

June 7, 2019

[Original]

### Government Contracts

**Mr. D. Landry:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Premier accused the member for Moncton South of providing incorrect information in this House when she said that his special advisor had been paid \$212 750 for the period from December 18 of last year to March 18 of this year. That was the number provided to us by his office through the tabling motion. Can the Premier tell us whether or not the number provided via the tabling motion was correct?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I can talk about it not being correct actually because the amount paid to date is \$80 000. That even includes the transition expenses from back in the fall, so that is the amount. Plus, the salary cap is actually lower than that amount, so I am not sure where that amount comes from.

However, I think of another amount that we should talk about. That is the million-dollar man with the Liberal government, Mr. Speaker, Len Hoyt. There was \$1 million that went to Mr. Hoyt, Mr. Speaker—\$1 million—and \$960 000 went to another gentleman, Mr. Speaker. You know, it is quite astounding.

You know, the opposition wants to open up the box, Mr. Speaker. I want to see the box because I have three people. They are three people with specific skill sets who are driving change within the government and helping to grow the talent within the civil service, not three people who are just looking for a way to find Liberal channels through the system. We are actually going to improve delivery within government because we are going to have the right people working together, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite want to talk about salaries. They want to talk about expenses. As I said in the media last night, game on.

**Mr. D. Landry:** Mr. Speaker, how can we trust what the Premier is saying when he keeps giving out different numbers? In estimates, he said that he is calling for Mr. Youden's salary to be \$185 000. Is that accurate, Mr. Premier, or not?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Bob Youden's salary is topped at \$185 000. That is correct. That is the contract. You know, I do not leave the contracts open-ended like some do, Mr. Speaker. Also, it is based on actual work being done, so it is not just kind of, here is the pay, and there you go. Mr. Speaker, I do not know. They have dug up something here about which they should get more facts. They should really get more facts, Mr. Speaker.

I know that, if we want to look at some of the issues and questions about where money is being spent, I have another list of names, Mr. Speaker, which I think we will just put out there, but we will not do it all at once. It is kind of good to do it in drips, Mr. Speaker, because every time that



they want to make up something and then multiply it by four like, oh boy, we have something here... I have something here, the million-dollar man, and that is factual, Mr. Speaker. I have a few others who are in the same camp. And we have not gotten to the bottom of the regional office in Saint John yet. What was that for, with government money, Mr. Speaker? It was staffed with government money and set up for a political reason, to get ready for the election.

Do we really want to spend our time talking about this, or do we really want to deal with issues that are important to New Brunswick?

**Mr. D. Landry:** Mr. Speaker, are we sure that Mr. Youden, the Premier's former Irving colleague, is not being prepaid for his work because \$185 000 plus HST adds up to \$212 750? If that is the case, who gets paid in advance for the work that they might do, Mr. Speaker?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, there you go, you see. The members opposite took a contract that has a maximum limit on it, and then they multiplied it by four yesterday. Do you remember? There was this thing about if you multiply it by four, what is it going to be by the end of the year?

Not only are they wrong about the current number, which is \$80 000, but the max by the end of the year will be \$185 000. Maybe expenses will be something like \$20 000 or \$15 000. I do not know, but the maximum salary is right in the contract, Mr. Speaker, so there is no confusion about it. We can be very clear, very precise, and very accurate, and \$185 000 is the salary cap, Mr. Speaker. We do that because we are just not open-ended in spending money.

However, when I bring people with that calibre into the system, someone with that recognition in the community—in the business community and in his community—with the work that he has done personally and for others and with his national recognition, do you know what? I want those kinds of people to help us build New Brunswick. That is why he is here, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. D. Landry:** Mr. Speaker, why is Mr. Youden not being paid like normal civil servants who are subject to certain rules? Why, when the Premier is complaining about regular civil servants taking sick days, is Bob Youden getting special treatment? Will the Premier agree to make public the terms and conditions of Mr. Youden's contract? Does he have to show up for work like regular people? Does he have to follow the same rules as others, Mr. Speaker?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is not a regular contract. It is not an 8-to-5 contract. It is a contract where someone comes in and spends time here. We are on the phone a lot, we are sending notes, and we are talking back and forth about issues. The idea is that when he is here, when he is working, he bills for hours based on the time he works. I know for a fact that the hours he works are much greater than the time he spends here, but it does not matter in that sense because he is capped. He is capped to protect New Brunswickers, Mr. Speaker.

