

June 4, 2019

[Translation]

Budget

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, when the budget was tabled, it was like music to our ears. The Minister of Finance and several other ministers rose in the House to say that there would be no cuts and that services would be maintained throughout the province.

The facts tell a different story. Every day, we hear about new cuts, and most of them affect people who need help the most. There were cuts to the Free Tuition Program for students who cannot afford to go to college or university, to a program to assist informal caregivers, which helps families of children with disabilities, among others, to the SEED program that helps students find summer jobs, and to the New Brunswick Women's Council. The list is still longer.

The Premier's close friends are very well paid, but everyone else is paying the price. Will the Premier admit now that his heartless budget provides less and not more to the people who really need help from his government?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that paying for results is a foreign concept to the opposition. The members opposite believe that just throwing money out there, no matter what the results are, is all good enough. Well, Mr. Speaker, they also must believe that putting more money into banks and credit rating agencies in order to make interest payments and have them increase is a good thing as well, Mr. Speaker.

Getting our budget in order was more than just a bottom-line issue. It was avoiding paying more interest for nothing, Mr. Speaker. It was avoiding our paying more and more each year and taxing more and more each year.

Regarding the issues that the Leader of the Opposition talks about, Mr. Speaker, let's look at the results. We have a motto on this side of the House, and our motto is this: We want taxpayers' money to get results. If it does not get results... I was questioned on that very early on. What will you do if it does not get results? I will stop spending money on it. So, Mr. Speaker, my question to the opposition will always be this: You name the results that were not happening, and you continue to expect us to pay for it? That is not going to happen, Mr. Speaker.



[Translation]

Tuition

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the Premier is yelling; after all, there are children in the gallery.

We are talking about Standard & Poor's and all these international agencies that lend money to the province. I have no pity because of this, even if we must pay interest.

However, I can tell you this: When we make cuts to services for students, like free tuition, our future is at stake. All these cuts the Premier is making today in roads and infrastructure may look good right now, but I can guarantee to you that the work will be done some day. If we do it in 10 years, it will cost twice as much. Can the Premier tell me where he thinks he will save money with this kind of thinking?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: You know, it is interesting that the Leader of the Opposition brings up the free tuition issue. We do not believe that picking winners and losers is the opportunity that government should take advantage of. We believe that all students should have the opportunity to succeed in education. That is why the free tuition program applies to all students. It follows the student, Mr. Speaker. It follows the student to go to the university or the college of their choice, not the one of the government's choice, Mr. Speaker, because we believe that people have the inherent right to have a choice to make decisions. With our free tuition program, the money stayed the same, Mr. Speaker, but guess what! It reaches more students—more students, more colleges, more people—to choose freely, to make this province as good as it can be, because they are part of the solution, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. D. Landry: With this way of thinking... We do not have the same philosophy in this regard. If the program was not working as well as the Premier wanted it to, the government should have improved it instead of eliminating it. Free tuition is an investment in our future. We all know that the northern parts of the province will be more affected than other areas. So, Mr. Speaker, why did the Premier not simply decide to improve the program instead of eliminating it?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Read the fine print, Mr. Speaker, because that is exactly what we did. We improved the program. We made it accessible for all students to choose. The money follows the student, Mr. Speaker, and that is the role of government, to help all students to have choice.



And do you know what we added to the program, to talk about improvement, Mr. Speaker? We added a tax credit for those who are helping to fund universities. We want them to have a tax credit to do that and continue to do that. So it is not all taxpayer money coming out of everybody. It is people who want to help pay. They can pay, and they will see a tax credit. There is nothing wrong with that, Mr. Speaker.

One day, we hope that we will be able to bring back the tuition tax credit, Mr. Speaker, or the rebate program to allow kids to stay in New Brunswick and to be here longer, because we want our kids to have roots right here in the province, to live and work here, and to raise their families here. Unlike that of the previous government, it is a long-term strategy to build a province and build it with lots of people engaged. I am proud of what decisions have been made so far, and I am proud of my colleagues for helping us to make them because what we are going to have is a stronger New Brunswick. Thank you.

