

May 16, 2019

[Original]

Collective Bargaining

Mr. Melanson: Mr. Speaker, the labour situation with our nursing home care workers has gotten to a point where it is basically at a crisis. Mr. Speaker, it is quite unfortunate, what we saw in the news last night. The Premier of this province and this government are pushing this group to the limit. They are getting frustrated because this government is not taking its responsibility as a government to get this resolved.

Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the Premier would care about the people living in these nursing homes so that the workers who are providing care for them get a fair shake and a fair deal. We know that when the Premier was Finance Minister, he could not get any labour or collective agreements signed. These people, Mr. Speaker, are still at the table, and the Premier is blaming them for leaving the table. Mr. Speaker, can the Premier please get back to the table and get this situation resolved?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, my voice is a bit gone. Anyway, I will just speak on this.

It was an interesting exchange yesterday, an unfortunate exchange yesterday. In relation to returning, when someone says that “we are done with this”, the indication that “we are done” is pretty clear. Obviously, if the mediator calls and the union wants to get back to the table, we are there. There is no question about that. We are there. If there was something that was said in haste at the meeting... They said: That is not what we meant. “We are done” is pretty clear to us, but we are willing to get back together and talk about this to finalize a deal.

The discussions had been going... There were a lot of discussions about where we need to be and what we need to accomplish. Mr. Speaker, we cannot let this be just a business-as-usual negotiation. It has to be one where we map out the future because the future requires us all to be better, and that is our goal through this. Unfortunately, it is about more than just wages. It is about a whole different approach to how we deliver services. Thank you.

Mr. Melanson: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is basically blaming the union representatives of these workers. They probably said: Let’s get it done, and let’s get this resolved. They are still at the table waiting for the Premier and this government to negotiate in good faith. Mr. Speaker, why are they not at the table? This Legislative Assembly has to take responsibility, and, today, its members will be debating a motion to go to binding arbitration.

The question is to the Premier, because he cannot get this resolved. He is not negotiating in good faith in trying to resolve this labour dispute. Will he and this government respect the will of this Legislative Assembly and support binding arbitration?



Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, we have said that we will go to binding arbitration with the condition and with the understanding that we have to be reflective of made-in-New Brunswick. We have to be reflective of public and private sector conditions here in New Brunswick. We have a comparison that looks at our wages, our salaries, and our cost of living. That is not too much to ask. After all, it is the taxpayers of this province that are going to pay those salaries. It is not just the people in here. It is the people all over the province that are going to pay those salaries.

If we are going to be responsible in this House, then the binding arbitration should be reflective of the need to assess conditions as they relate to living and working in New Brunswick. That is not unreasonable. Anything short of that is very unreasonable because we are imposing on the citizens of this province a new level of taxation to afford something that is different than New Brunswick can actually afford. That is the goal—to protect all citizens, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Melanson: Mr. Speaker, obviously, the answer to the question was not clear. We are asking the Premier to respect the will of the Legislative Assembly and to go with straight, traditional binding arbitration as it exists in the legislation of today. I will move on to a different subject.

Economic Development

We have not heard much from this government around economic development and economic growth. Mr. Speaker, we know that, from 2010 to 2014, economic performance was quite poor in the province. One year, the economy actually shrank. The unemployment rate was high, and people were actually losing their jobs. It was quite difficult for those people. And who was responsible for economic policy? It was the Minister of Finance of the day, and, today, he is the Premier. I am going to ask the Premier: Can you please explain today to New Brunswickers exactly what is your economic plan to grow the economy and to get people to work and to keep working in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to make what may be a news flash to the member opposite. It is talking about remembering the 2.3% jump in New Brunswick's GDP in 2015. Statistics Canada has now corrected that. It found that it was an error and that it was actually 0.65%, which means that in the last decade the average was 0.4%. It was not 2.3% after all. We could never get an answer from the previous government as to what it did to make that happen. Well, it turns out that it did nothing, because it did not happen.

Now that you look at that, you are saying: Okay, so spending money and throwing money around and taxation are not getting the job done. What can get the job done? Getting the private sector motivated. Having regulations that work for everybody who wants to invest in the province. Having a province's own financial situation be in a position where people will say: I want to invest in New Brunswick because it has its act together. New Brunswick is not going to just tax us into oblivion. It is going to help us to succeed in the province.



What are we doing? We are working with the private sector to get investment back in our province and not chase it out, as the previous government did.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Melanson: Mr. Speaker, the statistic referred to by the Premier was an official Statistics Canada measurement used in 2015. The measurement changed. We respect the adjustment made by Statistics Canada. I want to make sure that people understand that the measurement used was officially the one from Statistics Canada.

