

November 21, 2018

[Original]

Mr. G. Arseneault: Mr. Speaker, as is the tradition here in this Legislature, I would ask for unanimous consent to extend the question period to 45 minutes today. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent to extend question period to 45 minutes?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

[Translation]

Child Care

Mr. Gallant: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the government for outlining its agenda yesterday in the throne speech.

[Original]

We were very pleased to see a commitment to balance the budget by 2020. We were very pleased to see that there would be investments and efforts to create more community health clinics. We were very pleased to see, as well, Mr. Speaker, that the government will continue the work that we did and that other governments before us did to ensure that seniors can stay in their homes as long as possible through enhanced home care.

Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned, however, that there was no indication within the speech from the throne to continue the programs that provide free child care and financial support to the middle class for the cost of child care. Will this government continue the rollout of the child-care program started by our Liberal government?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the Leader of the Opposition, and I appreciate the comments in relation to the throne speech. While I understand that there are more issues, it will be a broader discussion as we go forward.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue around education and free tuition, we said that we would study the program for its effectiveness. We have concern that the tax relief that was provided to working families and the tuition rebate program that was cancelled were deterrents to keeping our kids here in our province, so our goal, as stated in our platform, is to look at the entire program for its effectiveness. We also want to make sure that the tuition program follows the students so that they have a choice. We are looking at areas and making sure that, at the end of the day, it is fair, it gets the results needed, and people are going to school, because we believe that every child has the right to go to a postsecondary institution in this province.



Another item that was mentioned was in terms of child care. We, indeed, are going to work on that area to ensure that child care services are available throughout the province, not just in urban areas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gallant: Allow me to clarify something for the Premier. Our Liberal government, which preceded the current government, had initiated a free child-care program for families with an income of less than \$37 500 and a subsidized child-care program for middle class families.

Thanks to these two programs, no family would spend over 20% of its income on child care. These programs will bring about a significant transformation with regard to our economy, the fight against poverty, and our family life. These programs were rolled out in the Saint John, Edmundston, and Greater Moncton regions, but the plans and the budget were in place to give the rest of the province access to them by March 31, 2019.

We urge the Conservatives to continue to roll out the program, which provides free child care to families that are struggling to make ends meet and financial support to help the middle class pay for child care. Can the Premier confirm that his government will continue to provide these child-care programs?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, I think that the same context applies in relation to looking at all programs and making sure that they are achieving results. I think the pilots that were talked about here... I call them “pilots” because they are focused in the urban centres. For us, it is about ensuring that we have day care provisions for small centres as well. Allow people to have day-care facilities in their homes. Do not have it so restricted that we cannot ensure that everyone is being served no matter where they live.

Our goal is not to change a program just because it is there and it was from a previous government. We have said it very clearly. Our goal is to ensure that programs work and are effective. Our plan will be to enhance programs and to change them as needed and not just to dismiss any out of hand because someone else started it. I would say to the Leader of the Opposition that we will look at all programs and we will look at whether they are getting the best value for the people of this province. It will not be a case of just changing them for the sake of change. It will be a case of building on successes to get better. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gallant: We appreciate the comments of the Premier, Mr. Speaker, but I want to clarify yet again that the plans are in place to ensure that every region will have the free child-care program and the program to help the middle class with the cost of child care by the end of 2019. Mr. Speaker, the plans are not only in place but also budgeted for.



There are only a few more months to make sure that the other regions will be able to benefit from the program that we started. We would suggest humbly to the Premier that he has to stay focused and that his government has to stay focused for this to be a complete success. We have seen great results in Edmundston, Saint John, and now in Greater Moncton, and we want to see this child-care program rolled out across the province, as we promised and budgeted for, by the end of March 2019. Can the Premier please confirm that he will indeed ask his government to continue the rollout of this wonderful program to help the families of our province?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, as with every program that has been put in place, we will evaluate it for its effectiveness—every program. We will not take anything at face value. We will look at it and make sure that it is getting the results that were intended. If those results are materializing and we are seeing that, those programs will continue. But I will not arbitrarily commit to anything until we have had that evaluation. I want to hear from the people who are involved on the ground in the communities that it is working for them. My point is that we will do that with every program, but we will continue the good programs that are getting the results we must get for the people of this province. There will be no doubt about that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, if the Premier wants to receive feedback from those who have already had the program to see whether he wants to continue the province-wide rollout, as was planned and budgeted for, can he please give this House a deadline by which he will make a decision to ensure that this program will indeed be rolled out across the province as planned, by the end of March 2019?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I think we can give a deadline because we are looking at putting a budget together and having it brought forward in, say, late February or early March. That will be the time in which we will have that evaluation completed, and, if there is anything we need to change or improve or continue, we will be able to do that at that point in time. It is not going to be a matter of just putting it off and saying it is coming soon and hoping it will work. We will commit to timelines that will work, and this budget for this coming year will reflect what is going to be done in that program. Thank you very much.

