

May 7, 2019

[Translation]

## Floods

**Mr. D. Landry:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My plan was to congratulate the people who have been directly or indirectly involved in flood relief efforts, but I know that the Premier will be making a statement in a few minutes, so I will offer my congratulations at that time.

Mr. Speaker, because of the extent of the floods last year and the devastating effects of this catastrophe, cottage owners received financial assistance from the government to clean up their properties. The floods are just as extensive this year. Will similar assistance be provided this year? The media seem to be sending two contradictory messages. The Premier has indicated that similar assistance will be provided, while the Minister of Environment and Local Government has said that it might be provided. Of the two, who is right?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. It is great to be back in the House. I would certainly like to start by congratulating, although I am not seeing him at present, the new Leader of the Liberal Party, Kevin Vickers. I had a chance to meet Mr. Vickers just briefly at a restaurant. He seems like a very pleasant fellow. I am looking forward to working with him as we further the progress of New Brunswick.

The point here, in relation to what we are going to be looking at... Now, I kind of forgot the question that you asked, actually. I started out on that new approach. Repeat it, please.

(Interjections.)

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** No, it was not.

(Interjections.)

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** It was on the flood situation, which I will be talking about briefly in a minister's statement too. In the case of floods, we have said that we have put in place... First, we have \$15 000 out there initially, at the very beginning, to get people back to normal. We are going to provide cleanup services to every cottage owner, every landowner, and everyone who has seen debris fall on his or her property. They will get it to the road, and we will be providing the services to ensure that it is picked up in a timely manner.

We know that different parts of the province got hit. It was on the other side of Grand Lake in this case. Most unfortunately, a wind and ice situation made it extremely difficult, but we will



deal with it. We will deal with property owners. At this point, our goal is to clean up. Our goal is to ensure where our...

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. D. Landry:** Thank you, Mr. Premier. I think the Speaker has been really generous.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker, the flooding again led to the closing of a number of roads. It has been suggested that work be done on some of these roads, perhaps to raise them, to better withstand flooding in the future. Will any of this work be done in this coming year?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Yes, I will stay focused on the question this time, Mr. Speaker. In this case, we identified... I think that we had about 85 road closures, and I think that for a number of them that were flooded, we saw that they had been repaired before at the same elevations as in the past. I think that we are learning from this. Obviously, we were hopeful and not expecting this two years in a row. The idea is that the roads are all identified, and, in the cases where there are repairs being done, they will be changed to the right level or at least to what we can forecast for the future. The idea of repairing them at the same elevation in repeat areas has to be changed in our work plan, and we will address that.

The same thing applies with the rebuilding of homes or structures. The same thing applies with work permits and building permits. I think that we have to be a lot more diligent now in relation to where people are going to build. We know that it is going to be a challenge for insurers to get insurance for homeowners who have built right along flood zones, and we have to step up the game here. The way of life is different now than it used to be. Climate change is a reality, and we have to deal with that. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. D. Landry:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the budget allocated to help repair damaged roads be higher than the amount that was already budgeted this year? Where will the money come from?

[*Original*]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Once again, thank you for the question. I think that what we have to look at in relation to... There is funding available federally for mitigation efforts. We would consider that areas such as that or rebuilding a road would qualify for that. I believe that it is a pretty significant fund. We have already made four applications in that regard, and there will be many more.



As we look at where we can put forward... That was last year, honourable member. This year, we are moving forward on that. The idea of making this a change as we build is very important, and we will be looking at setting our priorities right. There may be some areas that we said we were going to work on, but now we cannot because of the flooding situation. I do think that there is mitigation money available which we will be indeed going after with the federal government.

### Collective Bargaining

**Mrs. Harris:** Mr. Speaker, we certainly do have a Premier who does what he says he is going to do, which includes cutting and taking away from poor and vulnerable people in this province, making sure he is looking after big business, cutting student jobs by half, cutting free tuition, and hurting the very people who are going to run this province in the next few years. Day after day, he is disrespecting nursing home workers and residents—every single day.

This leads me to my question for the Minister of Labour. Can you explain to the House why you chose not to speak to CUPE members at your office yesterday and why you saw it necessary to call the police?

**Hon. Mr. Holder:** I can assure the member opposite that I did not phone the police. The police showed up. There was no phone call made from my office whatsoever.