That being said, we have a Premier and a government who are only focused on one issue, the budget. There is no emphasis on economic growth to make sure that an economic plan is in place so that New Brunswickers are able to work and stay in our province.

We have seen this government flip-flop on different issues, since it has no plan regarding different sectors of New Brunswick society. My question for the Premier is this: Could he identify the specific sectors he has prioritized to grow the economy in our province?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, this is the thing that is very different. We look at, first of all, getting ourselves in a position where the outside world looks at us and says: Wow, New Brunswick is improving. We do not just go around and print a headline with nothing behind it, Mr. Speaker. We like to have a third party endorse our improvements, like DBRS saying: Oh, now we have gone from a negative outlook to a stable outlook. We did not invent that, Mr. Speaker, but we helped it to happen because of the great work and people in the system and throughout government who want to see a better New Brunswick and be part of this.

What are we asking? What did our budget say when the Minister of Finance put it forward? We cannot do this alone, Mr. Speaker. That is why, when talking with the unions right now, we cannot just lay out money. We have to find room in our system for improvement, because it is not fair to download more and more costs onto the citizens of this province. How many residents can afford another \$7 000 per bed in a nursing home? Mr. Speaker, it is not fair. How many residents do not have the benefits that we share here? We are going to fix it one step at a time, and it is growing New Brunswick one step at a time.

Mr. Melanson: Mr. Speaker, New Brunswickers do not want to relive the experience of 2010 to 2014, during which the economy actually shrank one year and there was no growth in the economy and people were losing their jobs. We all know that the economy and the growth of our economy are very much connected to having sustainable social programs and a sustainable financial footing.

If the Premier and this government are not going to focus on growing the economy and if they are not going to explain to New Brunswickers exactly what their plan is and on which sectors



they want to focus, we will have a challenge, not only to keep the fiscal situation balanced or in a surplus, but also to be able to provide the services that New Brunswickers are demanding.

Mr. Premier, could you please explain where are you focusing your energy—on which sectors—for the economy to keep growing and be sustainable in the long run?

Hon. Mr. Steeves: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. Do you know what? We do not want to relive those years. We do not want to relive the past four years. We do not want to relive the past 10 years. We have had government after government that has put off making the hard decisions.

This is a government that has made those hard decisions. It has made decisions that will balance the budget. It has made decisions that the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce, the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce, and the Greater Moncton Chamber of Commerce have all come out in favour of. It has made decisions on which small businesses have come out in favour of this government. It has made decisions where CFIB has come out and said: Good job on the passive income. We have made decisions that have made differences to New Brunswickers. We have made decisions, Mr. Speaker, and not for the next election. We have made decisions for the next generation. That is what we have done, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Fishing Industry

Ms. Thériault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am concerned about the economy of the fisheries sector, particularly in the Acadian Peninsula.

This week, the media reported that a worrisome phenomenon has appeared in the snow crab industry. In fact, we are seeing the takeover of several of our crab licences in Area 12 by financial interests outside the province. Even if these transfers are basically illegal, they can be done through proxies and other subterfuges. It is also reported that eight licences, worth more than \$50 million, were transferred to owners who are not from New Brunswick.

My question is this: Can the Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries tell me what the province is doing to stop this outflow?

[*Original*]

Please, let's not take the easy way out and say that this is a federal issue. It is the responsibility of the province to make sure that the laws are respected, so what is the plan?

Hon. Mr. Wetmore: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank my colleague for bringing the issue to the floor of the Legislature. We are fully aware of the issue, and we are concerned



about licenses being transferred out of the province. Hopefully, the member knows that this is a DFO issue, and it has been dropping the ball on it.

Our department will continue to advocate on behalf of our fishers to maintain the licenses in our province. We have reached out to the federal minister. We have asked the minister for a meeting. I have reached out to the other fishery ministers in Eastern Canada, letting them know that this is an issue. I will be going to Quebec City in July, and I have invited all the other fishery ministers in Eastern Canada to come to New Brunswick. Again, this is a federal issue, and the member for Shippagan-Lamèque-Miscou and I are working on this to protect jobs for all New Brunswick...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister. Time, minister. Time, minister.

Ms. Thériault: Well, I guess it is good news that they want to work with the feds. I cannot wait to see that.

Let's be honest, Mr. Speaker. That was a lame answer. It shows that this government has no real plan for our fishing industry. We are losing licenses. We are losing money that is going to be invested somewhere else, and we are losing boats.

