

May 10, 2019

[Translation]

Collective Bargaining

Mr. D. Landry: Before I begin, I want to wish a happy Mother's Day to all the moms who sit in the House or work in the Legislative Assembly. I also want to wish a happy Mother's Day to all moms in New Brunswick.

I know the Premier was supposed to meet with the union that represents people who work in nursing homes across the province. We heard about this two days ago. I think he was supposed to meet with them in person yesterday. What I would ultimately like to know is this: What was discussed? Are we moving forward on this file? The people working in nursing homes and the families of residents need to know what is going on with this file.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Leader of the Opposition for the question. Yes, we had that meeting. The minister and I met with the executive of the union in the next day or so, after they left the building, prior to their negotiating session that took place yesterday. The meeting was amicable. We discussed a lot of the issues in relation to how we move the province forward together, collectively. They indicated a number of opportunities that they had suggested to us over the years that had not been implemented.

In the spirit of working together to fix New Brunswick, we are basically identifying where improvements can be made and how employees and employers can all benefit. I talk about stakeholders and taxpayers all benefiting, but, most of all, the people in the nursing homes could benefit from better working conditions, better hours of care, and better pay by finding efficiencies in the system to make that happen. We were both pleased about the attitudes that, collectively, we believe in and that we have to have to move forward. I am optimistic, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. D. Landry: I am pleased to see that the Premier is optimistic, but we all know that very expensive campaigns have been run through the media, particularly in the province's newspapers. The money came from taxpayers. I can understand that discussions are going well, but I would like to know if we can get a date. We all know that these negotiations are being held in the streets. They are being held in the streets, in the newspapers, and on television. The file has even come before the courts.



We know holding meetings is a very positive step. However, does the Premier think someday there will be a resolution and people in the nursing homes of this province, residents and their families, will be able to get a break and know where this is going? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Once again, thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we know this is a process, and we know that it has been going on for 31 months or so. It is something where, at the end of the day, we have to reflect the best interests of the province. Can I put a timeline on when it finishes? No. I do not think that you can with any negotiation. Certainly, the Leader of the Opposition would well know that, because it was 21 months on the opposition's watch and it was still going.

It is a process, but at the end of the day, there has to be a recognition that we are able to put a package together that actually reflects our making improvements in every aspect of what we do. You know, I think that, from the very beginning of our mandate, it has been about how we can do better in this province. We have asked this in our very own budget that the Minister of Finance put forward. There is a sense of urgency in our province on many fronts, and we asked for people's help. This is no different. This is not a typical negotiation. This is asking leaders and workers—anyone in any sector of what we do for people as citizens—to do better because we must, and we all share in that benefit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, if I ask the same question to members of the nursing home workers' union, I hope they will give me the same answer.

We see friends of the Premier, like Bob Youden and others, who were hired and will get close to \$200 000 a year. The Premier has been extremely generous with these people. Why is he not as generous with nursing home workers?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that in relation to the shop here, if you want to have a look at past hiring versus this hiring, it is quite different—very, very different—and the focus is very clear. The focus is on some particular areas where we have not been able to get traction in terms of making a difference. We are talking about the tendering process, talking about buying for New Brunswick, and talking about having contracts that we see are fair and equitable across our province. But, most importantly, we recognize the importance of New Brunswick businesses and the work they do for the New Brunswick government. All of that is getting under the hood—not continuing to talk about it, but actually having actionable items for people directly related to making it happen, so that is the purpose of doing that.



Now, as for the debate back and forth with the union leaders and whether they are feeling the same way, do you know what? I think that they have a conviction for the province as well. And, no, it is not going to be all easy. We are changing the game here. We are changing the challenge and putting the challenge on each other, but we will hold ourselves accountable. Right now, we are working on how we can do that best. Talk is cheap, but talk is over because we need help in our province from all sectors. That is our goal, Mr. Speaker.

WorkSafeNB

Mr. Harvey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Chair of WorkSafeNB is a provincial government appointment. Can the minister responsible for WorkSafeNB tell us why he appointed Mel Norton as the Chair of WorkSafeNB?