Economic Development

Mr. Melanson: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the latest report of the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council projected that New Brunswick would be in last place in terms of major investment projects. The Premier has been promoting and actually travelling to Saskatchewan, trying to convince people who are already convinced that the pipeline is going to happen. Mr. Speaker, the business case does not support the pipeline. Can the Premier tell us here today which specific other projects will become major investment projects that will create jobs in our province from the private sector?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker—shale gas development. You know, if we do that specifically in an area, what we could have is just like what British Columbia has. British Columbia has a \$42-billion investment going on, and guess what it is! It is an LNG export facility based on British Columbia's own natural gas supplies, and it has a coalition government with the Green Party, Mr. Speaker. I have said it before. We need a different shade of green here in New Brunswick. We need a shade of green that is going to help develop our province.

You know, I was looking at Norway and the information about how Norway is leading the world in electric cars. I think, in Norway, something like 50% of new car purchases are electric, such as Teslas. Do you know what? Norway is subsidizing that by 25%. Do you know where Norway has gotten its money? It is through natural gas and through oil development. Its oil reserves are depleting, and natural gas has taken over. Norway has taken that money and invested it in such an innovation as electric cars. We want to do that too, Mr. Speaker. We want to have industry pay for the next generation.

Mr. Melanson: Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the Premier is screaming this afternoon. If he is trying to convince himself of these projects, well, so be it.

That being said, New Brunswickers are concerned. New Brunswickers do not want to relive the economic downturn that happened between 2010 and 2014 under his watch, when he was the



Finance Minister. The Premier needs to explain to New Brunswickers that his economic policies, which he is bringing forward today, are of concern. There is no private sector investment in major projects, which we need to see. There are no publicly funded major projects because he has cut them—and they were leveraged by the federal government. Can you explain to us when we will see concrete results from your economic policies that you are bringing forward for this province?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: It is interesting, Mr. Speaker. I think that the member opposite should look at the news flash about the 2015 numbers that were corrected by StatsCan. They went from a fictitious 2.5% to 0.6% or something like that. There was an artificial economy to begin with and then erroneous numbers to end with, Mr. Speaker—an artificial economy based on taxpayer-funded dollars.

What have we seen over the past several months? We have seen renewed interest in New Brunswick, whether it be in terms of investments in the northern area, pellet plant investments, cybersecurity, or our cannabis operation here and the interest in developing that, which the opposition would well know of. But, Mr. Speaker, we cannot keep losing \$12 million per year or \$12 million in six months. We cannot keep doing that, so we are building, and not on taxpayer money. We are building a foundation on knowledge. We are building an organization to develop an economy here. Whether it be in rural areas or whether it be in a blue economy with aquaculture, it is going to be an economy based on private sector investment, not just on throwing government money to the wind.

[Translation]

Mr. Melanson: The projects or initiatives the Premier listed were all started when we were in government. They are real projects and investments. The Premier can mention them and take credit for them; that is fine, since, in the end, it is New Brunswickers who will benefit from them.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier still has not answered my question. What are the specific investment projects from the private sector—other than the Energy East Pipeline, a type of investment which the development plan does not even support—that the Premier is planning to see in New Brunswick to create employment in our province, get workers to stay here, and enable those who have moved away to come back to work here, at home in New Brunswick? His economic policy is not working, and he does not have any concrete examples to show that it is.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting how you create hope in our province. You create hope by, first, getting your own act together. You create hope by saying: I do not need to tax people more to get there. You create hope by asking people to do a little bit more, not pay a little bit more. That goes for the discussions we are having with the nursing home workers, with



other workers in the civil service, and with other workers anywhere in the province. It is about doing a little bit more.

We talked about the sick time in my discussions yesterday and the day before. The facts are real. For whatever reason, people are not able to come to work regularly. In relation to the need for sick time or the absenteeism, it is across the whole system. We can argue it and pretend it does not exist, or, Mr. Speaker, we can deal with things head-on.

I prefer to work with the facts. In here, facts seem to be something that is not really relevant, but for me, they are very relevant. Understanding the issue, then understanding the root cause, and then building a team to save New Brunswick—that is a goal. We will not find them all right in here, Mr. Speaker.

Nurses

Mr. G. Arseneault: Another hidden cut that was not mentioned on budget day was the cut to the nursing programs at UNB and the Université de Moncton. The chair of the Horizon Health Network board has now weighed in on this move, calling it “simply bad policy”. He added that he finds the decision “troubling”. My question for the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour is this: In the face of our critical nursing shortage, would the minister agree with the experts that this decision is just bad policy?