Mr. Gallant: I humbly suggest to the Premier that waiting until the end of March for the budget to be laid to see if he will continue the rollout of this program that is scheduled and budgeted for completion by the end of March 2019 is irresponsible. Mr. Speaker, there is a program that is in place. There is a budget that is in place for the rollout of free child care as well as the program to support the middle class with the cost of child care across the province by the end of March 2019. I would humbly suggest to this government that it do everything it can to make sure the rollout continues.

Will the Premier please confirm to the Legislature that he will come back sooner than the end of March 2019 to ensure that the families in the other regions where the rollout is supposed to continue will indeed be able to benefit from these wonderful child-care programs?



Hon. Mr. Higgs: Our budget should be put together by the end of February or the middle of March. That is the deadline that I will commit to. We will look at all aspects of what we are planning, what has been planned, what is working, and what is not working, because we must. This is a priority for us. We know that. We said that before. We said it in our platform. This is a priority, so it will be top of mind and at the top of our consideration within the new budget. But every aspect of what we find...

When we talk about how we, as a government, are responsible, we have to look across the board, and I have said it over and over. We will invest in programs that are making sense for the people of this province and are getting the results that we must. But at the same time, we have to ensure that those are the programs we invest in because we cannot just keep spending money on programs that are not getting results. We cannot tax people more in this province. Being responsible means looking across the board, not picking off one item after another but setting priorities. I assure the Leader of the Opposition that this is a priority. It will be part of our program, and we will make it work because we will make results a priority. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Paramedics

Mr. D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, this week, the Premier said the only solution he has found to address the New Brunswick ambulance shortage is to add a new nonurgent patient transfer system. At no time did the Premier mention that he saw the need to attract more new paramedic candidates or that the retention of current paramedics is part of his plan. When will the Premier redo his homework and give the paramedics an addition to their pay so that their salaries are representative of their work and their risks?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: I feel that the full press release was very clear. We said in our platform, and in our latest platform here in the House as well, that the paramedic issue and the health issue for the people of this province are top priorities, so we reacted quickly. The proposal of Medavie in relation to the transfer system is one first measure, but a first measure that goes a long way toward putting ambulances on the road.

There were other measures that were very clear in there. We are working with CUPE and working with the Paramedic Association on the recommendations—I think there were 26 in all from the association and another group within CUPE—in order to understand. The Minister of Health is going to be doing just that over the coming months.

We know that this is a first step, but it is a step, and we will continue to step in the direction of improving health care and response times for the people of this province. Thank you very much.



[Translation]

Mr. D'Amours: This week, the Premier indicated that there were too many ambulances without paramedics in New Brunswick, since these vehicles are parked because of a staff shortage. Now, his quick fix is to take away even more of the paramedics who are available for emergencies and to have more parked ambulances.

Why does the Premier want to increase the number of ambulances that are parked because there are no paramedics, while New Brunswickers are going to wait even longer for service?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I fully understood the question. I do not want more parked ambulances. I want more ambulances ready to roll. That is the goal. If an ambulance is parked in a garage, it should have somebody there to drive it. That is our commitment. I want every ambulance ready to roll, not just sitting in a garage with no driver and no one to operate it.