**Mrs. Harris:** Mr. Speaker, it just so happened that they were driving by. That is quite interesting. Good job.

You never answered the question, minister. Why did you choose not to speak to the CUPE members? You are the Minister of Labour. They wanted to ask you whether you support binding arbitration to settle the labour dispute, which is a legitimate way of resolving disputes when two sides cannot reach an agreement. It is high time that this government started to show that it has care and concern for those who are living in the nursing homes and for those who are working in the nursing homes, keeping in mind that they are all New Brunswickers. They are the ones whom this government is supposed to support. Does this minister support binding arbitration? Yes or no?

**Hon. Mr. Holder:** Mr. Speaker, I have met with members of CUPE previously, in the last few weeks when they have been in front of my office. My door, the whole time I have been a member of this Legislature, has been open to them.

I, as Minister of Labour, have a role to maintain a level of neutrality. I have put mediation services in place. It is our goal, as a government, to come to a resolution. We encourage both sides to come back to the table, and my department will continue to have mediation services in place to mediate this dispute.



**Mrs. Harris:** Mr. Speaker, what I understand from the minister is that his door was open yesterday and that they were allowed to go in. That is what I am understanding. That is not what we heard, so I would like to have that clarified.

You are saying that you will not agree that you are for binding arbitration, but an arbitrator's job is to consider both sides of the argument—in this case, the government side and the union side. I do not think anyone wants a strike because we do know what is going to happen if a strike occurs. I think most people want the matter resolved for the benefit of seniors in these homes, their families, and the workers, who are our brothers, our sisters, our family members, and our friends. Most importantly, it is the seniors who are living in these homes who are being tortured by this government not offering something to these unions. It is time for you to stand up and show that you actually care about New Brunswick. What are you going to do about it?

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, member.

**Hon. Mr. Holder:** What I, as Minister of Labour, care about is making sure that there is a fair collective bargaining process in place. It is my job to make sure that neutrality is there. I have made it very clear to the members I have met with over the last number of months that the mediation process and services are in place. I have appointed mediation services. I will continue to maintain that level of neutrality and make sure that fair collective bargaining is protected in this province.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. LePage:** This weekend, nursing home workers waited for 72 hours at the office of the Minister of Social Development — a heartless minister. Yesterday, the same people went to the constituency offices of the Deputy Premier and seven of his Conservative colleagues. They were ignored by heartless MLAs.

Since these workers asked the Deputy Premier to do something about the nursing home crisis, he called the Premier in front of the demonstrators, but the Premier ignored him. Is the Premier heartless? Can the minister tell us what he wanted to ask the Premier?

**Hon. Mr. Gauvin:** Thank you very much for the question. I would like to wish everyone a good spring session. I just wanted to ask the Premier if he wanted to talk directly to the demonstrators, because we have an open-door policy. If you ask the member for Shediac—Beaubassin—Cap-Pelé, I think he will tell you that I have never refused an interview. So, I just wanted to start the conversation between the Premier and the demonstrators back home in Shippagan. As we know, the Premier is very busy, because he received 200 requests for meetings in one week. So, if he had been able to talk to the demonstrators, I am sure he would have, since that has happened before. The call was just to start the conversation. Thank you very much.



**Mr. LePage:** I am pleased to see that we have a busy Premier, but he has to also be busy looking after the most vulnerable people of this province. The Deputy Premier supposedly left a message for the Premier. Was the Premier heartless, or did he return the call? If so, what did the Premier tell him?

**Hon. Mr. Gauvin:** Again, thank you for the question. Later that afternoon, I talked to the Premier, and he told me he would have answered the questions from the demonstrators if he had been able to take my call. Thank you very much.

**Mr. LePage:** Again, people in this province are being ignored. When the demonstrators asked the Deputy Premier and member for Shippagan-Lamèque-Miscou if he supported their request for unrestricted binding arbitration, this is what he answered: Personally, I definitely support the workers. Can the Deputy Premier confirm to the House that he has a heart and that he supports unrestricted binding arbitration?

**Hon. Mr. Gauvin:** Listen, I am always going to support nursing home workers, since my father spent the last five years of his life at the Résidences Lucien Saindon nursing home. That is why I will always support these workers.

Now, a process is in place, and people are going to go back to the negotiating table on May 9. They will therefore have a chance to share their points of view; mediation will take place, and people will have a chance to talk to each other. I always stand up for workers, because I know that what they do is important and, like everyone, I would like the situation to be resolved as soon as possible.

