

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



December 19, 2019

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, a new page was written for the New Brunswick history books: We became the poorest province in the country. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, who is the author of that page? It is the Premier of New Brunswick, Premier Higgs. Premier Higgs will go down as having one of his legacies being New Brunswick becoming the poorest province in the country.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has no vision for our province. He is very much operational. There is no economic development plan that we know about or that New Brunswickers know about. He has gutted ONB. He got rid of free tuition. We do not know where this province is going economically. Can the Premier, once and for all, tell all of us and the people listening what our economic development plan is?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, you know, it is always interesting to watch the members opposite talk about their record in government and what it did to our province. That is where we are right now. We are trying to recover from the most lavish spending record, which is one that would have continued had they still been in office. After all, they promised \$1.8 billion in new spending. Where were the tax dollars going to come from for that, Mr. Speaker? We already are the highest-taxed jurisdiction.

We know how equalization payments are calculated. I think that what I will ask about is the timing in which they are calculated because what I think that the member opposite needs to understand is what transpires with the formula and over what period of time it is calculated for the next year's amount. I think that he might be shocked to know that it is not necessarily just on last year's performance, Mr. Speaker. It is a combination of issues. You always need to know that. Of course, when you talk about the measurements and how they are calculated, I think that what we should understand, too, is how a province with a \$4-billion surplus gets \$13 billion of a \$19-billion transfer. Maybe the formula is not quite right, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, L): Mr. Speaker, as usual, the Premier's strategy is to blame everyone else. He has blamed the federal government and Prime Minister Trudeau. He has blamed our government. He blames workers and unions. At the end of the day, when will he take his responsibilities as Premier, and when will he try to erase the page of history that he wrote yesterday, making New Brunswick unfortunately become the poorest province in Canada?

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At the end of the day, we still do not have an economic growth plan. Yes, we want to see private-sector investment, but there must be a balance between the public and private sectors. We are seeing no results from this government in terms of economic growth and job creation. When will the Premier stop blaming others, and when will he take his responsibilities, which are to develop and unveil an economic growth plan?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think that, on day one, we assumed responsibility for the mess that we inherited. We started that very quickly by getting our finances in order so that we would not pay more interest rates and not waste more money. We also started looking at projects that were not generating economic benefit, Mr. Speaker, like the Bas-Caraquet shipyard—the project that was financed by the government and then sailed off to compete with our shipyard in Bas-Caraquet—and things like that, where we see items being built and money being spent just to create jobs but without long-term, sustainable futures.

So, Mr. Speaker, it comes as an interesting concept, which I understand can be difficult for some to understand. It is building teams and building networks in different communities like the focused effort that we have right now in the Belledune area in order to find a long-term solution for an industry that shut down after many years of successful operation. We are focused on working on that solution with the community, which has had job fairs, and we are working closely to make that happen. But it is for a long-term, sustainable future, not a short-term political gain, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, L): Mr. Speaker, I still have not heard of a plan for growing the economy. I did hear a few blame games from the Premier and his not taking his responsibilities. The last time that I checked, the Auditor General, in her audited financial statements of 2017–18, showed that there was a surplus of \$67 million, and the Premier was not in government that day. We were, Mr. Speaker. Job creation and growing the economy will get us, as a province, out of the history books as being the poorest province. The Premier should come clean. Lay out the plan so that everybody understands which economic sectors he wants to see grow and which companies or even investments we are going to see because the projections are not good. Premier, come clean. Tell us. What is your plan?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to the point on equalization. You know, I have a note here that says it is calculated on a three-year rolling average with a two-year lag. Interesting, is it not? You might want to look back at just how that works, because that turns the mirror right around, Mr. Speaker.

But it is not about that. It is about how we build an economy based on a foundation. The foundation that we are building is working with ONB to deliver a new mandate, which will

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roll out early in the new year. Do you know how ONB is building a new mandate? It is working with businesses and people all over this province to create a sustainable path forward. The only plan that the Liberal government had before was spending money—building a courthouse that we did not have to build at this time, building a highway we did not have to, and building a museum in Saint John with no real plan other than just to create work. All over this province, we saw money being thrown at the wall to make people think there was economic development. And where are we? One percent, Mr. Speaker, one percent.