Is there a shortage of paramedics? Maybe, and maybe there are a number of reasons. We are looking at our compensation model, looking at working conditions, and looking at all the issues that make us comparable to other provinces. We want to ensure that people want to work and live in New Brunswick because we are delivering fair and just and equitable pay for the working conditions. At the end of the day, they will be proud to be working in New Brunswick. We can fix this, and we will work with the people who are actually on the ground and who know what is needed to get it done. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. D'Amours: The Premier acknowledges now that there is a paramedic shortage, but that was not clearly mentioned in the plan he brought forward this week. New non-emergency transfer teams would be set up throughout the province, which means that paramedics assigned to emergency services would then become members of the non-emergency transfer teams. Yet the number of paramedics available to answer emergency calls is obviously insufficient. Can the Premier confirm that paramedics who will be assigned to the non-emergency transfer teams will no longer be able to answer emergency calls once they return from a transfer?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: The proposal that Medavie put forward was that there is a difference between transfers and actual emergency calls and that the same qualifications are not always required. Certainly, in the case of language, if you are transferring a patient who is unilingual French or English, you can have a unilingual French or English paramedic do that service. That is the goal.



These paramedics who are currently on as casuals and not able to work, whether unilingual French or unilingual English, will now have an opportunity through this transfer method.

I think that is a great step forward. Interesting enough, it is something that has apparently been going on in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island for some time. Why we in New Brunswick are the last to adopt this is kind of strange, but anyway, it is another step forward to putting paramedics into the seats of ambulances. That is our goal.

Is there a shortage? I do not think that it is as acute as we may have thought it was prior to this new change. However, we will look at that, working with the recommendations from the green paper and working with the recommendations from the arbitration hearing. We will look at all of that to ensure that health care is number one. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Government

Mr. C. Chiasson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Deputy Premier. In the throne speech, we find the following: “Citizens will not accept ideology or politics blocking common sense solutions.” It seems to us that this sentence comes directly from the campaign platform of the People’s Alliance of New Brunswick. Can the Deputy Premier tell us if he considers language rights to be ideological, political, both, or neither?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, we have an opportunity in this House to work with all parties. We have an opportunity to listen to people of like minds to get things done in the province. The people, the electorate, have told us—told us—to work differently. It does not matter where it is coming from. It matters that it is in the best interest of the people of this province. I am looking forward to working with members across this Legislature to make that happen.

I was proud to work with the Alliance in this regard. The paramedic issue was a big issue in its platform. It was a big issue in our platform. But there will be big issues as we go forward. Whether it be in our carbon plan and in avoiding the carbon tax, whether it be in ensuring we meet our emissions, or whether it be in our *Crown Lands and Forests Act*, there will be huge opportunities, and each one of us will have alignment in some manner.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going for disagreement. I am going for alignment, and I will work with those that we can get aligned with on the best interests of this province. That is our goal, and it will continue to be our goal because Job 1 is a better province, moving in a direction to bring people home. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



[Translation]

Mr. C. Chiasson: Once again, my question is for the Deputy Premier. I wonder if he could explain to the House the nature of the agreement that the Conservatives reached with the People's Alliance.

The member for Quispamsis went to see the Lieutenant-Governor. The next day, the leader of the People's Alliance went to see the Lieutenant-Governor. The leader of the People's Alliance told the media that he had reached an 18-month agreement. He is also sitting in the first row on the government side, but the Deputy Premier is sitting in the second row. The leader of the People's Alliance takes part in meetings with federal officials. If it is not a coalition, what exactly is it?

Is the Deputy Premier comfortable with the establishment of a new Conservative Alliance Party, given everything he said not too long ago?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting. Do you know what? Something I said after the confidence vote was that I was proud to be working with a team of 25 that could not be bought. That included the members of the Alliance party. I am proud to be working with them, and I will be proud to build a relationship with the Liberal Party and the Green Party as we go forward, because we must.

In relation to where Minister Gauvin is sitting, he is sitting where his dad sat when he was in this Legislature many years ago.

We can try to make a time out of it, or we can face what it is. Do you know something else? In this process, there is not any coalition, and there is not any agreement. There is a work in good faith to fix our province. That is what is going to fix our province, and I am proud to work with anyone who will work in good faith to get it done. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. C. Chiasson: After the election, the Premier said he did not want to cooperate with anyone. Then he said he would entertain a four-year deal, but he quickly reversed himself. Then he said he would govern with a minority with no deal but would cooperate with all parties. When he took office, he refused to speak to the Liberals or the Greens and kept his consultations limited to the Alliance.