[Translation]

Speaking of boats, if all our licences are leaving the province, that will have an impact, not only on the fisheries industry, but also on the whole ecosystem, including shipbuilding. I am concerned about our economy, as I have told you, Mr. Speaker.

The New Brunswick Naval Center in Bas-Caraquet is a great asset to our region. The investments made by our Liberal government had revitalized the shipbuilding industry, but, since the Conservative government came to power, the Minister Responsible for the Regional Development Corporation has never mentioned the New Brunswick Naval Center. Nor do we hear this file mentioned by the Premier, who, by the way, had voted against the project at the time.

So, is there someone, somewhere, on the other side of the House, who is going to rise to tell me whether, yes or no, you will continue to invest in the New Brunswick Naval Center?

[Original]

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Minister of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries has one minute.



Hon. Mr. Wetmore: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My gosh, I cannot get over how holy the opposition has become. This is not something that has just happened in the past six months. It has happened over the past few years, and this opposition did nothing while it was in government. I will tell you that I have spoken with the minister and I will be meeting with the minister. We will be protecting jobs for all fishers, not only in northern New Brunswick, but in southern New Brunswick as well. This is a government that is going to work for all our fishers. We realize how important processing is for the province, and we will not be letting these jobs go without a fight. If we cannot work with the federal Liberal government, we will be working with the new government that is going to be in place in Ottawa come October.

Economic Development

Mr. Harvey: Mr. Speaker, we have not heard much from this government about its plan to realistically grow this economy, except for its pipe dream to Alberta. Our Liberal government's Economic Growth Plan was focused on specific economic sectors, with an action plan to address challenges such as the aging population and labour shortages. Mr. Speaker, there is no action from this Conservative government. Complaining about the federal government in an election year is not an economic growth and jobs plan. Losing 6 400 jobs in one month is not an economic growth and jobs plan. Cutting infrastructure investments, the SEED program, and the budget of Opportunities New Brunswick is not an economic growth and jobs plan.

Mr. Speaker, the people are asking this in the coffee shops across New Brunswick: Where is the Conservative economic growth plan? When will the Conservative government table an economic growth and jobs plan that will work for all New Brunswickers and not just for its Tory friends?

Hon. Mr. Steeves: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Do you know what? When we talk about economic development, it is rather rich coming from this former government. When the members opposite talk about a pipe dream, I wondered what they were smoking in that pipe at the time when I look back at a business that they set up that has lost \$12 million in the first six months. Do you know what? We have a good board there, and we are going to be working with it. We are going to improve that business model, and we are going to make the changes that need to be made to make money for this province, while safeguarding and protecting our youth, protecting the product, and trying to get it off the streets too. We are going to do that, and we are going to do it without losing another \$12 million. When they talk about economic development, Mr. Speaker, we have to look right there, at that. Thank you.

Mr. Harvey: It is quite the earthshaking thing here that the Minister of Finance has to get up and answer these questions. Their only comment is on Cannabis NB losing \$12 million in its first year. Mr. Speaker, we developed...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.



Mr. Harvey: One of the core planks of our economic growth strategy was developing the cannabis industry with jobs in Moncton, with jobs in Atholville, with jobs in Fredericton.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Harvey: That was our plan. Mr. Speaker, they have no plan. They have no plan. Their only plan is to criticize the federal government. It is a pipe dream. The Premier goes out West and speaks to his buddies in Conservative governments. He has no plan. The Energy East Pipeline project is dead. The Premier is giving false hope to New Brunswickers on this plan. Shame on the Premier for that. They have no plan.

Will the minister finally stand up and give an outline for the plan for New Brunswick?

Hon. Mrs. M. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the comments and concerns from the member opposite. I have been waiting seven months for my second question regarding economic development here in the province of New Brunswick, and I am very excited to stand up and talk about the importance our Premier has put on the point that the private sector is where it is going to be at—energizing the private sector.

I would like to point out that, since 2016, in three years, the members opposite were responsible for a 263% increase in WorkSafeNB premiums, and there were no claims. There were no claims. It was just poor management. It was a top priority for our government the day that we hit the table. Passive income—it is absolutely pathetic about what happened over there. On June 28, the day that I was nominated, our now Premier stated that he would not support the federal government's push to parallel the federal changes to passive income while the...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister. Time, minister.

Mr. Bourque: I guess, Mr. Speaker, that finger-pointing is not an economic plan.