[Original]

## Carbon Tax

**Ms. Rogers:** Mr. Speaker, we saw a fairly significant decision in Saskatchewan last week with the courts ruling that asking provinces to have a carbon plan was, in fact, constitutional, contrary to our Premier's words. My question is for the Premier. Is the Premier willing to accept this ruling and come up with his own carbon plan, or does he not care about wasting taxpayers' time and money and, instead, is choosing further court challenges?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Thank you for the question. You know, talking about wasting taxpayers' money, the honourable colleague across the floor would well know all about that.

The idea of this ruling that we received right now... I have been speaking to the Premier of Saskatchewan, and, you know, as well, there is alignment with the Premier of Ontario, the Premier of Manitoba, the Premier of Alberta, and, I would say, probably the Premier of Prince Edward Island. We have a bit of a trend going on here that people do not want to pay more taxes in this country. That is the trend. The interesting part, Mr. Speaker, is that we can have



both. We can meet our targets and exceed our targets, but we do not have to tax people more to get to them.

Now, on this particular ruling, as the member would know, this was a split decision, 3 to 2. If you look at the ruling, Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of rationale behind an appeal. It is my understanding that the Premier of Saskatchewan will be appealing this, and, Mr. Speaker, yes, we will be there to support them through the entire process.

**Ms. Rogers:** Mr. Speaker, it does beg the question of whom this Premier works mostly for. I am wondering this: How much is this futile battle costing taxpayers, or does the Premier not care about this?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, at this point in time, our provinces are aligning in many ways, but in this case, it is all our in-house counsel working with counsel in Saskatchewan. The purpose of doing this is to say that we believe that, while we are using natural resources in this country, we should be able to use them. That does not mean they are not going to change over time, because they are, but there are 800 000 barrels of resources that are not from our country. They are not from a country that protects human rights. They are not from a country that has regulations to protect its environment. They are from a country that just wants to sell to us at whatever price it can. That is the difference, Mr. Speaker.

However, we want to have a plan in place to protect our citizens from just continued taxation. While the carbon tax is a great theme to get on to make people feel as though they have to participate in it to help the environment... We will do what we need to do to help the environment because we must, but we do not have to get people on a taxation model that the Liberals will continue to take advantage of over and over and over again for generations to come.

**Ms. Rogers:** Mr. Speaker, is the Premier acting on independent legal advice from the Attorney General's Office to pursue this at extra cost to taxpayers, or does the Premier not care, again, about New Brunswick's hardworking taxpayers?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, I think that we have covered that actually. I think we have said that our in-house counsel is working on the legal requirements with the legal folks in other provinces. I know it may come as a shock that we can find a common interest to save taxpayer dollars. We believe that we, as a nation, are taxed too much and that we, as a province, are certainly taxed too much. We have seen that. We have seen it in our economic plan. People will say: We need to grow the economy. Then they say: We can pay higher taxes, and that will help.

It does not help, Mr. Speaker. Paying higher taxes and having a higher cost of living chases people out of our province. We want people to come back here for the right reasons, to a province that is second to none, a province that you can afford to live in, and a province that is moving forward in a measurable way. Mr. Speaker, in the past six months, we have moved forward in a measurable way. Thank you.





## Climate Change

**Mr. Coon:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier has continued his public campaign against the federal efforts to cut the carbon pollution that is deepening our climate emergency. Meanwhile, New Brunswick families and communities are suffering the consequences of climate breakdown: back-to-back 100-year floods of the Saint John River, serious declines in mackerel, crab, and shrimp populations off our coasts, and increasing rates of debilitating Lyme disease have been brought to New Brunswick. All of this is thanks to climate change.

Back in 2016, Mr. Speaker, this Assembly's all-party Select Committee on Climate Change recommended 24 separate actions to protect New Brunswick families and communities from the consequences of climate change. How does the Premier intend to implement these essential measures when the budget contains no money to implement any of them?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, we have a carbon plan that we put in place that was not in place when we came in. We have one that reflects what every other province has done, and, in many cases, it is a step ahead because New Brunswick is a step ahead. We have seen the articles from NB Power. We are more than double in the current reductions compared to where other utilities are. You have seen articles recently, such as Herb Emery's. We have seen the case, Mr. Speaker, where this is a transition.

Yes, we have had two floods back to back, but climate change took a long time to get here, and it will take time to move out of this. We are in a transition economy, Mr. Speaker. We will not just shut the lights off and hope for the best as we fumble around in the dark. Mr. Speaker, we have an opportunity to transition, not to one that shuts our jobs down and not to one that causes people to leave. We have a competitiveness that we must maintain if we are going to have a future for our kids and if they are going to have a place to live and work. To some people, things are black and white, but to me, it is a process, Mr. Speaker. It is a process that we continually improve on.