Hon. Mr. Holder: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge that WorkSafeNB has put in place a new mechanism by which to choose a Chair. That was as a result of the advice of the Auditor General. There was absolutely no contact between the government and WorkSafeNB. It went out and did that...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Holder: I am sorry. They can ask members at WorkSafeNB. There was an independent process. There was never any conversation between government and WorkSafeNB. This was the name that came up. We followed that process, Mr. Speaker, and I think that we have a very credible, reputable member who will now be the Chair of WorkSafeNB.

Mr. Harvey: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for that answer, I guess. But, Mr. Speaker, you know, it has been a busy week for the former provincial Conservative leadership candidates in New Brunswick. One has been found guilty of breaking campaign finance laws. Another has received a patronage appointment as Chair of WorkSafeNB. It makes you wonder what next week is going to bring. My question to the Premier is this: Will the Premier state in this House whether there were any other qualified candidates for the Chair of WorkSafeNB who were not candidates for the provincial leadership of the Conservative Party?

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, a process was put in place by WorkSafeNB. It was as a result of recommendations of the Auditor General. Yes, there were a whole bunch of people who applied for that job, but this was the candidate that WorkSafeNB recommended to the government of New Brunswick.

I know that is the way the members opposite would have done business. They would have assumed that it was partisan.

(Interjections.)



Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Holder: I will tell you something else. This is not a full-time job, as they had it set up. This is a part-time job. There is not a deputy minister's salary, as the previous government had in place. That, Mr. Speaker, is the difference between us and them.

Mr. Harvey: Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of ammunition in that answer.

Will the minister then table in this House the list of all the other candidates who applied for this job? It is an independent process, as he mentioned. Will he table the job responsibilities of the Chair of WorkSafeNB and whether the position is full-time or part-time? Will he table this information in the House? I think he mentioned that there was a whole list of candidates out there. I think the people of New Brunswick need to know.

Hon. Mr. Holder: Given the independent nature of WorkSafeNB, if the member opposite wants that information, he should contact WorkSafeNB. WorkSafe NB went through that process and made the recommendation to government, and we accepted it. If the member wants that information, I am sure WorkSafeNB will be happy to provide it.

I have to tell you, I would be remiss today if I did not thank the opposition for the opportunity once again—four days in a row—to get up and talk about the great work that is happening on this side of the House, unlike that stuff we read that came from their current leader the other day in the *Telegraph-Journal*. He was talking about the magic sauce. Well, I will tell you, we are not into magic over here. We are into hard work and getting results, and that is exactly what we are doing.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Government Services

Mr. C. Chiasson: Once again, we feel the climate changing as the member opposite speaks.

Mr. Speaker, it would seem that an announcement was made at a Tory fundraiser in northern New Brunswick regarding the reopening of a Service New Brunswick office. Can the Minister of Service New Brunswick inform the House as to what the announcement was and whether it was part of her budget for 2019-20?

Hon. Ms. S. Wilson: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we, as a government, are about providing services in the right place, at the right time, and where the need is. We are about doing what is right, and our goal is to better serve New Brunswickers. We said that we would treat every New Brunswicker like a customer of any business, and that is what we are about to do. There will be details later on in an official announcement.



Mr. C. Chiasson: Well, I am glad you want to be fair to everybody. So then I can readily assume that the SNB office in Saint-Léonard will reopen, to be fair to them, and perhaps the one in Port Elgin and maybe some of the others that were closed. I mean, we want to be fair to everybody, so can the minister please let me know the timeline for when the others can be expected to open?

Hon. Ms. S. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We look at where the volume is and where the need is. We are not just going to provide Service New Brunswick for every little, small community in the province. We have to be responsible financially, and we have to look at where the actual need is, to provide these services. If it is just a short drive, we have to look at where the actual need is. I guess we cannot put a hospital in every backyard, and we cannot put Service New Brunswick in every small community. We have to be responsible financially. We have balanced the budget, and we are going to continue to work to provide the best service possible for all New Brunswickers.

Mr. C. Chiasson: Well, if I am not mistaken, Kedgwick is eight minutes from Saint-Quentin. I would think that there would be a lot of volume. I can tell you that in Grand Falls, I had to wait about two hours the other day, so I think Saint-Léonard would be a great place to reopen as well.

I guess my final question is for the Premier. Does he agree with this move, and, if so, does he agree that the use of public funds should be announced at political fundraisers? Or worse, if you show up at a political fundraiser with your chequebook, you get what you want. Is that how the Premier is doing policy now?