I could talk about another name here that is \$960 000—another million-dollar person, Mr. Speaker, and there are a couple more. There is the previous CEO of the bridge. We could talk



about that, Mr. Speaker. We could then talk about the number of offices in the Premier's Office. You should come over and have a look at all the empty offices. I have no idea who was in those offices and what they were doing—other than just political distribution, Mr. Speaker.

### Hydraulic Fracturing

**Mr. McKee:** My question is for the Attorney General. Does she believe that this government has fulfilled its obligation to consult with First Nations people when it comes to the government decision to allow fracking in the Sussex area?

**Hon. Mrs. Anderson-Mason:** First, I want to thank the member opposite for that question. It has been quite some time since I have been able to rise in the House and answer any questions. I have been told repeatedly that in this position as the Attorney General, you seldom get to rise to answer questions, so I thank him very much for that.

I believe the question he asked was in relation to consultation. As the member opposite would know, consultation is an ongoing process. Thank you.

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, as the minister is very well aware, the Supreme Court of Canada has repeatedly stated, in cases like the Haida nation and Rio Tinto or the Mikisew Cree nations, that the duty to consult “arises when the Crown has knowledge, real or constructive, of the potential existence of the Aboriginal right or title and contemplates conduct that might adversely affect it”.

That duty would extend to decisions of Cabinet as we have seen here. The Premier has said that the duty to consult is vague. They have talked about having coffees. That is not meeting the duty to consult nor are things like what the minister says are ongoing. The Premier is now talking about getting investments of \$77 million. When are they going to consult?

Given that, would the minister not agree that this government has not met its legal obligation and duty to consult in this case?

**Hon. Mr. Stewart:** I thank the member opposite for the question. The important thing is to clear some of the air on this issue.

Number one, the moratorium is still very much in place. It was lifted with a ministerial exemption for just one small parcel of land in New Brunswick.

Aboriginal treaty rights are recognized by our government. Our government believes that anytime there is going to be an impact on hunting, fishing, and gathering, we always need to consult with our First Nations. We actually hope that we can be a partner. Our government wants to work with First Nations because we know that they are the fastest-growing population in New Brunswick. We believe that they are key to our economy, and we also believe that they



are key to this industry. We are going to be working together in full and meaningful consultation.

### Political Fund-Raising

**Mr. G. Arseneault:** The Minister of Environment is sending out letters to people informing them that he is travelling the province as minister. In the same letter, he asks for donations to the Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick. My question is, why is the minister embarking on a political fund-raising tour paid for by taxpayers?

**Hon. Mr. Carr:** Mr. Speaker, all political parties need money. It is no surprise that it is the process that all parties use. Every party sends a letter out to its supporters.

Now, I did not send it out from my departmental office, from my government office. It went out from the PC Party, just as the former Premier, Brian Gallant, sent out a number of letters to his constituents and to all New Brunswickers who supported his party in the last go-around and just as Mr. Vickers will do in the next three or four years or however long he is the leader of the party.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that anything was done wrong here. It is political party fund-raising. We all do it. We will all continue to do it. I do not know what else to say to the member. He is really grasping at straws today. Thank you.

**Mr. G. Arseneault:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister signs it under his ministerial title, and it is a portfolio that he has some say in.

Mr. Speaker, I have a straight question for the Premier. Does the Premier see nothing morally or ethically wrong with the minister using his position and mixing government business and political fund-raising?

**Hon. Mr. Carr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, the member opposite is really grasping at straws here. Any of these letters are sent out by the parties. All fall within the rules of Elections New Brunswick. They are gone through very thoroughly. They come before this House before legislation is changed, and we are following that process perfectly, Mr. Speaker.

What I fail to understand this morning is why the Leader of the Opposition will not condemn the former Premier and former leader of his party for hiring Jack Keir in Saint John, taking money out of the Premier's Office over those four years, to politically campaign in the city of Saint John to try to win seats. And it did not pay off. On the backs of taxpayers, he won one seat by nine votes, Mr. Speaker. Would the member opposite like to explain that?



[Translation]

## Telecommunications

**Mrs. F. Landry:** Mr. Speaker, the previous government launched a very important project for rural New Brunswick. It was about bringing high-speed Internet to every corner of the province. As you know, it is an essential tool, both to attract businesses and to retain them throughout our province. High-speed Internet is also very important for activities such as distance education or for students to be able to keep up with their classwork from home as there are more storm days.