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, L): I have not heard anything coming from the Premier's mouth this morning that will change the fact that he will go in the history books as the Premier who was in office when New Brunswick became the poorest province.

The Centennial Building and the new courthouse had \$16 million invested, with a business plan to save money for many years to come, and he sold the building for \$4 million. I do not see how the business case is sustainable for that building.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I want to hear from the Premier. When is he going to table or make public a real economic development plan? Which sectors of our economy will be focused on so that we can see private-sector investment, so that we can see the labour shortage addressed, and so that we can see growth and more prosperity for all of us in New Brunswick? When is this going to happen, Premier?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): It is great to see the member opposite come alive here this morning, because he has been a little dormant lately. It is good to see. But, you know, it is interesting that you want to use the courthouse and the Centennial Building as examples. What was the plan there, Mr. Speaker? When I asked what the plan was for the Centennial Building, I heard: Well, we might turn it into an office building. I asked: Do we need more office space in government? I heard: Well, no, actually, we would empty buildings all up and down and throughout Fredericton to do that. Just as we have in downtown Saint John, we would have all these empty buildings.

Mr. Speaker, with the plan that is there right now, they paid \$4 million and they are going to put \$46 million—I think that is the number—into it, and it is all private money—no grants, nothing, Mr. Speaker. And that is just the start. You are going to see other items where government is not funding our economy. Under the Liberals' watch, we went to a private-sector and a public-sector investment strategy that matched. That is no strategy, Mr. Speaker. Public-sector spending should not overtake private-sector spending.

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[*Translation*]

SENIORS

Mr. LePage (Restigouche West, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eighteen months ago, the previous provincial government negotiated an important deal with Ottawa. Given our aging population, the federal government provided \$75 million to New Brunswick for research initiatives on ways to better help seniors in their homes, their communities, and nursing homes.

We are now halfway through this three-year period, and this government has only announced two projects: a \$450 000 one, and another one carried out in collaboration with the Université de Moncton, of which we still do not know the cost, since the government press release does not mention it at all.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Social Development. What have you done with this money from Ottawa that was meant to be used to deal with one of the biggest challenges in this province?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Social Development, Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, PC): I am very proud to say that further announcements will be coming very soon. As you know, this is a lengthy process. We require time to receive the submissions, and then these submissions go all across Canada to a group of Ph.D. analysts who decide which projects will see the biggest benefits to what we are doing. So, Mr. Speaker, the second round of projects has been analyzed. The projects have now been to Cabinet, and they will be approved and announced in the very short term. Those arrangements are being made now.

Mr. LePage (Restigouche West, L): We like to see this government with lengthy processes. We also saw that yesterday with Bill 17.

[*Translation*]

We are now halfway through this three-year deal, and we are not using this money at all. Every day, the Premier stands up and talks about the aging population and the fact that he needs help from Ottawa in this file. Yes, we could use more help, but was the Premier aware of this deal negotiated with the previous Liberal government? Is this federal money—\$75 million—that the province must invest in research projects that will help us better care for our seniors? Mr. Premier, why are you not using this money?

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[Original]

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Social Development, Minister responsible for the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, PC): Well, again, Mr. Speaker, they put the process in place. You know, we came into government in November of last year, and the first-round announcements were done. The second call went out. The Healthy Seniors Pilot Project is highly visible all across this province. I am happy to say that many, many, many applications were received. Those applications went out to our analysts, they came back, and the department made decisions. I am happy to say that there are 19 letters now on my desk waiting for my signature this week. They will be signed today, and they will go out. Then we will have an announcement on those projects coming very soon.

IMMUNIZATION

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Education, and it is concerning Bill 11. I think we have done a pretty good job here on both sides of the House in toning down the rhetoric around this bill, and I think we all want to get more children vaccinated. The question is regarding the best path forward. Given that this bill will not pass before our Christmas break, can the minister inform the House on whether we can expect better data on the extent of the problem when the House reconvenes?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for the question. Yes, absolutely. As we have already said in the House, every year, a twelfth of our students enter the school system. These are new students—clearly—who are entering Grade 1.