Now, his throne speech says that he will consult with all parties. Can the Premier explain whether he truly means this and how he plans to meaningfully consult with our caucus and the Green caucus and whether he will consider our parties to be on equal footing with the Alliance? Is the new era he speaks about the formation of a new Alliance-Conservative party?



Hon. Mr. Higgs: What is disappointing is that the fearmongering continues. We heard it in unprecedented fashion during the election, and I would have liked to think that it was going to stop today. It is sad.

I have said that there is not a coalition. There is a willingness and a spirit to work in good faith. There were not any demands—do this for me, and I will do this for you—through this discussion that we have had. That is what it is going to take in working with the others as well. In the case of working on the paramedic issue, I said that it was a case where we both had that in our platforms.

There is a lot to be said about why we are here. We are here because a group of three decided that it would work with us. We want to expand on that team, and we want to expand on that team with the folks who are opposite me right now. We will build on the team that we have right here that wants to fix New Brunswick. I only hope that we will see that same interest from all members across the aisle, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Pay Equity

Mrs. M. LeBlanc: My question is regarding pay equity. The speech from the throne referenced “a moral duty to ensure equality of opportunity for those willing to work hard”. Pay equity is a recognition of equal pay for equal work of equal value. The *Pay Equity Act* was passed in 2009. Does your government support expanding pay equity legislation to the private sector?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: I have said that I want to ensure that home-care workers and day-care workers earn a good living and have a profession that they can follow. When we talk about home care being the single-biggest issue facing us in our province as we deal with our aging care in our society, we need to have a health care system that recognizes the performance—the value—of that profession. That will be my focus.

It was not in our platform to expand pay equity in the private sector, and it will not be something that I will be pursuing directly. That is true enough, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. M. LeBlanc: The wage gap between men and women in New Brunswick is 7.4%. What are you going to do to ensure women are not discriminated against based on their gender?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: I would work with my colleague opposite in any manner to ensure that discrimination does not exist. As a father of four daughters and being in a position of having worked with tremendous people of any gender throughout my career, I value each and every one of them for the value they bring to this operation. I value the members I have here with me today who will bring a whole new dimension to our caucus, and it is necessary. I want to



promote women's activity within our Legislature. I want to promote our being a more friendly, able Legislature that people want to pursue.

So I will work with the member as we see areas that need to be resolved, because we will not accept gender discrimination of any kind. We will not accept anyone not being treated equally for the jobs they do. It is not in our makeup, and we will ensure that we look after men and women alike. We will not accept gender harassment of any kind. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Women's Health

Mrs. F. Landry: Over the past four years, we have made real progress in protecting and promoting women's equality in our province. Will the government commit to protecting the programs and policies we established to enhance access to reproductive health care?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: As I have said about other programs, we would certainly want to promote and pursue the programs that have been put in place and additional ones that may be required. However, as with any program, we want to make sure that the programs are getting the intended results and that we are actually making progress in this field. Yes, we will continue the programs, and we will continue the programs that are actually doing the right job or making a difference.

However, it will not be my decision to say this does or does not work. It will be the women in our caucus, and it will be people who have firsthand experience, those who are receiving and experiencing and know how we need to improve on it. It is not a case of what my opinion may be here. It will be a case of making sure that we have the right way to determine that the results are being achieved and that they are achieving the goals that they must. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. F. Landry: My question is for the Minister responsible for Women's Equality. Since the expansion of the midwifery profession is included in programs to enhance access to reproductive health care, will the government commit to implementing its expansion throughout New Brunswick, including rural areas and northern New Brunswick?

[*Original*]

Hon. Ms. S. Wilson: Thank you to the member opposite. This is the first time that I have had the privilege of standing in the House to answer my first question.



Yes, that is part of the plan. In response to the question, it is part of the plan. It is something that we have talked about and that our government wants to promote. We will work toward furthering that goal. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. F. Landry: My question is again for the Minister responsible for Women's Equality. If the government is committed to securing the progress that has been made regarding access to reproductive health care, will it then commit to maintaining public funding for Mifegymiso?

[*Original*]

Hon. Ms. S. Wilson: Thank you again for the question. As our Premier has stated, there are many programs and many things that we want to look at to see how these are going to roll out and how beneficial they will be to New Brunswickers. As we move forward, we will be looking at that.