Hon. Ms. S. Wilson: No, Mr. Speaker, that is not how we do things. That is how the members on the opposite side do things. That is how they do things. Our government previously stated that we want our taxpayers to be treated like customers in any business. We are working toward that goal, Mr. Speaker, and we will accomplish that goal in a fiscally responsible manner.

[*Translation*]

Health Care

Mr. D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, in the Standing Committee on Estimates and Fiscal Policy, the Minister of Health talked a lot about the difficulty of providing services in hospitals throughout this province. He also stated that he would ask both health networks to bring forward their ideas on how to manage the limited budget that was given to them. Can the minister confirm that this will lead to service cuts in some hospitals, especially in rural New Brunswick?



[Original]

Hon. Mr. Flemming: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, the Health Critic for Region 4... The only questions he ever asked in estimates were regarding Region 4. He is so myopic in his views that I do not think he knows there is any health care outside of Region 4. He gets focused on this, and I have told them over and over again that we are not cutting services to the people of New Brunswick. We are going to provide them with the best health care, the highest level of quality health care, that we can. People want that. They deserve that, and they are going to get that.

We are separating health care from economic development. Get used to it. Get over it. We are putting the patients and health care of people first.

Mr. D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, the minister can continue to attack me personally, but I can tell you something. He should do the job that the people of New Brunswick are waiting for, which is taking care of the health system, period. This week was nursing week—National Nursing Week. The minister did not see the value of giving a ministerial statement to identify the work that nurses are doing in New Brunswick.

Mr. Speaker, the minister, we know, has appointed John McGarry as Chair of the Horizon Health Network. I am not arguing with Mr. McGarry's qualifications in the health field, but Mr. McGarry has argued in the past that he would perhaps have to close hospitals in New Brunswick. Would the minister agree with this, and, if a recommendation is made to close hospitals, would the minister do so?

Hon. Mr. Flemming: I have said it once. I have said it a million times. We are not going to close any hospitals. It is not necessary to close any hospitals.

One of the great advantages of being a father is that you get experience from your children. They ask you a question. You say no, and they ask it again. They ask you a question. You say no, and they ask it again. I wish you would phone my children and get a little advice from them. They would say: You can ask him the question over and over again, but when he says no, no means no. That is it. Get over it. Stop. Get some new material.

Route 11

Mr. Bourque: Mr. Speaker, the Premier likes to talk about managing smarter and making smart choices, but, time and again, we have found examples of managing stupider. If you want to do less road work and make roads less safe, it is not great, but I guess it is fine. However, what is happening on Route 11 simply makes no sense at all. First, we have had about eight different versions of what they might or might not do around the Cocagne-to-Bouctouche Route 11 twinning. In estimates, we discovered that there is part of the work, an overpass detour in the Cocagne South region, which had already been completed at a cost of millions of dollars, that



they are tearing down, without doing any additional work. With this additional cost, can the minister or Premier explain how that approach is smart? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, I know that the members opposite have only one thing in mind, and that is how to discredit the government and how to focus on the next election and not plan for the future of the province. The difference in our philosophy and theirs is that we are thinking of the next 10 years, the next 15 years, and the next 20 years. The very clear indication of that thinking was shown up by the ratings of DBRS when it turned our negative outlook to a positive. It did not do that just because we were talking about being better, but because we actually are being better. What that means is that you build for New Brunswick. You start looking at what is needed in the province, and you build for the province.

Now, the federal government is talking about money that can be allocated in order to look at projects. Mr. Speaker, I am excited about that, because, if those are projects that we actually need and that we are spending money on because they are infrastructure that we need to fix up and projects that we are building because they improve the infrastructure and the tourism capability through our province and, once again, open up rural New Brunswick to our tourism, I am interested in that. However, if the federal government is continuing to invest in projects just for us to try to match 50-cent dollars, I was not interested in that before, and I am not interested in it now.

Mr. Bourque: Just before the House Leader of the opposite side cries foul, I am going retract the word “stupid”. I am going to say “unsmart”. It is unsmart.

Let’s be clear here. I want our Premier to tell the thousands of passengers who are in the thousands of cars that pass on Route 11 every day and who see that millions-of-dollars overpass detour that has been completed and that is going to be torn down, with no additional work to be done, that it is smart work and that it is because...

