately cover the issues that we are going to address. We are going to have some major priorities. Municipal reform is one of them. Educational reform is another. Health reform is another. Economic development is another. We are going to have strategic information around getting that work done.



You can write a lot of generic stuff in the order of just following the typical process of a government, or you can identify what really needs to be done after you have been there a few months to know what has to be done. That is what we are doing, Mr. Speaker.

Ferry Service

Mr. Austin: I think all of us drove here today or maybe stayed overnight, but we did not have to travel across an international border to get here. However, the residents of Campobello Island do that every day. Mr. Speaker, I understand a ferry service is going to be provided to these residents for the summer months. However, year-round entry into Campobello seems nonexistent.

My question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure to answer: Can the minister give some hope to the people of Campobello Island, who are citizens of this province, that they can travel year-round without crossing into the United States?

Hon. Mr. Oliver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for the question. Certainly, we are quite aware of the concerns that the residents of Campobello have regarding access to and from their island. It is certainly an issue that has been going on for some time now.

As the member stated, there is an operator who will be providing service and who has been providing service for the past number of years during the summer months. However, at this point, he has not been extending that trip. We have had the discussion with him about that, and no decision has been made yet.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and the MLA for Saint Croix, which is where Campobello Island is, as well as the MP for the area have also been discussing solutions. On a personal note, I have had an opportunity to speak with Minister Garneau, the federal Minister of Transport, about this issue, and I hope to speak to him again soon. It is one of the issues that we will be bringing up, and hopefully, we can clarify...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Paramedics

Mrs. Conroy: Mr. Speaker, early after the election, we worked hard to address staffing issues with our paramedics, and although we made some great first steps, talks have since fallen silent. Giving unilingual paramedics full-time work was just a small victory in bettering the jobs of our dedicated paramedics. Reclassification is another necessary and reasonable change to increase morale, to give them an opportunity to bargain within a unit that better reflects their role and service, and to help in hiring and retaining paramedics in the province.



In November, paramedics voted 98% in favour of changing their classification. Following the vote, the New Brunswick Paramedic Reclassification Committee said that gave it a clear mandate to move ahead with plans to reclassify the medics to patient care providers like other health care professionals in the province. My question is for the Premier, Mr. Speaker. Will all the paramedics be reclassified from patient care services to patient care providers, which will better reflect their vital role in our health care system?

Hon. Mr. Flemming: Thank you for the question. I am well aware of the issue. The Paramedic Reclassification Committee has met with me frequently. I have gone over with the committee the procedure that has to be followed. Much of the responsibility lies with the paramedics. They need to apply to the Industrial Relations Board. They need to make an application. They need to request that it be changed. There is a legal procedure, and they need to follow it. They understand that. I am working with them in that regard.

However, again, there is a procedure to be followed, a legal procedure. There are laws with respect to industrial relations in the province. The laws are being followed. I am working with them to go over what requirements and what procedures they may follow to do that. It is essentially an application that comes from them. I am working with them to assist them in every way that I possibly can, and I look forward to meeting with them again. Thank you for the question.

Carbon Tax

Mr. Bourque: We have heard these government members say time and time again that they are vehemently opposed to new taxation. However, it is interesting to see that when it comes to carbon pricing, they go directly to the carbon tax. They have seemingly not shown any type of movement to avoid it, as we in the previous government did. It is all about dumping that tax to the consumers, and, now, we are hearing about another municipal levy that the government is dumping on the municipalities, allowing for more taxation. To me, that sounds like double-talk, Mr. Speaker. On the one hand, the members opposite are saying that they do not want additional taxation, yet they allow it freely. They are blaming it on other governments, but they are allowing it. My question to the Premier is this: Are you going to stand up and stop...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Carr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has been very clear leading up to this point in time that we are not in favour of any new taxes for New Brunswickers. The part that is of most concern is that the members opposite, when in government, rolled over for Justin Trudeau and allowed him to apply a carbon tax to New Brunswickers without going forward, doing their due diligence, and putting in our own plan that made sense for New Brunswickers.

On our side of the House, we are standing up for New Brunswickers. A carbon tax is not needed for the people of New Brunswick, especially not for our low-income earners or our seniors who are on fixed pensions and who live in rural New Brunswick.



Mr. Speaker, New Brunswick is doing its part without an unfair carbon tax. We are reaching our emissions levels, and nobody in this room can dispute that because the numbers are there. We will reach our numbers, and with the help of New Brunswickers, we will exceed our numbers. I will say it again: An unfair Justin Trudeau carbon tax is not needed for the people of New Brunswick.

Mr. Speaker: Question period is over.