The only thing that we have seen the Premier talk about in relation to the economy is at political rallies out West regarding a pipeline. Let's all remember that we supported Energy East too, but the reality is that the proponent company has moved on and will be using other additional existing pipelines. So, realistically, this business case is just not there and is not happening anytime soon.

Why did the Premier, along with two political staffers, grandstand at a Senate committee hearing and try to create the illusion that this pipe dream is possible? On top of that, no minister and no civil servants accompanied him for that hearing. Either the minister and civil servants did not want to be part of this farce, or he just does not trust his ministers or civil servants. It is all about a political facade and all on the taxpayers' dime. When will this Premier stop the pipe dreaming and start building on a real economic plan?



Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, the only thing that the previous government had was to spend money, taxpayers' dollars, and disburse it all around to have taxpayer-funded jobs and taxpayer-funded announcements. That was its plan: We are going to finance enough areas in order to stay elected. Well, it did not work because people are tired of paying more taxes.

So what are we doing? To the Minister of Finance's comments earlier, what are we doing? We are talking to businesses all around the province. We are talking to chambers of commerce. We are giving them the opportunity to build in their communities. We are looking at regulations. The minister talked about the regulations related to the passive income, related to WorkSafeNB premiums, or related to real red tape reduction.

Mr. Speaker, we do not invent solutions. We create a path to create solutions for the future, and we create ownership in communities to help communities build on their own merits and on their own strengths. There has to be more than a political distribution model, but, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the previous government knew only one thing: Throw money at it, and maybe it will get better. Well, it was not getting better, Mr. Speaker, but it is now.

[*Translation*]

Tourism

Mr. J. LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are hearing real concerns on the ground about what is going on in the tourism sector. We had made real progress in this province. Now, with the huge budget cuts in tourism made by this government, thousands of people think that we are missing a huge opportunity to create jobs and attract tourists.

One person sent an email to one of my colleagues, on this side of the House. This is what the person said: You were doing such a good job in tourism, and, now, it is back to square one.

My question is this: Can the minister measure the impact of these cuts on the growth of this sector?

Hon. Mr. Gauvin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. I was really getting bored, because you know how much I like to talk.

Yes, we will measure this sector, because nothing was ever measured by the members in the official opposition. When I arrived at the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, my first question was this: Have you ever measured the effects of marketing efforts? I could not get an answer.

So what we decided to do is to invest in key markets, such as Ontario, Quebec, and New England, and we will keep doing it. This week, we released videos that are popular across New Brunswick.

The problem the former government had was that it showed nice pictures, but there was no emotional connection to a product. People need to hear our story; we are going to give it to them. We are going to restore the passion, and people in the tourism industry are going to be busy again. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.



[Original]

Mr. Speaker: It is very interesting that due to an oversight on my part, I missed the 10-minute cutoff. I will allow the two other parties to have their four questions.

Climate Change

Ms. Mitton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday, hundreds of youths and adults rallied outside the Legislature at a Fridays for Future climate strike.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Mitton: An increasing number of youths have been speaking publicly at these rallies, voicing their legitimate worries about what the future holds for them on a planet that is experiencing climate breakdown. One of the signs that I have often seen at rallies says: 1.5 to Stay Alive. That is a reference to the Paris Agreement, which our country signed, that agreed to aim to keep warming to 1.5°C.

Whether or not the Premier will agree with scientists that we have a climate emergency, I hope that the Premier will agree with the New Brunswickers who are being impacted by flooding and extreme weather events that the situation is serious. As the leader of our province, I would hope that the Premier would be well informed on this issue. Mr. Speaker, I would like to know if the Premier has at least read the executive summary for policymakers of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC, report from 2018.

Hon. Mr. Carr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member opposite's bringing up the discussion on climate change once again, Mr. Speaker, because we in this Legislature do take it seriously. Every person in here takes climate change seriously. Every person in that gallery does. All those children who were standing out on the steps of the Legislature and on the lawn and in all other places take it very seriously.

The member asked if we had read different reports. I want to ask the member opposite this, Mr. Speaker: Has she read the Climate Change Action Plan that her leader endorsed and was a very big part of? She has not spoken about it even once in this Legislature. I want to know why. I want to know why she has not endorsed the Climate Change Action Plan for all the world to hear, because it is a darn good piece of policy that several members of different parties of this Legislature put together. It had all-party buy-in and was all-party work. Why has she not commended her leader for working on that and for making a successful document that we could take to Ottawa to get rid of an unfair carbon...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.



Ms. Mitton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have read it, I do support it, and I would like to see a timeline for implementation.