We know that a number of infrastructure projects were cancelled or postponed by this government. Can the minister assure the House that the project to make high-speed Internet available throughout rural New Brunswick has not been postponed?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Thank you for the question. To the member opposite, you know, when you say it was on your priority list, what was not on your priority list? I think everything was on it, and when you have a priority list with everything on it, Mr. Speaker, you do not have a priority list.

However, as for the point of this, I agree that the high-speed Internet is an issue. We have been working with Rogers and Aliant and having discussions about the bigger picture and their contracts, and we are looking for ways to improve that service. So it is still very much on the radar as something to do. I do not have a particular timeline in that sense, but I know that it is important to rural New Brunswick and that it is something we want to pursue. However, it is something that we are going to try to do in the context of our whole service contract and how we can get synergies with those companies as well as with Xplornet and others.

[Translation]

**Mrs. F. Landry:** Mr. Speaker, my question is very clear: Does this government not consider high-speed Internet access throughout rural New Brunswick important?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I understand that it is important.



[Translation]

## Schools

**Mr. K. Chiasson:** The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development was in my riding last week to visit Polyvalente W.-Arthur-Losier. It must be borne in mind that this is the same minister who put an end to the midlife upgrades to our high school last fall, choosing to start new projects such as building a new school in his own riding before even finishing the projects already under way.

Mr. Speaker, upgrades started in 2015, and only two phases remain to complete the project. So, after seeing first-hand the current state of this high school, is the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development now prepared to admit his mistake and complete the last two phases of the upgrades?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Cardy:** Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for his question, despite the disconnection from reality that the question contained, which I will go through in a couple of quick points. First, when rising in this Legislature, I think it would be appreciated by all members if there were some basic understanding of the structures that the members are talking about. The minister does not make decisions around school construction priorities. We have elected bodies, called district education councils, in this province.

[Translation]

They are the district education councils.

[Original]

They are responsible. They present lists to the department, which analyzes them in the context of the capital budget processes. As I have said before, I will make decisions on school construction based on the money that I am given through the budget process and based on priorities identified by locally elected officials. The government has always stood up for local government and for decentralization.

The members opposite cannot imagine that any decision would be made outside the boundaries of the Premier's Office. We know, again, that they lived under a regime of fear and control for a long, long time. We hope they will come out of it.

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

**Mr. J. LeBlanc:** There were priorities.



[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this time. To postpone a project already under way such as the one at Polyvalente Louis-J.-Robichaud in Shediac is not an intelligent way to manage New Brunswickers' money. The project will end up costing a lot more. Once again, I ask the minister: How can this not actually be a political decision? The decision is certainly not based on sound economic principles.

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Cardy:** Mr. Speaker, thanks to the member opposite for the question, but I will take no lessons on intelligent financial management from any of the members on the other side of this Legislature. When I make decisions in the best interest of the students of this province, I do it knowing that we are standing on a legacy of mismanagement and waste. Millions of dollars, as we discussed here today, were wasted on friends of the former Premier, on people who stood around the corners of the Liberal Party offices waiting to grab any contracts they could. That was their responsible management.

When this government came into office, we made rational choices. We went to the departments, we listened to the bureaucrats, and we listened to the elected district education council officials. Do you know what I have done? I have said this to them, and I have followed this up: I will listen to you when you give me the priority lists. The two schools that were being constructed this year were the ones identified by the DEC's in question and by the folks in the department to make sure that we made the right choices for the people of this province.

## Telecommunications

**Mr. Harvey:** Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a question to the Minister of Economic Development because when I ask the Premier about rural broadband services across New Brunswick, the Premier is totally ignorant on this issue. I might as well ask the minister who knows the file.

To the minister, our former government was working with a New Brunswick company, Mr. Premier. There are companies out there that are not from away. They are in New Brunswick, working in New Brunswick and delivering services in New Brunswick.

There is a company in Carleton County that has been working with the federal government on Phase 1. That project is unrolling across New Brunswick. Phase 2 is supposed to be unrolling this year. Will the Minister of Economic Development stand up and say when this project is going to be unrolled? When will this project be completed in Phase 2? Will the minister stand up and advise the House of the situation?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** I can only assume that the member opposite is talking about Xplornet—the \$20-million Phase 1 and another \$20-million Phase 2 from the government. That is a typical



process of the former government. It is all about how much money the government can contribute to get something done.