**Mr. Coon:** Mr. Speaker, action to protect New Brunswick families and communities from the consequences of climate breakdown is urgent, but I hear no sense of urgency in the Premier's voice and see no sense of urgency in the way that he is acting. He continues to allow Irving to clear-cut our watersheds so that there is nothing to hold back the water in the springtime. He continues to allow wetlands to be filled in despite their essential role in holding back the floodwaters. And he has no plan to ensure that our roads are not shut down every time there is a flood or that exit roads are passable when the main roads are blocked. Exactly how does the Premier intend to implement the actions that we so badly need to protect families and communities from the consequences of climate change and climate breakdown?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, I think we have seen the changes. We talked earlier about the roads and how we understand where we need to raise the elevations. We even talked about feasibility studies to look at how we can mitigate the damage of floods in the future.



Talking about the changes, we are not going to keep spending money on redoing the same places every year in the same way. There has to be a mitigation program that actually elevates or moves back from the waterway. We have talked about the building permits that we need to change and enforce. We can go around this province, and we can certainly see areas where we would say: Why are we building here? We know that this is going to be a problem.

I would think just to the contrary, but in some ways, some people only say: You throw money at it because that is what will make the difference. Mr. Speaker, you focus on putting money in the right places, and that includes building for the future. That includes mitigating our risk for people who are living in our beautiful province, anywhere they live. It is not about taxing more and thinking we will be better. It is about doing more with what we have and setting priorities to get the job done, Mr. Speaker.

## Floods

**Mr. Austin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have numerous residents in both rural and urban areas of my riding who are facing exhaustion and hopelessness over yet another flood event. Many want to move and relocate to higher ground. I would like to ask the Premier: What is the province doing beyond the current Disaster Financial Assistance program to ensure that the federal government would provide a program to allow these homeowners to get out of the flood zones, which seem to be a regular occurrence?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, in this regard, we understand that the federal government does have a mitigation plan for activities that actually do change the game, whether it be moving from a location, whether it be elevating in an existing location, or whether it be changing roadways. There is actually a fund that is there just to help deal with climate change matters. These would be climate change matters. We have asked everyone who is impacted to register, and we will do the assessments on the properties. Then, let's work together to find a plan to reduce our exposure going forward.

I know that I speak from a small area along the river in Quispamsis, but, this time around, people were better prepared than they were the last time. They did not move their houses, but they did protect the areas so that they were able to mitigate the water that came up and to pump it out before it got inside their homes. Not everyone was there, but it was an improvement. We know that it is going to change. We are going to look at the repeat performance from last year and find solutions for the future, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Austin:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that answer from the Premier. However, we cannot continue to do this every year. Taxpayers are on the hook for providing more assistance for these floods. Homeowners—many of them—do not want to be in the flood zone anymore. They want out.

I guess the question that I would ask and that I would ask again is this: Beyond the Disaster Financial Assistance program, which is available after the flood hits, is the provincial





government willing to push and work with the federal government to create a program so that homeowners can get out of the flood zone before it hits or mitigate the results of the flood by raising their homes?

**Hon. Mr. Urquhart:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. Yes, that is one area that I have already started pushing to Minister Goodale in Ottawa. There is now a \$10-billion mitigation fund that is in place, separate from the disaster relief fund. We are starting to put our proposals in on it, but the talks have already started. But the talks are not only going to be with Ottawa. The talks are going to be with our Canadian Rivers Institute here at UNB. They are going to be with our engineering firms here in the province. We on all sides who have worked through this have already decided that things are going to change.

We are pushing Ottawa—not only pushing Ottawa, because Ottawa does understand. The defence minister and Minister Goodale have already made it very clear that they are going to work with us. Through our involvement with them, I hope and expect to see changes made as far as where we live and where we build in the future.

### Carbon Tax

**Mr. Melanson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has been constantly talking about New Brunswickers being taxed too much. If the Premier really means what he says, well, he has to act upon it. We know that he is against a tax on pollution that was brought in by the federal government, but we know that there is one piece of that new revenue that is under his control. It is the provincial piece of the HST. That is a tax on tax, in the common sense of the word. Can the Premier tell us this: If he really means what he says and New Brunswickers are taxed too much, why does he not give back to New Brunswickers that portion of the HST so that they can benefit from a credit for this tax?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting philosophy, and I would suggest... Does the member opposite actually believe that we are taxed enough, or should we be taxed more? There seems to be an ongoing issue to tax more.

