

May 30, 2019

[Original]

## Immunization

**Mr. D'Amours:** Mr. Speaker, since it looks as though there is confusion within his government, can the Premier inform the House how many measles vaccine shots are available for New Brunswickers in New Brunswick right now?

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** These people are pitiful. They know full well that the measles outbreak is being dealt with to the fullest extent by Public Health, an organization that operates separately from government. It is acting extremely well. It has access to vaccinations under our MOU with all the other provinces and the federal government. It is dealing with it to the fullest extent. It is doing a credible job, and for the people over there to attack Public Health on a political issue is absolutely downright despicable. You know better. I thought you were made of better stuff. You are not, and I was extremely disappointed with the member for Carleton-Victoria. They are a couple of pitiful, petty, picayune, and political pinatas, and they are turning this into a political issue.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** Public Health is acting exemplarily. The matter is being dealt with. It is being controlled, and we should be thanking Public Health, not criticizing it.

**Mr. D'Amours:** Mr. Speaker, families in New Brunswick are worried for themselves and their children. Elders in New Brunswick are scared. I am receiving messages from families from Quispamsis, Saint John, Edmundston, and Moncton. Can the Premier confirm that every New Brunswicker who wants a vaccine shot today can have access, and can the Premier confirm that his government has enough vaccine shots for all New Brunswickers?

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** The matter is being dealt with by Public Health to the fullest extent. It is acting exemplarily. It is acting properly. It has all the resources that are made available.

People who were born before 1970 are at zero risk, and you are trying to tell me that seniors are calling. That is improper. That is not good medicine. Those are not good facts. That is political posturing. You know better. You should know better. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Scaring seniors—scaring seniors—when there is no risk. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You are not fit to be in this House.



**Mr. D'Amours:** Mr. Speaker, the minister should be ashamed for not answering this question. The Chief Medical Officer says that New Brunswickers who have not been exposed but want to protect themselves will have to be patient before getting the vaccine. Can the Premier explain why New Brunswickers need to be patient and to wait until the next order of vaccines arrives in New Brunswick?

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** The government advises the people of New Brunswick to listen to trained professional physicians, not petty political hacks. There is a big difference. Listen to the experts. Listen to people who have it under control. Listen to people who are trained. Listen to people who advise medically. The situation is being dealt with to the fullest extent of the medical community that we have.

For you to stand up and scare people and fearmonger and create problems when there are none... What you are doing is pulling resources away from where they are needed elsewhere. You are being a blight on health care in New Brunswick. You are causing more harm than you are causing good, because the only thing that you care about is your own petty political agenda. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

**Mr. D'Amours:** Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Exactly. The Chief Medical Officer mentioned yesterday that there are not enough in New Brunswick. There are not enough in New Brunswick. Two days ago, the Minister of Education, who was answering for the Minister of Health said in the House:

[*Translation*]

*yes, there is enough vaccine for what we are experiencing as a province*

[*Original*]

The Chief Medical Officer is saying that New Brunswickers will have to be patient before having access to vaccines. Pharmacists have stated that there is a shortage of vaccines. Which statement should New Brunswickers rely on?

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** Certainly, not yours.

Rely on the medical experts. The vaccines are used for people who are at a higher risk. It is to control the spread. For you to turn this into a political circus to scare people and have people who are not at risk think that they are at risk, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I do not know how you look at yourself in the mirror in the morning. I mean, this is a new low for you. You could walk under a snake's belly with a top hat on, you are going so low. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. This is a matter for experts.



The government is giving them all the resources that they need. They are dealing with it to the fullest extent. Let the doctors practise medicine. Let them treat the people. Let them control the situation. You would do well to keep your nose out of it.

**Mr. D'Amours:** Mr. Speaker, the Chief Medical Officer—and I repeat—is saying that New Brunswickers will have to be patient before being able to access the vaccine. Pharmacists have no vaccine shots. People around the province are trying to find vaccine shots, but cannot find any. You refuse to give us a clear answer. Either you do not know what is going on or you are hiding information from New Brunswickers and members of this House. Can the Premier give a clear answer to a clear question? How many vaccine shots are available right now in New Brunswick?