When I talk about using companies and exploring and opportunities, just as the name Xplornet might say, I am talking about exploring what is the best option to get the best result and the best value. I will continue to do that. I will continue to work with Xplornet, and I will continue to work with others. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, it is about having the right service at the right price for the people of this province. I think that they deserve it. I think that they deserve a whole lot better than they have been getting over the past four years, and we are going to deliver a whole lot better. I am very familiar with Xplornet, Mr. Speaker.

## Herbicides

**Mr. DeSaulniers:** Mr. Speaker, people are worried about what herbicide spraying is doing to our health and to the environment. NB Power routinely uses glyphosate to get rid of vegetation beneath its transmission lines. I see that NB Power has recently advertised that it plans to start spraying glyphosate again this year on our power lines, but the advertisement is not clear and is short on many details. Mr. Speaker, I think that NB Power thinks it has some sort of sovereignty over things and it does things the way it wants. Does the Minister of Energy and Resource Development share the people's concern over the use of herbicides?

**Hon. Mr. Holland:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the ability to stand and answer questions in the House here today. Indeed, the member opposite is correct. There has been advertising that has gone out about the spraying program. There were some details in it. To agree with the member opposite, we could certainly get involved with more details. That is why I am here to talk about a couple of things.

We are working with NB Power, and since taking on the role of minister responsible for NB Power, I, as an advocate for the ratepayer, have stressed the need for us to communicate better. We must ensure that consumers of the public utility are adequately and correctly informed of the details of initiatives that directly affect them.

On the specifics of what you are talking about, I will be able to give some details here. I am very proud that, after reflection and consultation with NB Power and after a good hard look at the issues related to spraying in that area, we are announcing a reduction of 30% in the spraying of NB Power's power lines this year.

**Mr. DeSaulniers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another question with regard to the herbicide program. I have spent a great deal of my life in the outdoors. I have fished salmon, I have canoed, and I have hunted—I have done it all. I have a lot of concerns about this.

My question is this: Does the Minister of Energy and Resource Development work with the Minister of Environment to have serious conversations about the herbicide program, or is he simply rubber-stamping items that are placed in front of him for a signature?





**Hon. Mr. Carr:** Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the question because it does give me an opportunity to discuss and clarify how much I actually work not only with my colleague beside me but with all my colleagues on this side of the House and with the third parties, the fourth parties, and the fifth parties—whatever you want to call them.

Under the previous government, when the calls went out to have a look at this issue, they were ignored. Even when the members from the Saint-Quentin area signed the petitions and ran out publicly and said they supported a reduction in spraying with a plan that would address this issue over time, it was all for naught.

I am proud to tell the member opposite as well that through consultation with my honourable member here and with industry and by talking with NB Power and with woodlot owners, we are also going to reduce spraying in protected watershed areas on Crown lands this year. We will start to create more regulations for a future time. For now, I think that that is a good start, and I appreciate the question very much. We are willing to talk about this more as we go on into the future because we are not scared to face the tough decisions.

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

## Health Care

**Mr. Coon:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday afternoon, I was listening to members' speeches from both sides of the House and thinking about the work we were elected to do here. Too often, what I heard told were tales full of sound and fury that, in the end, signified nothing.

The capacity of our health care system to provide care is badly eroded. The model of care we have is outdated. Successive governments have known this. Even the idea of implementing preventative health care remains a dream as we stand by while some of our youth are damaging their brains with crystal meth. I met with the CEO of Horizon Health this week for the second time since being reelected, and I am worried—very worried—Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, does the Health Minister see any merit in assembling an all-party caucus on health care reform to help bring about the restructuring we so badly need so that what may now seem politically impossible to him becomes possible?

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** Mr. Speaker, that is a sensible question, and I want to thank the member for it. If there ever was a subject that we should get together on and if there ever was a subject that we should work together on, it should be our health care. If there was a subject that we should not politicize, it should be that. I thank the member for the question. I thank him for what I believe is a sincere offer of collaboration to work together to fix a common problem, so I am more than happy to do that. I look forward to doing it.

Since I became minister, I have had a good level of collaboration with the member for Fredericton South, and I thank him for raising this. The answer to his question is yes. I think I am



more than happy to work together. I believe that iron sharpens iron, and I believe that he has a contribution to make. This Minister of Health thanks him for making it.

**Mr. Coon:** Indeed, Mr. Speaker, when you review all the platforms from the election, you find that there is a lot of common ground among the parties, and I think there are some real possibilities here.