What happens to New Brunswickers? It is all about money. This is about safe roads. It is about economic development. It is about accidents to be avoided. We had to mourn two deaths on the Cocagne bridge this winter, but that is okay because—listen—it is all about dollars and cents with this Premier. That is what I have been hearing. So, really, he does not care. He just simply does not care. Is that being smart or unsmart?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the question was there, but it is not difficult to look at projects and to say: Okay, what do we need to do here in order to make sure that we provide the right service, the right safety features, and the right capability in different regions? That does not really relate to any folks, members, in the opposition. They basically throw money at things and say: Well, you know, we will just spend the money here because it is the right thing to do. We are investing more money, and it must be right. They do not look at the details and at what impact it is going to have.



When we talked about traffic, we said that we are going to improve Route 11 and make it safer to drive on. We have said that right up front, and we will, Mr. Speaker. But that does not mean that every highway turns into a four-lane road. When you talk about traffic in New Brunswick, you compare that to traffic everywhere else. We have highways with no cars on them. There has to be a connection with traffic and the number.

I am not saying that Route 11 does not need improvements because I think it does, and it will get them. But it will get improvements that are right for New Brunswick and right for New Brunswick's traffic so that we can improve more areas throughout the province. That is our goal, Mr. Speaker.

Government Contracts

Mr. Austin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has told the people of this province that he is committed to putting New Brunswick first and creating a healthy economy by promoting New Brunswick businesses. As a matter of fact, I remember, in the campaign, the Premier being very hard on contracts going to Quebec and other places outside of New Brunswick. If that is true, can the Premier explain how it is possible that millions of dollars under his watch are leaving this province when local companies are producing goods and services and making reasonable bids on tenders yet losing out to companies from outside New Brunswick, including companies like Soleno and Leading Edge Geomatics?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks very much to the Leader of the People's Alliance for the question. You know, we are looking at this in every sector: how we are actually tendering, how we are actually awarding contracts, and, more importantly, when we are out doing an RFQ or out looking at a project, how it can actually be more of a project that fits New Brunswick companies.

But I would like to know the specific incidents that the leader is talking about because, with every one of those incidents that we find, we can get under the hood and say: What happened here? And it gives us the opportunity to fix it. While I am not familiar with those particular projects, if, indeed, we have been unfair to our companies in this province, I am committed to changing that game because I want the game to be New Brunswick businesses being awarded contracts and being awarded contracts for things that are done here in New Brunswick by New Brunswickers. Let's talk about those specific contracts. Let's look at this, and let's work together to figure out what happened. I assure you that we will fix it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Austin: Mr. Speaker, I know that during the campaign, again, the Premier campaigned hard on not allowing businesses in New Brunswick to be, you know, out of business while we give contracts to people and companies outside of New Brunswick. Of course, there are interprovincial trade laws. Of course, there are parameters in place.

My question is this. What is this government doing to change those parameters to give an advantage to New Brunswick companies? We cannot continue to see New Brunswick



companies losing bids to companies in Quebec and other places around Canada—in this country. Will the Premier give us some idea of what the government is doing to change the interprovincial trade laws to make sure that New Brunswick companies come first when it comes to bids and tenders?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we started very early on to identify where some of the shortcomings are. One of the examples is that, in terms of Quebec, we have 12 certifications in our trades, and Quebec has 38 or 40—somewhere in that range. What that means is that a whole lot more people can work in New Brunswick than can work in Quebec. The question that we have had already in relation to other companies pertains to some of the big projects. We have tendered projects that are too big or that require a bond that is too big for companies that are working in New Brunswick, so we are not allowing them to join forces in New Brunswick in our own contracts—in our own tenders.

I recognize that. But there also have been some wins. There have been some wins in relation to the fact that we have looked at the border issue, but we have also had wins in terms of the salt contract. With respect to the idea of salt here in New Brunswick, it only made sense, Mr. Speaker, that we actually mine salt and put it on our own roads. It could have been a whole different process, but, no, we said that we have something here and we want to work with the company to make it work.

There is more to do. I want to work with all members to make it happen, but we are working in DTI under the hood of every contract.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Aboriginal Affairs

Mr. K. Arseneau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will start with a little editorial and say that if anyone needs any proof that we need to smash the patriarchy, it is that listening to the Health Minister's paternalism responses is really hard.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday was a historic day for Elsipogtog First Nation. It announced that it has entered a memorandum of understanding with the federal government to have exploratory discussions about the possibility of having negotiations based on the recognition of Elsipogtog Aboriginal titles, rights, and treaties. These discussions will also consider the protection and management of the environment and natural resources of Sikniktuk, the land of the southeastern portion of New Brunswick.