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** It just goes to show you how totally inept the Health Critic from Region 4 really is. He is talking about going to pharmacists. If you think that you are at risk, you do not go out in public. You do not go to a pharmacy. A pharmacy is a public place. You do not want to spread it. The very thing you are suggesting is the very thing that the medical people are saying not to do. Stay home. Stay in isolation. Call 911. Let the medical people deal with the issue, not some political hack.

**Mr. D'Amours:** Mr. Speaker, when I said that the Premier should pick up the phone and call back the Minister of Health in New Brunswick, he did the right thing and followed my advice. The Minister of Education said that we have enough vaccines. We do not know the number. They do not want to tell us the number. We know that he misled both the House and the people of New Brunswick by not saying how many vaccines we have in this province. Will the Premier demand that the Minister of Education do the honourable thing and resign from Cabinet since he can no longer be trusted?

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** You know, I have a little grandson. At Christmastime, his mother, I think, bought him a little doctor kit. He had a little bag, and he had a little cross in his thing and a little flashlight. I think I will get you one. You are a wannabe doctor. Why do you not try to look like one? You are sure not acting like a member of this Legislature.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** There are 11 cases. There are 11 cases. They are contained. They are controlled within a particular geographic area. Public Health is dealing with it according to the protocols of infectious disease. There is no place for politicians to micromanage experts because some chump wants to make political points. It is not proper. It is irresponsible. It is not acceptable. The medical community and Public Health—the experts—are controlling the situation. They are dealing with it. They are containing it. They are following every medical protocol there is. They are being given every resource that they are asking for, and the last thing they need is you.



[Translation]

## Paramedics

**Mr. McKee:** The judge's ruling yesterday in the judicial review overruled the decision of arbitrator McEvoy regarding language requirements for paramedics. The ruling yesterday confirmed that an ambulance must meet obligations under the *Official Languages Act* and provide services in both official languages. Will the Premier respect this ruling?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** Well, I will tell you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. We are a collaborative government. We work with the language commissioner. We work with our members of the People's Alliance. We work with our friend the Minister of Tourism and Minister responsible for La Francophonie.

I will give you a few statistics. Our goal in March 2019 was to fill 40 of the 60 vacant bilingual positions. Today, I am pleased to say that Ambulance New Brunswick has filled 50 of those positions. Our goal was 40, and we filled 50 with 38 unilingual English and 12 unilingual French—50 full-time positions have been filled. The floater position is working extremely well, and 32 out of 33 positions have been filled. There have been 13 casuals go to full-time and 7 casuals go to part-time and 31 positions awarded to unilingual English people. We use language to unite, not divide.

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, they are not answering our questions today. We want real answers. I know the Premier relies heavily on the leader of the fourth party on that side of the House for political support, and, last year, they stood side by side in a taxpayer-funded photo op to claim they had fixed the problem. Well—news flash—they have not. His Alliance partner slammed yesterday's court ruling as well.

[Translation]

With this ruling, the only way for the leader of the fourth party to deal with ambulance staffing would be to amend the *Official Languages Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. According to the media, yesterday, the member for Fredericton-Grand Lake talked about doing so, given that he is well versed in constitutional law. Does the Premier agree with the Leader of the People's Alliance who supports a dangerous amendment of the *Official Languages Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, what I said—and I will stick to what I said—is that we have a situation in our province where we have been a failure at being able to teach our kids both official languages after 50 years. Do I think the Official Languages



Commissioner should have a role to play in improving that? I absolutely do. Do I think that they should not just bow out when we have a case in our education system where our kids are not learning both languages? Yes, I think they should have a role to play. If that is called a change in mandate or if that is called an interest in fixing New Brunswick, I do not care what it is called, but what I know is that I want people to be accountable for helping us to get results. I stand behind that opportunity, and everyone should stand behind that opportunity.

Having 20% of our kids graduating bilingual in our province after 50 years of our being officially bilingual is unacceptable. It is a failure, and it needs to be fixed so that all children coming out of school can at least talk to each other anywhere in this province in both official languages and be on a square footing right from day one, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, with respect to the legislation on official languages, if they want to change the mandate, we need to see new legislation tabled. This week, the government has not tabled any new pieces. We want real answers here on what is going on behind the scenes with respect to the *Official Languages Act*, and we want some real answers with respect to the problem that is facing our ambulances.