Hon. Mr. Holder: I think the member opposite needs to read the whole article. I saw the video yesterday from Mr. McGarry, and he clearly stated the very same thing that both the Minister of Health and I have said repeatedly in public and on the floor of this Legislature—that we all need to come together to build a strategy that actually gets results. He said that we need to bring the health authorities, the Department of Health, my department, the universities, the Nurses Association of New Brunswick, and the New Brunswick Nurses’ Union all together to build a strategy. But we cannot keep shovelling money out the door and getting absolutely no results, Mr. Speaker. That will not work. We are going to get a program in this province that actually delivers nurses.

Mr. G. Arseneault: The minister fails to mention that some of this money was being used for critical training—the high standards of critical training in the province. It was the Bernard Lord government that brought it in. The member seems to blame us for that issue, but we continued it in the hope that someday this minister and this government would bring in a proper recruitment program. When it does, the cuts that are being contemplated here... The \$9 million that is being cut from this program will not be available for that recruitment program. I ask the minister this: Will the minister consult with the groups involved here, the stakeholders? Get them together once and for all, if that is what he believes in, and let’s get a recruitment program. We are at a critical stage here with our nursing shortage. What is the minister doing?

McGarry also says: “We need to get our heads out of the sand”. Well, let’s do that, and let’s do it now.



Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, I think what he was saying is that we all collectively have to get our heads out of the sand. That means everybody. It has to be all hands on deck. That is exactly what we on this side of the House have been saying all along.

I find it pretty rich. I heard one member over there yapping and saying “When?” This is coming from the guys that shovelled \$8.7 million out the door every year and never asked for any results, Mr. Speaker. Maybe that is okay to them, but it is not okay. We cannot and this government will not continue to shovel money out the door and get absolutely no results, Mr. Speaker.

First Nations

Mrs. Harris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was released yesterday. The National Inquiry was launched in 2016 to recommend concrete actions to address the systemic causes of violence against Indigenous women, girls, LGBTQ, and two-spirit people and to end this national tragedy. I would like to thank the minister for personally attending the closing ceremony.

In December 2017, the *New Brunswick Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls* was released. Can the minister kindly update the House on the implementation of this plan?

Hon. Mr. Stewart: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite. After the events in Gatineau this week, essentially, they handed me the report and I am going to be reading it. Once I finish it, I am going to be reaching out with my staff, who are going to be working with the Women’s Equality Branch.

One of the important things about our own plan is that we have to engage First Nations. We cannot just tell First Nations people in New Brunswick that this is going to be the plan because the Liberal Party wants it or the Green Party wants it. We have to engage with the First Nations people so that they can determine the process and we can support the victims better and support our own people better. Thank you.

Mrs. Harris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the minister for his words, but what I am wondering about is this. In 2017, there was a plan. It was a New Brunswick plan entitled *New Brunswick Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls*. I am wondering if you can update the House on what has been happening with that particular plan.

Hon. Mr. Stewart: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for the question. That plan is ongoing, and now that the report is finalized, there is going to be more engagement with that plan. We are going to be reaching out to the First Nations.



As I said, Mr. Speaker, there were over 2 300 testimonials. This is a Canadian national effort, the first of its kind. We are seriously indebted, and we want to value the testimonies of so many First Nations people in our country. We are going to take the New Brunswick plan that you are talking about, which we are working on, and now we are going to engage with the First Nations on the next steps. We know that there needs to be action in New Brunswick, and I am committed to that too. Thank you.

Fundy Trail

Mr. J. LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, every day, we hear about more hidden cuts by this government that are going to have a devastating impact on tourism in the province. We believe that there is a real opportunity for growth in this sector. This government obviously disagrees with that. My question for the minister is this. Why have you decided to delay the completion of the Fundy Trail Parkway? Is there not enough evidence that this will boost tourism and help the economy and the province's bottom line?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting question because of what has happened in the last four years. We went in every direction but that of getting something done. We spent lots of money, Mr. Speaker. The previous government threw money at everything, but you cannot figure out what actually got done. That is the \$1-billion hole that you find that is being spent today and that was not being spent a year ago—or let's say four years ago. It is now spent every year—\$1 billion more per year.

Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? We are going to focus on key areas to finish and complete. Do you know what? The next thing they will be moaning about is: Why are you not doing something else? The process of complaining is rampant here. It always has been. But, Mr. Speaker, we are gearing up right now to figure out how we can finish at least a shortcut to get through so that we have a loop, because it is a key asset for our province. It is an area where things can actually get done. We have people stopping there, and then they move out throughout the rest of our province. It is a focus for us, and I am hopeful that we will be able to complete it, unlike the lack of progress that has happened in the last four years.

Mr. J. LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, this is not about spending. It is about investing in the future. We have also been seeing reports that the main road for travellers to Fundy Park is so bad that tourists are worried about damaging their cars to get there. If you are not going to complete the Fundy Trail Parkway, should you not at least fix this road?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Oh boy, it is rich, Mr. Speaker, is it not? We can build things all over the place. Do you know how much road would have been fixed, if you took some of the projects? You could look at a number of them, whether or not they were priorities. I could list a whole lot that were not priorities. Mr. Speaker, obviously the access to get to the Fundy Trail Parkway... It is finished, the Fundy Trail Parkway. We want to get the access outside the Fundy Trail Parkway off to, let's say, the Sussex region and ultimately the Alma region so that people have a route through there. That does include getting there on Route 114.



However, can you imagine how good it could be or how good it will be if we stop building these great big things that we do not need? Mr. Speaker, that is what we have done. We have stopped the huge expenses on things that we do not need, to focus on the things that are going to be game changers for this province. Whether it be in the north, the south, the east, or the west, we are going to focus on what we have to offer, because we believe there is a lot to offer. The days of bypassing New Brunswick are over, Mr. Speaker.

Waste Management

Ms. Mitton: Mr. Speaker, last week, NB Liquor announced that it will phase out single-use plastic bags. Prince Edward Island will institute a ban beginning July 1. Last night, Moncton city council voted on first reading to ban them within its municipality by July 2020. Dieppe and Riverview plan to follow Moncton's lead, yet the provincial government is absent on this file. Dieppe's mayor, Yvon Lapierre, has said that he is not prepared to wait for the province.

Instead of a patchwork framework, the government needs to show leadership with a province-wide ban. A recent Corporate Research Associates poll found that three quarters of residents in Moncton, Fredericton, and Saint John would support a ban. The Retail Council of Canada has also called for a uniform ban across the province to make it easier for retailers to implement. Will the Minister of Environment and Local Government commit to taking the lead to work with municipalities to ban single-use plastic bags in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Carr: I can actually send the member opposite the news media link where I have already committed to doing that, Mr. Speaker. We have openly committed to working with municipalities on that file, Mr. Speaker. It is a file where I have said that I would like to see how it turns out in those other jurisdictions.

There is no doubt that we have to reduce our use of plastic here in the province. There is no question about it. Bags are one of the low-hanging fruits, really, Mr. Speaker. We should go further, and I think the member opposite should be pushing us to go further with more of our single-use plastics. It is not just the plastic bags. There is so much more we can do. Mr. Speaker, right here in New Brunswick, we have a company that recycles those plastic bags. Nobody is talking about that or about why that company is doing such great things with those bags. However, we do need to go forward, and we do need to go further. I appreciate the question and the concern from the member opposite.

Ms. Mitton: Mr. Speaker, the time to act is now. We need a timeline on this, and municipalities are waiting to hear that timeline. In November, the Minister of Environment and his colleagues across the country agreed to cut Canada's waste by 30% by 2030 and 50% by 2040. New Brunswick has not even had a waste management strategy since 2001.

The minister and I have many things on which we agree here. The minister has said that he thinks one of the biggest targets to reduce our waste should be plastics. I agree. He said he



does not want different regions of the province to have different regulations, and I agree. He said that we need to give retailers adequate time to prepare, and I agree.

However, I do not agree that we should delay any longer. We need to start now so that we can give retailers and consumers time to prepare for changes that could maybe come into effect next year. What is the Minister of Environment and Local Government committing to doing this year to make New Brunswick a leader in reducing our use of plastics?

Hon. Mr. Carr: I think we all have a role to play in reducing our plastics in our environment, Mr. Speaker. So far, from what I have seen around the province, there is a lot we can do—a lot that every one of us in this room can do and that every one of our constituents can do better. Mr. Speaker, when I travelled around the flooded areas this spring, all I saw in the ditches of New Brunswick was garbage and plastic. There is no need of it. We have to start behaving better as individuals to start with. Now, at some point—and the member opposite agrees with me—government has to come in and create the legislation because we cannot just do it on our own as citizens. We just cannot seem to get to that point.