So, we were able to get the information on all the students who entered the school system last September. We need about three months to compile all this information. We will absolutely share this information. It will all be available. I will be more than happy to share it with all members next March when we are back at work here.

Before then, if members are interested in discussing the information available in the system this year or any other information, I would be more than happy to share that with all parties. Thank you very much for the question.

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we think this information is very necessary and important. We hope this information will be provided here in the House, so that everyone can consider all the factors in order to make the right decision.

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Also, many experts have stated that education is one of the best ways to get more children vaccinated. Does the department plan to do more than what it is doing now to educate the public about the benefits of vaccination? I would say that, to solve the problem, we should immediately intensify our efforts to that effect. What is the department planning in this regard, Mr. Speaker?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much to the member opposite for that question. Absolutely, I think that while it is very clear from looking at the international situation that education alone is not sufficient to make sure that we can protect our most vulnerable citizens, especially students in our school system, at the same time, we can always do a better job when it comes to education. So I have been asking folks in the department to look at how we can strengthen our health curriculum to make sure that there is more information about vaccines, the way that they work, and the reason why they are important.

The member for Memramcook-Tantramar has talked to me about the importance of strengthening education programs. I welcome the support and, even more important, the ideas of all members of this Legislature on how we can strengthen that bill to make sure that it achieves the objective, which I know is not a partisan objective but one that is shared by all members of this Assembly, that we make sure that our most vulnerable children are protected. Right now in New Brunswick, there are students who are not able to go to school because of the actions of others that are putting their lives at risk. Let's make sure that we stand up for them. Any means to doing that, I am open to. Thank you to the member for the question.

EDUCATION

Mr. C. Chiasson (Victoria-La-Vallée, Deputy Speaker, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this fall, a lot was said about potential reforms in education. Teachers have said loud and clear that they are tired of successive governments making major changes to the system without clear evidence that those changes will make a difference. I think the minister's desire to eliminate grades would classify as a major change. I would also say that there is no clear evidence that this will improve outcomes for our students. Can the minister update the House on whether or not we will see grades eliminated in New Brunswick schools in the 2020-21 school year?

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I think that the honourable member opposite may be somewhat confused around the nature of the reforms presented and also their genesis.

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These ideas came from New Brunswick teachers. These ideas came from ideas already in place in New Brunswick classrooms. They are ideas that are already generating exactly the sort of evidence-based results that the member opposite claims he is interested in hearing. If I ever get the chance to sit down in my office with the honourable member opposite so that we could sit and talk about these things, perhaps I could share more of this information. I remain open to doing that at any time.

In terms of the plans for next year, first, if the honourable member had read the green paper, he would know that we are not talking about doing this across the whole province. We are talking about inviting schools interested in participating in moving to eliminate the K-2 grade block and replace it with a more open and inclusive environment that is better for all students. That is an idea already in place in some New Brunswick schools. It is already working. That is the plan. We are being bombarded with schools and teachers, to whom the member opposite says he has been listening. I do not know to whom he has been talking because those teachers are coming to me and saying: Sign us up. Get us on board. We are ready to go. I look forward to working with the member opposite on that front.

Mr. C. Chiasson (Victoria-La-Vallée, Deputy Speaker, L): The minister feels it is important for him to use a condescending tone when he answers a question. I get that, and I am okay with it. It is what it is. How widespread will the changes be then? Will they be in every school or a select few? Will they be in the French or English system? I think that if changes are coming, parents will want to know whether they will impact their children. When will the details be known?

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will do my very best to answer in a calm and soothing tone to make sure that I do not cause any upset on the opposite benches.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Thank you. Speaking slowly has never been my strong suit, but I will do my very best for the honourable member.

To answer the question, I am forced to repeat a little bit of my previous answer, and I hope that the member opposite does not take it as being condescending. But I very clearly said that this is a program that invites schools interested to opt in during the course of the coming months. We will make decisions around which schools are able to participate in this program based on the expressed interest of the people to whom we are listening, who would be the teachers in our schools, whom we value. And I value them above all other public servants in this province because they are responsible for preparing our next generation. Those programs and those schools will be decided...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Time, member.