Last fall, the Premier pledged to fix the problem with Ambulance New Brunswick within a week of taking power. It is ironic that he often talks about people making promises they cannot keep. Well, this one was a whopper. Can the Premier try again and give a realistic timeline for when the issues of Ambulance New Brunswick will be fixed? Can he perhaps take responsibility for making a promise that he knew he would not be able to keep?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** I have been clear from the beginning that results matter. When we embarked on this program, it was to ensure, with the paramedics, that we had a fair opportunity for all qualified paramedics. We were assured by Medavie that it was going to happen, and the Minister of Health has quoted the success to date. If there is more opportunity, we will continue to pursue that, and I am sure that the minister will do just that, because the accountability lies within Medavie to get the results and that is what we are going for.

As for the Office of the Official Languages Commissioner, there is not any backroom program going on. I am saying to every New Brunswicker that we must be better. Some may be prepared to accept the status quo and just throw stuff around and say: I want to get back into government, because that is what life is. Well, for me, Mr. Speaker, it is not about being in government. It is about fixing New Brunswick. It is about making a difference so that people can live and stay right here in our province. One of the fundamental things that need to be changed is our ability to graduate kids who can converse with each other in both official languages. It is a mission, it is a goal, and we can achieve it.



[Translation]

## Collective Bargaining

**Mr. D. Landry:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon, the Premier will have the opportunity to stop governing and negotiating in court and start governing in the Legislative Assembly. I do not know if he saw them, but there were still quite a few hundred nursing home workers gathered here in front of the Legislative Assembly this morning.

What I am wondering is whether the Premier will act in accordance with the motion that we are supposed to vote on this afternoon, if it is adopted. Will he go along with all the members and recognize that he must go to binding arbitration? Will he respect the result of the vote this afternoon if the yeas have it?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** First of all, I am not going to preassume the outcome of the vote that will happen in the Legislature today. Yes, I am very familiar with the folks who are outside, and my intent is certainly to go out after question period to speak with them.

The situation we have right now in our province, which is most disappointing, Mr. Speaker, is that we have seen an attitude shift with the members opposite crossing the floor. We have seen a situation where, in 21 months, 40 000 employees have accepted a deal that this group—maybe they are all nursing home workers outside, but I would suggest that they are probably from all over—will not accept. So it is 40 000 compared to 4 100, yet, in this House, we are prepared to say: Unfettered binding arbitration. We do not care if you compare to New Brunswick or you compare to the United States or you compare to out West. We do not care. If we have one party that got 4%, we have another one that wants 20%. An arbitrator can do whatever.

Mr. Speaker, asking for a comparison of private sector salaries and benefits in this province is not too much to ask.

[Translation]

**Mr. D. Landry:** In the end, what we are asking for relates to the rights of nursing home workers that we must support. As I have said and still say, when I was Minister of Human Resources, correctional officers were the first group we bargained with. We had promised the group we would go to binding arbitration, and we did. Not one employee of the correctional centres has suffered from that; they are all very happy.

I can tell you this: Over a 19-month period, I was successful in negotiating 18 contracts. We started with binding arbitration, so why would the current Premier not end up with binding arbitration to end this conflict which is affecting the most vulnerable people in our society?



Furthermore, relatives of people who are in these nursing homes are worried. Will the Premier agree to binding arbitration some day?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, I think that the Leader of the Opposition just made my point. There were 18 successful negotiations...

(Interjection.)

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Nineteen—whatever the number. All of them accepted exactly what is on the table with this group. What is different? There are 40 000 employees who have accepted what this group refuses to accept. Now, why? What is different? Why is the fact that we want to have the binding arbitration with criteria that say that you must consider your benefits, your total package, with like jobs in our province, whether they be in the private or public sectors... What is wrong with that?

Who pays that bill, Mr. Speaker? The taxpayers of this province pay that bill. What is currently being asked for would amount to \$7 000 more per bed for every resident in a home. Is that what we want to download onto the taxpayers when 40 000 people out of 44 100 accepted it at the very time of the watch of the current opposition, which now, all of a sudden, has a change of heart? Mr. Speaker, let's put New Brunswick first here.