It is important to note that the only two signatories of this memorandum of understanding are Elsipogtog and the federal government, as the New Brunswick government has not yet agreed to participate. New Brunswick's full-time Minister of Aboriginal Affairs was not even present at



the announcement. Can the full-time Minister of Aboriginal Affairs explain why the province is not a signatory to...

Hon. Mr. Stewart: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite for the question. Plain and simple, I found out about the announcement at 8 p.m. the night before. My duties were here. I was not invited to the announcement formally. I read about it in a press release. The short answer to the question is that I was not invited to Elsipogtog.

In fairness to the member opposite, if I had been invited, due to the minority situation here, I would still have had to be here in Fredericton, but I was not invited. This is a bilateral agreement. There have been no formal conversations between the province and the feds since October 2018, when staff were informed that maybe something was stalled. Chief Arren in Elsipogtog formally requested that we be a part of the memorandum of understanding only on April 25. I did my job as minister. I am bringing something in to the province. We can look at it and see how we might participate. Thank you.

Mr. K. Arseneau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I only found out at ten o'clock, and I was there. Pertaining to the minority situation, we could have gone together.

This is a question of the priorities of this government. The government members had two weeks' notice, and they could have sat down at the table to talk about the MOUs. They did not decide to do so. This morning on CBC Radio's *Information Morning*, federal Minister Carolyn Bennett said that she hopes the province will join the federal government and Elsipogtog as a partner for these discussions. The title rights and treaty right claims were filed by Elsipogtog with the federal government as well as the federal... Yes, sorry. It is hard to believe that this government takes First Nations relations or management of the environment and natural resources in the land seriously when it will not even agree to sit at a table. Will the full-time Minister of Aboriginal Affairs explain what this government's plan is to come to an agreement with Elsipogtog...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. Once again, my duty as minister was to be in Cabinet at 9 a.m.

I was not invited to the announcement, and, Mr. Speaker, we have not been formally involved since October. In October 2018, the province learned that things were stalled. We were not at the table. It became a bilateral agreement. Here is the interesting thing. I found out from the Chief on April 25 that he would like us to be part of the MOU. I have no problem with that. As minister, my duty is to bring that back to government, so that is what I did. I am doing my job, but to find out late in the game like that is very difficult. Right now, it is a bilateral agreement. I would have been here anyway.



Here is the thing. Your question is not worth it. How come the federal government did not invite me? How come it did not invite me? Mr. Speaker, how come the federal government did not invite me? How could I have been in New York City with that minister pretty much on the date that I received a letter and never even have it come up? You...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Government Contracts

Mr. Horsman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to ask about some information that we gleaned from the DTI estimates. No one can deny that Fredericton needs a new courthouse. With thought, planning, and advice from civil servants, who are actually smart, we started a project across the street that would have included a new, safe courthouse and office space.

The Premier sits here in this House and talks about keeping things in New Brunswick while he pays \$1.3 million to an Ontario group to house PETL. In estimates, we found out that projects would have saved the taxpayers \$176 million on rental space over a period of time. It represents \$55.5 million in GDP, and it would have created 800 jobs here in the capital region.

I understand how excited the member for Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins is about creating 34 jobs. Could you imagine four ministers from the capital area being excited about 800 jobs? Mr. Speaker, DTI has shown that over \$238.5 million would have been saved. How was canceling this project smart in any way?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, there you have it. You have a situation where jobs are being created in Sussex—it is 50 jobs, by the way—with no government money. Contracts for salt were going to be done anyway, but not with taxpayer dollars. The philosophy of the Liberal governments in the past has always been to spend more tax dollars to continue to buy jobs, and that is why the province keeps continuing to go down and down, because we cannot afford the tax burden.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite cannot tell the difference. They cannot tell the difference between building for New Brunswick and people paying more taxes. The focus has always been on tax and spend, and tax and buy our way to the next election. Mr. Speaker, we are buying our way to the future of this province, and we are doing it through better management and better results. We are going to build what we need because that is what New Brunswick is all about.