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Mr. C. Chiasson (Victoria-La-Vallée, Deputy Speaker, L): The minister has a really hard time showing respect to anybody. We get that by following any of his social media feeds. He has a hard time respecting anybody, especially anybody who opposes anything that he thinks is right.

I think one thing that most experts agree on is that if a child arrives at school ready to learn, she or he is going to perform better. That means focusing on early childhood education, on reducing poverty, and on simple things such as proper nutrition for children. Would we not be better served by focusing our efforts on early childhood education instead of meddling with unproven class composition if we really wanted to make a difference?

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, while I thank the member opposite for the question, it is somewhat disappointing because the member opposite has just highlighted an area in which this government proudly, openly, and repeatedly has expressed full support for the early childhood education program introduced by the previous government. We expanded it. We extended it. We built on something that worked because it was well done, and all credit goes to the members opposite for being part of the team. It goes to the honourable member from Bathurst for his work on these programs because it was good work. We have no problem. We have no problem on this side of the House with sharing credit. We have no problem at all with working with others to try to achieve the best results for the students of this province.

So, yes, we are going to continue to work in early childhood education. Again, I ask the member opposite, if we are going to have discussions around respect, to respect the New Brunswick teachers who are not trying something untested and unproven with the ideas presented in the government's green paper but trying ideas that work.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Time, minister.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was glad to hear that the Premier and the Prime Minister spoke on Monday about health care funding for Clinic 554. Last October, Clinic 554 announced that it would have to close its doors due to the provincial law that prevents out-of-hospital abortions from being covered by Medicare. It is also good to know that reproductive health care was on the agenda at the meeting, considering that Health Canada's annual report said that the lack of coverage under Medicare for abortions at Clinic 554 remains a concern under the accessibility and comprehensiveness criteria of the *Canada Health Act*. Can the Premier share the details of his discussion with the Prime Minister about Clinic 554 and reproductive health care access in New Brunswick?

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Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question. Yes, we discussed a number of items. In the case of this situation, Clinic 554 was discussed as well. We talked about following the *Canada Health Act*. We talked about the concern over not setting precedents in terms of funding private clinics. I expressed that our position was clear, that we felt that we were following the *Canada Health Act*, and that we were providing reasonable access, as required. We had not changed a thing since the previous government put all of this in place.

But I also shared with the Prime Minister some statistics that I found quite interesting in relation to how the model has shifted. Since the introduction of the abortion pill, we have actually seen the number of medical procedures drop significantly. We have seen the increase, however, in the abortion pill, which went up significantly. This year, it started at about 45%, and it has gone up to about 70%. So, Mr. Speaker, I think that what we see in the clinic is a change in the requirements, which is reflective of the access that is already...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Time, Premier.

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Access to reproductive health care is important. It is a public health issue, and it is a human right. The lack of access to reproductive health care has negative effects, but Clinic 554 does not offer only reproductive health services. It also offers many other important services to marginalized groups in Fredericton, across the province, and throughout the Maritimes. The breadth of services offered by its family practice includes all scopes of medicine, from pediatrics to geriatrics, focusing on trans, LGBTQ, and HIV care. Visiting the clinic would give the Premier a good idea of the services that it provides and how important they are to the community. Will the Premier join me and the member for Fredericton South on a tour of Clinic 554 this winter?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Once again, thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I value the health needs of all citizens of this province, and that is why the mandate of any of our hospitals is to serve all our people equally and to meet their requirements equally. We believe that we are following the *Canada Health Act* in that regard, and I would be more than concerned if that were not the case.

I think that the opportunity here is certainly to ensure that our public institutions, our public hospitals, and the medical staff who are in them are following and meeting the needs of all citizens in a way that serves not only the *Canada Health Act* but also the reality of today's world. I would be disappointed to think otherwise, and in fact, I do not think otherwise. I believe that they actually are providing the service that is needed. In any particular case where that is not the case, I would want to know about that. I am sure that the Minister of Health would want to know about it as well, because providing the best service to all the residents of our province is absolutely our goal and our mandate.