[Translation]

**Mr. D. Landry:** Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee this to you: For us, things have not changed. When we were in power, we always continued to bargain with all groups. We never went to court, since we settled disputes at the bargaining table. There were very few protests, while there have been some eight protests since this government took office, and there is no end in sight.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Premier does not like to answer hypothetical questions, but I am asking him this: This afternoon, if the vote is affirmative and the majority of members vote in favour of binding arbitration, will the Premier support the bargaining agents for the nursing home workers? What we want to know is this: If he has a minority today, will the Premier comply with the request from the House?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is correct. I am not going to answer a hypothetical question because I would like to think that, at the end of the day, the people in this House will recognize that being fair to all taxpayers in this province is saying: If 40 000 people got it right and agreed, then why are 4 100 people different—what is different? These are people who are looking after our most vulnerable members of society, but they are not going to accept what everyone else has accepted.



Mr. Speaker, to ask for an amendment which is in the current bill or motion, to ask for this amendment and say that we want to have a consideration in the criteria that reflects the current situation and benefits compared to the private sector and public sector for this province and Atlantic Canada, for that to be part of the criteria and for the opposition to reject that, what would be the reason? How could that be an unreasonable request? I would ask the leader: Why would we not compare these salaries with 40 000 others and the rest of the province?

### Health Care Funding

**Mr. Coon:** Mr. Speaker, I totally agree with the Premier that the only reasonable solution to our health care crisis is to negotiate a new health-care agreement with Ottawa that recognizes that our costs are proportionately higher than those in Ontario and the Prairie Provinces due to our aging population. We share this challenge with the other Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland and Labrador. Yet, yesterday, the Premier told us that he does not intend to align with Premiers King, McNeil, and Ball to press Ottawa for a new health funding agreement. Instead, he told us yesterday that he chooses to align with the Premiers from the Prairies and Upper Canada. Does the Premier honestly believe that Premiers Ford and Moe are going to go to bat for us on health care funding?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, first, maybe I need to go back—or maybe we both do—to read Hansard and find out what was said in the House here. I do not recall making any such statement that I would not align with the provinces in Atlantic Canada to seek additional funding. I do not remember even answering something like that.

I am working for alignment across provinces to grow the economy, and across Western Canada as well. I am not only trying to improve our relationships back and forth between provinces, but I am also looking at breaking down the borders that exist for trade and for working capabilities with Quebec. We have talked about that a lot here in the House because, right now, we feel that with interprovincial trade, there is about \$60 billion on the table across Canada. We are not taking advantage of it through Atlantic Canada. We have met on those issues many times.

As for the issue of getting more money because of our aging demographic and recognizing that need, absolutely, Mr. Speaker, I would be aligned with every province and have a ratio that reflects our aging demographic and how that compares to what we need to support health care. But, in the meantime, we have to look at how we deliver health care to make sure that we can manage the services, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Coon:** Mr. Speaker, history has demonstrated over and over again that the only time Ottawa takes us seriously is when Atlantic Canadians hang together and present a rock-solid, unbending common front to achieve our common goals. To secure the health care funding we need from Ottawa, the political leaders of our region must come together in a common cause.





I want to see a summit on health care funding with all-party representation from the Legislative Assemblies of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador to build the political coalition we need to save our health care systems in New Brunswick and in this entire region. That is how we will get things done, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier invite delegations from those Legislative Assemblies in the rest of Atlantic Canada to join us to develop a common strategy to secure the health care funding we need?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Once again, I thank the Leader of the Green Party for the question. I do not rule out the possibility and the benefit of having a summit, but, right today... I was just reminded by my colleague that, yesterday, I talked about the First Ministers meetings this summer, which is for all Canadian Premiers to meet in Saskatchewan, and there are a number of goals there. The issue of health reform, health care, and health funding is one of the key items that is there. All the Premiers of Atlantic Canada will be at this session as well, so we are fully aligned in that. Maybe that will turn into an Atlantic summit on what is needed.