I would also like to know if this document has been read. If one were to read the IPCC report, one would learn that the consequences of warming at 1.5°C versus 2°C are significant. We have already hit 1°C of warming, and we are seeing significant impacts. We are on track to hit 1.5°C as soon as 2030. Frankly, at this point, 2°C is the best-case scenario. Our current plans and current targets are painfully inadequate. Science says that they are not good enough. That is why people, especially youth who are facing climate breakdown, are in the streets begging our governments to take this climate emergency and their future seriously.

Clinging to the sunset industries of oil and gas is outdated and deadly. We need to take advantage of sunrise industries and build a better economy quickly. The decisions that the New Brunswick government makes today in New Brunswick matter. This is arguably the biggest crisis New Brunswickers have ever faced, so Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Carr: As I said earlier, we do take climate change seriously, and I think that it would be incumbent upon the member opposite to take it seriously and to have a real, in-depth conversation about it publicly as well. I am very glad to hear her finally endorse the Climate Change Action Plan—finally. After six months of sitting in this Legislature, she finally took that piece of policy seriously, but she still did not say that her leader was a big part of that plan. It does show that we have a plan, Mr. Speaker.

The member still does not acknowledge how many percentage points below the 2015 Paris levels that we in New Brunswick are, Mr. Speaker. We are at 28%. Match that with anybody in the world, Mr. Speaker. I contend that we are right at the top of the class, and we will continue moving to the top of the class—not with fighting from the member opposite, but with cooperation from the member opposite to continue to endorse our Climate Change Action Plan that was built and made in New Brunswick to lead the world.

Immunization

Mrs. Conroy: Mr. Speaker, it is disturbing to learn that the Education Department has no idea whether parents have submitted accurate immunization records, have had children vaccinated, have lost their vaccine paperwork, or are choosing not to vaccinate their kids. Vaccination legislation has been in place for the past 37 years in New Brunswick. It requires children to be vaccinated for admission to school, with some exceptions.

I was pleased to hear the Education Minister promise to take a hard line on enforcing the vaccination policies. I believe in getting an accurate picture of immunization records to determine how many children are in school without this protection from a variety of serious, even life-threatening diseases. Proof of immunization has been a requirement for children



entering New Brunswick's schools since 1982, yet the province's Chief Medical Officer of Health says that, after 37 years, gathering that information is still necessary. Can the minister please explain what he means by taking a hard line on this serious health issue?

Hon. Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Cardy: Thank you. Is that better?

I am really glad that the honourable member has raised this question. This is something on which I would guess I could speak for all members of the House to share the concern over the outbreaks of easily preventable, immunizable diseases in recent days.

The fact that we have this hole in our provincial system in terms of collecting that data is something that we are working very quickly to address. I will quickly run through the steps. I have asked all the districts to provide information regarding the current status of vaccinated versus unvaccinated students. Some students have exemptions that are legitimate, and we want to make sure that we have a clear idea of what those numbers are as well. Some people, such as immunosuppressed people, for example, may not be eligible to get a vaccine. After we have done that, we are going to make sure that there is a program in place to catch up with the records as quickly as possible and to make sure that students who are currently in our school system get the immunizations that are required. After that, we are going to move ahead to try to work on a...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister. Time, minister.

Mrs. Conroy: In this province, keeping immunization records is largely left up to the parents, who are given the immunization card, and it shows the record of their children's vaccinations. Parents update the card with each vaccination or booster and report those to the provincial health unit, either in person or online. This provides ample opportunity for gaps in the system, as the minister said. Can the minister say what measures are being taken to ensure that those gaps are being filled and whether an electronic health record system, which includes the immunizations for communicable diseases, is being considered? If so, could he explain when this is expected to happen?

Hon. Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, thanks to the member for the question. Yes, there is an electronic medical record system for immunizations that is currently being prepared for rollout. This is something that has been in development for quite a while because, in government, anything to do with electronics takes a very long time apparently. We are looking to make sure that this is in place within the next year. That is the current intention, according to folks in the department.



Once that is in place... However, that would not cover the students who are currently in the school system because that is designed to capture information from the day the students register for the first time. We want to make sure that, for new arrivals and for students who are currently going through the K-to-12 system, we have a full accounting of the immunization situation and that we encourage students and their parents to get immunized.

I will take the last few seconds, in answer to the member's question, to encourage all members to work with people in their communities to convey accurate, clear information about the fact that vaccines are the best way to prevent easily transmittable diseases that can result in injury and death for our students. If you care about your children and you can do it safely, get your kids vaccinated. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Question period is over.