However, I will say that I have met with the municipal associations on several occasions, and in terms of their top six wish list items, reducing plastic bags or bringing in that legislation was not one of them. We cannot chase every topic that comes to our table, Mr. Speaker. We have to pick our priorities. That one, for me, is a big one, and we will get to it when we get the other items ticked off the list. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Official Languages Act

Mr. Austin: Mr. Speaker, we are all elected to this House to create laws and to change laws, to make policies and to amend policies, to launch new programs, and to eliminate inefficient and ineffective programs. I have just a general question for the Premier. Does the Premier agree that if laws and policies are unenforceable or impractical, our role as legislators should be to change those laws to better reflect the realities on the ground?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Well, thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, you know, in the context of it, one would say that it sounds as though that should be the case, but I think that you have to look at every law in its own right. You have to look at every case, and you have to understand the details of each one. In some ways, you kind of think that this is a loaded question and the next question is coming, so I will wait for the next question, Mr. Speaker. My view on answering any question is this: Let's hear the question first. Thank you.

Mr. Austin: That is why, Mr. Speaker, I do not give the Premier my questions beforehand.

Mr. Speaker, many sections of the *Official Languages Act* deny the human resource issues that this province faces and do not provide a practical approach as it relates to frontline service. In fact, the province itself violates this Act on a regular basis in its delivery of frontline service. So



would the Premier agree that changes must be made to the wording of the Act to enable frontline service to adhere to the laws provided by the province?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I guess the point of looking at any laws that we have on the books and the point of this particular discussion, which seems to be about this particular ability to fulfill a language requirement and whether it is not practical in relation to our ability to actually do it... I think that we have an obligation in the province, which we have said. We are a bilingual province, and we do have obligations under the *Official Languages Act* to provide service in both languages. I do not think that we are debating that here in the House, Mr. Speaker.

I think that any time I have debated anything in that regard, it has been about the fairness of it all. It has been about the inability of our education system to keep up with what we want to be as a province, and I have challenged that. I have said many times that the French immersion program, after 50 years, is a failure. It is not delivering the result that was intended. Are we just going to pretend otherwise? I do not think so. I think that we have to understand what can really work that has worked for other provinces and other countries because I think that there is an opportunity. But in this case, we need to evaluate. Coming forward, we have a lot of challenges with people and with getting the services provided, so we have to look at everything head-on. For that, I understand what the...

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

[Translation]

Tourism

Mr. J. LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the end of last week, we heard of another hidden budget cut in the tourism sector, which affects funding for the Cape Jourimain Nature Centre. How can the minister justify not telling the operators of the centre about these cuts before the beginning of the tourist season?

Hon. Mr. Gauvin: First of all, thank you very much for the question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will answer the member for Shediac—Beaubassin—Cap-Pelé by asking him to turn to his right and to look at the member sitting beside him. Four years ago, that member considered Cape Jourimain for a budget cut.

Now, we must start to see results in tourism, too. Last year, in 2018, 70 people attended the opening of the New Brunswick Aquarium and Marine Centre in Shippagan. This year, all things being equal, there were 1 000 people at the opening on Sunday. Why the difference? We rolled up our sleeves to get results. We were active on social media, and we got results. Cape Jourimain is open. As for the budget cut, it had already been identified. Thank you very much.



Health Care Funding

Mr. D'Amours: Last week, we debated a motion asking the government to maintain existing services in rural New Brunswick hospitals. Of course, government members amended the motion to water it down.

Before he reacts with arrogance and demeans my region, I want to remind the minister that, in our province, there are people who live outside Rothesay, whether he likes it or not. We are not all rich like him, and he brags about it. We cannot all jump in a freshly cleaned BMW to drive the short distance to the biggest hospital in the province, Saint John Regional Hospital.

Here is my question for the Minister of Health: Can we really expect to see cuts in services in some of our hospitals in rural New Brunswick?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Flemming: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member opposite that he is still the holder of the idiot question of the day award. I do not know what that preamble was about. I do not know what the shots about my riding were about. I do not really know what it was that he was trying to say.

We had a resolution that was amended and that was unanimously passed by the House. The last time I checked the vote, everybody voted in favour of it. Now, the member is up trying to make some kind of political hay out of it, and I really do not even think it warrants much of an answer. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker: Question period is over.