PRIVATE WOODLOTS

Mr. DeSaulniers (Fredericton-York, PA): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Years ago, the Forest Extension Branch of DNR provided world-class information, advice, and resources to private woodlot owners across the province. Our rural economy reaped the benefits. This resulted in many opportunities for those with private woodlots to earn a decent living. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development. Can the minister explain how he plans to ensure that these private woodlot owners will be able to return to the days when they were able to make a decent living from their woodlots?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand here and answer that question. I might have a couple of thoughts that relate to that subject matter. As early as this morning... The member opposite might not have had a chance to see all the details yet, but in his member's statement, he referred to a number of issues related to the past. Well, this government, in the beginning, from the time we took office, has been working toward a forest for the future. This morning, we took major steps regarding a couple of points that he refers to.

We stepped into a bold new day to build a forest for the future by putting steps in place. We are not going to increase the cut on Crown land for the next five years. We are going to double down our efforts to work with our private woodlot owners to see that they have access. We have had over 100 stakeholder meetings with the private woodlot sector. We know what it wants. We are putting feet behind it with the initiative that we are talking about today. To talk about the first part of the question that the member opposite talked about, we are going to do it in a transparent fashion.

Mr. DeSaulniers (Fredericton-York, PA): I thank the minister for his answer, Mr. Speaker, and I welcome more transparency in all aspects of this government. I also want to talk to the minister in regard to the forest marketing boards. They have been in a bit of disarray of late, and I want to ask the minister this: Will he give the forest products marketing boards the authority they require to market all wood products from private woodlot owners through their system, which would be in the best interests of these individuals and the rural economy?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, in the course of the last year and in the course of over 100 meetings with stakeholders throughout the entire supply chain of the private woodlot system, we have heard loud and clear that we need to work and to put attention into certain areas to make sure that the resources are there and that each aspect of that supply chain is equipped properly. We listened, we heard, and we announced today that we will double down our efforts to ensure that we work with the Forest Products Commission. We will work with the New Brunswick Federation of Woodlot Owners, and we will work with individual private woodlot boards. We are committed to ensuring that the private sector, through the

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private woodlots, is energized, encouraged, and proud to call New Brunswick home and a place to deliver its products, Mr. Speaker.

SCHOOLS

Mr. Harvey (Carleton-Victoria, L): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Premier. Yesterday, New Brunswickers saw this government virtually give away a building in prime downtown real estate, the Centennial Building, to the private sector.

There is a private-sector group in the Bath area that has developed a proposal to purchase the Bath Community School and to complete the necessary renovations on a 75% completed project so that the children in this area can return to the school in September 2020. Will the Premier commit to meeting with this private-sector group soon to finalize a purchase sale agreement so that the project can be completed and the children in the Bath area can return to the K-to-8 school in Bath?

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, thanks very much to the member opposite for the question. I met a couple of months back with some of the folks whom the honourable member was talking about, and I am really interested in hearing this proposal because, absolutely, this is the sort of innovative thinking that we need when it comes to modernizing our public services. If we can find people who have a commitment to a school in the same way as do the folks in that community who went to that school and graduated from it and who want to see it preserved despite the huge challenges that have been exposed through the renovation and rebuilding process—it exposed asbestos and other things that were not expected—absolutely, we are ready to sit down and have that meeting. I had the briefest of chats back and forth with the Premier before getting up to answer the question today. He made it very clear that it is something that he is on board with as well.

I look forward to working with the honourable member and making sure that we provide the best possible education for all New Brunswick students. I would ask the honourable member, though, because I know there has been discussion around this in the press, that when we are working here on this side of the House to try to help to make sure that we can get that best possible outcome, to work with us on it. Your attack on the Premier, I thought, was somewhat unjustified. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Harvey (Carleton-Victoria, L): Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not need to take lessons from the honourable minister about working together, because I have been working on this file since last December when the current government stopped the project. Here we are, a year later, and there is no progress.