We are not alone, though, in the struggles we have with the health of our people and the deterioration in our health care system. We share these with the other provinces in Atlantic Canada, as we share the demographic changes the system cannot possibly bear without a fairer distribution of the Canada Health Transfer from Ottawa. I think the situation is serious enough to warrant a regional health care summit with all-party representation from our four Legislatures to look at closer cooperation on health care and coordination of our efforts to seek a fair resolution to the inadequate funding from Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to act boldly. I am trying to suggest some possible paths forward here that will safely carry us from the hellish stasis we find ourselves in to the implementation of solutions. Does the minister see value in conferring with legislative representatives from across Atlantic Canada at a regional forum on health care?

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** Thank you for the question. I do indeed see value in that. The reality is that given the aging demographics, given our population, and given the length of time that people now live because of life expectancy, health care has the potential to grow, by virtue of its very nature, what could be upward of 5% per year. Our economy does not grow at 5% per year, and we have to work very hard to be the best we possibly can be in terms of efficiencies. However, we also need to reach out to Ottawa. You cannot treat every province the same because every province is not the same. There are demographics, and there are ages. The member is absolutely correct that unless we do this...

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

## Economic Development

**Mr. Melanson:** Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, when I asked the Premier the question regarding any major private sector capital investment that was in the pipeline, based on the fact that APEC, the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, forecasts that New Brunswick will be at the tail end of any major investments, all of a sudden, the Premier mentioned shale gas. Then we learned from that question that secretly the government had lifted the moratorium on fracking in New Brunswick in a specific area. It has still not been defined where that is.

Mr. Speaker, the investment that is projected will only be in 2021, if it does happen. There are two years before that. New Brunswickers want to stay here and have access to jobs. Premier, tell us this: What is your economic development plan? Also, where will these investments come from?



**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, in thinking about that particular issue, we know the moratorium is not lifted. The regulation was changed to allow the Sussex area to be pursued. When the members opposite get the actual regulatory change—we passed it around yesterday—they will realize all of that, Mr. Speaker. There was nothing secret about it because we said six months ago that we were going to do it. We said that we would do it by the end of May, and we did. I guess that is the surprise, that we actually did it.

The other idea, in terms of opportunity... I mentioned gas development as an opportunity because that is what is happening in British Columbia. That is what Quebec is doing, Mr. Speaker, with building its plant. When I talk about a transitional economy, it is about finding the money in the system to help innovate. That is what Norway did, Mr. Speaker. That is why it can have 50% of its cars be electric. It is because there is a 25% subsidy on electric car purchases, and that is financed by its oil and gas industry, Mr. Speaker.

That is what you do. You use the money you have for the right reasons, and that is what we want to do. We look up north, and we see opportunities in the north for investment, such as in pellet plants. We look at businesses all over the province that need people, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, Premier.

**Mr. Melanson:** Mr. Speaker, when you listen to the Premier's response, you find that he is all over the place, but there is not a concrete road map from this government for economic development and for creating jobs in the province.

We all remember... I think we should go back a bit, but not too long ago, to 2010 to 2014, when he was Finance Minister. He, as Finance Minister then, had the responsibility for the budget policies and the economic policies. The economy was shrinking at that time, and unemployment rates were high. New Brunswickers were having a difficult time, not only to find jobs but to stay in the province to work and to provide for their families and their own family members. We do not want to live that again, Mr. Speaker. New Brunswickers do not want to see that trend and that scenario happen again. I think that the Premier should please come up with a concrete economic development plan so that we can all understand it and see real jobs in the province.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** You are absolutely right. We do not want to live the past four years again because our province cannot afford it, and we do want an economic plan that goes well beyond investing taxpayer dollars to build something we do not need, Mr. Speaker, to build something for the sake of building it because it is going to create a job. That is no sustainable path. Ask any—any—economist. Short-term gain for long-term pain is all that amounts to. All that was ever looked at before was a four-year plan, just how you get elected back.

You are right. I am all over the place, and I am all over the place because every piece of this province deserves to have recognition to be as good as it can be. We are talking to companies. Whether it be the salt mine in Sussex... We did not put any money into it, Mr. Speaker, but we



are going to supply salt of our own. Whether it be building a wooden bridge to create employment here in our province... We are not going to put any money into it, Mr. Speaker, because they want to build here in this province. Whether we get our debt under control so that people say: Finally, New Brunswick has its act together...

They want to come here, Mr. Speaker. I do not have to keep handing out money to them to please show up.

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