Mr. Speaker, finding ways to reduce the taxation levels in the province is not about cutting the revenue of the province. It is about saying: What can we do differently?

I met with Minister Morneau just this past week, and we talked about infrastructure funding. Do you know what we talked about? It was about infrastructure funding for projects that we need to do—not projects we are inventing, but projects we need to do—to upgrade infrastructure in communities around the province. There is a lot of interest in focusing on that, and we are to put together a list, Mr. Speaker, to help that happen. Do you know what? If I can offset money we are currently spending, we can either do more or charge people less, but we will find a way, as time goes on, to put more money in the pockets of the people who are paying the bills. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



**Mr. Melanson:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier promised in his platform that if there was going to be a tax on carbon...

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Melanson:** It was on page 6 of the platform that he would give it back to New Brunswickers. One piece of that tax—that incremental revenue that the provincial government is going to receive as of April 1—is the HST provincial portion of the tax on carbon. Premier, you promised that you would give it back. You keep saying that New Brunswickers are taxed too much. Why can you not answer the question today by clearly—clearly—telling New Brunswickers what you committed to do in your platform, that you would give it back? Will you give it back? Yes or no?

**Hon. Mr. Steeves:** Hello, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for the question, to the member opposite. The portion that he is... Well, it is interesting, first of all, to hear the member talk and admit that it is a carbon tax. It is a carbon tax.

(Interjections.)

**Hon. Mr. Steeves:** That is progress. You are right. It is also interesting because the member opposite knows exactly how this works. The federal government does collect our taxes for us. It does collect our HST and our corporate and personal income taxes for us, and then it distributes them from there. There is no way of telling exactly how much. Now, we have some estimates out there from staff whom you know—through you to the member, Mr. Speaker—that it will be less than \$2 million and that it may not come in for, as you would know, as much as seven years, the HST, because it takes so long to get caught up.

That is exactly what is going on. We are going to be taking care of New Brunswickers. We are going to be fighting this carbon tax and getting real answers for the environment. Real answers for the environment—that is what we are looking for, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Melanson:** Mr. Speaker, we notice that when the questions are quite clear and we are asking for a specific answer, yes or no, the Premier diverts the questions to his ministers.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: If the Minister of Finance does not know the value of the provincial portion of the HST, the tax on tax—if he does not know the amount—that is fine. But can the Premier commit today, as he committed in his platform, that he will give it back? All New Brunswickers want to know now is whether the Premier is going to respect his platform commitment and commit today that he will give it back. Whatever that amount is, are you going to give it back to New Brunswickers? Yes or no?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Thank you for the question. Yes, I have been very clear on that. Any new revenue that we get—and it is net revenue, so it is new money that we have—we will return to the citizens of this province. I have been very clear. We will do just that, Mr. Speaker.



[Translation]

## Health Care

**Mr. D'Amours:** As we all know, over the past few months, the Minister of Health has been relatively clear when he has said that services would be eliminated in the New Brunswick health care system. Barely two weeks ago, during estimates in the Standing Committee on Estimates and Fiscal Policy, the minister confirmed that he had ordered Vitalité Health Network and Horizon Health Network to give him a rationalization plan clearly indicating the services that would be eliminated in different hospitals throughout the province. Can the minister confirm today which services will be eliminated and in which hospitals in the province? Can he confirm which services people will lose, and which services people currently access in their own region that they will have to travel hundreds of kilometres to get?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** Mr. Speaker, it is pretty clear that, again, the health critic for Region 4... That is the only thing he ever talked about the whole time we were in estimates. He is unaware that there is even anything else in the province except Region 4, but in any event... On the second day, he did not show up for estimates when his colleagues were there asking questions, so he is a little limp on the subject, Mr. Speaker.

However, what the member missed completely is the fact that we are not cutting any services. We are giving New Brunswick the highest level of health care we possibly can. We are going to improve those services, Mr. Speaker. We are going to expand those services. We are going to make those services more efficient, and we are going to make health care for New Brunswickers more efficient, more effective, and more available so that they can live longer, healthier, and happier lives.

With all due respect or lack thereof, Mr. Speaker, scaring people is not really what we are about. We are about telling the truth, and we are about sustainability.