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In the spirit of cooperation and in the spirit of Christmas, I am reaching out to the Premier—seriously. Will the Premier... They need to meet with the Premier. I have nothing against the Minister of Education, but they have met with the Minister of Education numerous times with no results. They need to meet with the Premier. This is private-sector money. Will the Premier listen and say: Let's finish this project? There is private-sector money that could be on the table. All we are asking for is a meeting with the Premier of the province. I do not think that it is unreasonable. I would like the Premier to address this question because this is beyond politics. This is about what is in the best interests of the children of the Bath area. I want the Premier to answer the question.

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Order.

Hon. Mr. Cardy (Fredericton West-Hanwell, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, PC): I am never going to join the Liberal Party. While I recognize the leadership problems that the members opposite are having, certainly, I would not be interested in stepping into those particular shoes. Two parties were enough for me, and I am in the right one now, Mr. Speaker.

Let's make sure that in the spirit of evidence-based politics, we get some facts on the table. I have had one meeting with the folks involved in this issue, not several. At that meeting, I asked for a proposal. We are looking forward to getting that proposal. I certainly have not seen it. If it has been sent to anyone else, it is news to me.

I certainly would encourage the honourable member to have a chat with me today after question period, which is going to end in just a few seconds' time. Let's have a chat about this. Let's line up that meeting. Let's make sure that we have an actual detailed proposal. If there is an actual detailed proposal, then we have something to work with. But having partisan shots exchanged in the press and partisan shots exchanged in the Legislature is not the way to get this done. Come talk to me after the meeting. Let's set up that meeting. Let's get a plan on the table and do what is best for the kids of this province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Question period is over.

TAXATION

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was responding yesterday when I took a question under advisement. In terms of general comments about money laundering, tax evasion, or use of tax havens, the federal government, provinces, and territories have ongoing dialogue on important issues



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such as these. They are international issues, and the federal government and the Canada Revenue Agency have been at the table during these discussions. At this point, there seems to be renewed effort to take it very seriously. There has been increased support allotted to the Canada Revenue Agency. There are moves afoot to strengthen beneficial ownership transparency, and a joint ministerial meeting on anti-money laundering was held this summer with governments continuing to work together.

Under the Canada-New Brunswick tax collection agreement, the Canada Revenue Agency collects and administers our income taxes and is responsible for audit and enforcement as well. That said, there are ongoing dialogues between CRA and the province. We will continue to work with the federal government, provinces, and territories as we confront these issues.

We are also taking seriously the issue of tax programs that we administer at the provincial level. They are continuously being reviewed in an effort to curb tax evasion. Under beneficial ownership, while the majority of business organizations are used for legitimate commerce, there are some that are not. The FPT ministers agreed that we need to move forward to strengthen beneficial ownership transparency, and some progress is being made in that regard. The federal government is seeking to improve beneficial ownership transparency by initiating public consultation on a publicly accessible pan-Canadian beneficial ownership registry.

Service New Brunswick is responsible for the Corporate Registry in New Brunswick and is considering beneficial ownership amendments within the context of the potential modernization of the *Business Corporations Act*. That will be coming forward to government in the new year in this regard, including a potential consultation process that goes with it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Savoie (Saint John East, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During question period...

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): The way that it works is that there was a question asked yesterday and the answer only came in this morning. The procedure is that now that the Premier answered, you are allowed one question. He is allowed another answer. Do you have a question regarding what was just said? That does not surprise me.

Mr. K. Arseneau (Kent North, G): Thank you for the opportunity, and thank you very much for coming back with the answer. As you said, there are—and I am very aware of this—many things that have been done federally and there are many things that we could do provincially to help reveal the extent of this tax evasion. I am happy to hear that something will be coming forth.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

I guess my question yesterday was really about beneficial ownership. There has been work done on this by Service New Brunswick. Is this a commitment, Mr. Premier, through the Speaker? Is this a commitment that something will be coming forward in the new year? The beneficial ownership will give us the information that we need to figure out who is actually evading taxes.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you for the additional question. Yes, it would be my understanding and, certainly, the details I just presented that Service New Brunswick, which is responsible, is reviewing this in its entire context with the intent that we will bring this forward as a consultation process in the new year. That would be my intent, and I will be asking for further clarification on just exactly what that would look like.