But, you know, if I was thinking that the greatest success we have had is when we are all aligned with the federal government, well, Mr. Speaker, I do not think you would ever have had a time that everybody was aligned in the last four years. And what did that do for us? Let's just think, that does not always work. It is on the agenda for the July meeting, and it will be a prime target for an outcome that we will all be pushing for. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

## Paramedics

**Mr. Austin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the Liberal radicals over here are celebrating the court's decision yesterday on the McEvoy ruling, people are still dying while waiting for paramedics. The reality in this province is that on Saturday alone there were 31 ambulances that were unstaffed and scheduled to respond to emergency services. In Saint-Quentin, there are six positions that are not available, which Francophone paramedics could fill, but they still refuse to recognize that government after government is putting language over lives. I am asking the Premier: Will this nonsense stop—to allow frontline emergency service to do what it needs to do and to stop putting language over lives?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Look, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Leader of the People's Alliance for the question. I want to understand those statistics, because, if that is true, that is not the deal we have with Medavie. Our deal with Medavie is that it keeps ambulances on the road. I am looking forward to having that discussion, having the details, and confronting Medavie head-on about what is happening in Saint-Quentin, because that is not acceptable. It is not acceptable anywhere in this province. If we have an issue with ambulances being parked because they are not being staffed, then I am looking at the provider, I am looking at Ambulance New Brunswick and I am looking at Medavie, and I am saying: We need a better result. I will work with anyone in here to deal with that, because that is what we need to do—deal with it.



## Government Services

**Mrs. Conroy:** Mr. Speaker, Service New Brunswick is continuing to send dirty laundry from the hospitals to Ottawa while it awaits the completion of the centralized laundry facilities in Saint John. Over eight months, between last August and March, that cost \$1.2 million. My question to the minister is this: When can we expect the new centralized laundry facility to be completed? Does she believe that this is cost-effective?

**Hon. Ms. S. Wilson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member for that question because it gives me an opportunity to provide a bit of history here in the House. There was a study that determined that the province's laundry equipment was either out of date or at the end of its life, so a plan was adopted to consolidate laundry facilities and to refurbish the central facility with modern, more efficient equipment. Now, an emergency plan was put in place at the outset of the project should there be any breakdowns of the equipment, so laundry has been handled out of the province as a temporary measure until necessary facility upgrades are carried out in Saint John. After that, the Saint John facility will be able to handle the laundry needs of this province and other provinces, if necessary, and it will be a source of revenue for New Brunswick. Thank you.

## Floods

**Mrs. F. Landry:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Premier got quite emotional when asked simple questions about the flood mitigation project in Perth-Andover. He certainly did not give the straight answers he promised to give us in this House when he took office. There have been issues with flooding closer to his home this year, so I will ask about one of those, the road to Darlings Island. Will that be raised this summer, yes or no?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, I guess that I would talk... I do not know about being emotional. I was concerned, and maybe I got a little excited. However, I am concerned about residents who are affected by the flooding, and Darlings Island was one of those areas.

I would say, before I answer this question, Mr. Speaker, that this year in Darlings Island, our people in the civil service—our DNR folks, our people who are represented and are being paid by tax dollars—were there on-site delivering residents from one shore to the other, unlike last year when residents were left to do it on their own with a private operator. We put our people to work because they wanted to help. Last year, Mr. Speaker, they were not in sight. They were sitting in an office about 2 km away because they were not allowed to help. That was unacceptable, so that did not happen this year.

Now, on the upgrade, the member opposite would know full well that that project is under way. It was started last year. Houses were bought and moved, and the road is being upgraded and will be raised this summer.



**Mrs. F. Landry:** Our main east-to-west highway, Route 2, has been closed for long periods of time due to flooding for two years in a row now. That created a two- to three-hour detour for everyone, including the commercial traffic through this province, meaning additional costs for businesses and citizens. Mr. Speaker, time is running out. Will work be done to address this issue this summer?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** I think that, again, Mr. Speaker, my point from yesterday is being made today with this question. Yesterday, it was all about a new bridge and raising Perth-Andover. My comment was that we need to put it all in the perspective of what the priorities are for the province and how we ensure that we are going after the biggest issues first, the ones that most impact the people. Certainly, for people, where they live is a huge issue, and how they travel and commerce are all issues.

That is the goal, Mr. Speaker—actually understanding what are the priorities and what we need to change in order to minimize the impact of climate change and the impact of flooding like what we have seen in the past two years. Setting the priorities for that and then dealing with the federal government, as we are... As I said yesterday, I have been very thankful for the cooperation that I have received from the federal government in terms of reviewing and outlining what needs to be done and then working with the federal people to get that done. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Question period is over.