[*Translation*]

Minimum wage

Mr. K. Chiasson: The Liberal, Green, and New Democrat platforms all called for the minimum wage to be raised to \$12 or more next year. Collectively, these three platforms received 55% of the vote in the last election. In the throne speech, the government indicated that it wanted to create a new form of covenant and mentioned the notion of equality several times. However, it did not mention minimum wage. So my question to the Premier is this: Will the government commit to raising the minimum wage to \$12?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: We looked at the minimum wage program, and we wanted—in fact, we had agreement back two or three years ago with the government at the time—to have a formula through which minimum wage would be raised. It would not be a political discussion, but it would be based on a measurement of where we are in terms of a differential. It would ensure that people could count on it. It did not become an election-cycle issue, but it became one that was fair and reasonable for people on minimum wage. By the same token, it is a case of understanding the collective issues between provinces so that we are not out of step.

However, something that I have learned more recently—although I understood it in the past—is that a minimum wage increase sometimes has more benefits for the government than it actually has for the recipient. It is because of tax levels. If you look at the actual tax structures, the government makes a whole lot of money when minimum wage is increased. That is another way to put more costs on the backs of businesses. There has to be a way to look at tax



reduction in order to achieve better value for people on minimum wage without more increases to businesses. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr. Bourque: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Energy and Resource development. As we know, there is a plurality of views in the Assembly regarding hydraulic fracturing. We all know that in this minority situation, this plurality of views is, I think, really, really crucial. As we know, one previous government opposed... It did not oppose but put in a moratorium on fracturing. The other one was trying to push for fracturing. My question, directly to the minister, is this: Would he consider a vote in the House regarding a full or partial lifting of the moratorium on fracking? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, we think that we have struck a real balance here with a region that would like to pursue gas development. The region has lost its potash mine, and certainly, there is much less likelihood of it ever returning if we do not have competitive gas pricing. There is a situation in the province where pricing is going to go up by about 30% to all our businesses as our domestic resources deplete, and those depletions are happening now. Over the next year, we are going to see big increases because all our gas comes from the United States. When you are in that situation, you look out and say: Who is going to come to New Brunswick and invest? Where is the balance, Mr. Speaker?

We want to do the presentations of current technology, current operations, around this country and throughout North America, while also respecting our ability to reduce our emissions. Why is the United States well ahead of its emissions standards? It is because it is on natural gas. There is a transition from heavy oil to natural gas to green energy. It is a process. Can we do it in a systematic, developmental way, and can we work here in the House to get that support? I am optimistic, Mr. Speaker, because we must.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bourque: Of course, in the throne speech, the Premier indicated that he wanted to answer questions directly. Therefore, I ask him to answer the following question directly: If we must look at partially or completely lifting the moratorium on hydraulic fracturing, will the Premier hold a vote in the House? I repeat this clearly: Will he hold a vote in the House on this issue?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, what I understand right now is that the legislation would require a change in that legislation in order to move forward in this regard, so it has to come to the House and there has to be a vote on it. That is how I would understand it. Unless I am missing something, that is what I believe is necessary in order to move in a regional way, in a very localized way, in any way. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



Mr. Bourque: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have not heard a yes-or-no answer on this, Mr. Speaker, and I want to make sure that I clearly understand this answer. Again, the Premier, in his throne speech, did say that he and his ministers would give clear, clear answers. My question, again, is this: Is the government prepared to have a vote in the House regarding a partial or a full lifting of the moratorium on hydraulic fracturing? Thank you. Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, I will press replay because what we have here is a case where we have legislation that has put a moratorium on natural gas in New Brunswick. In order to change that, we need legislation that will allow us to do regional development in the area of Sussex. It does require coming to the Legislature, and it does require a vote. How much clearer can that be for the member opposite? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Homelessness

Mr. Coon: Mr. Speaker, winter has come early to New Brunswick, and that has a lot of caring New Brunswickers concerned about the plight of the homeless in our province. Homelessness, Mr. Speaker, has increased to levels that have not been seen in recent memory. In Fredericton, there are people living outdoors in tents, some without. In Moncton, it is estimated that there are 120 people sleeping outside. Saint John faces similar problems. There is an urgent need, Mr. Speaker, for emergency funding to enable churches and other community-minded organizations to bring people in from the cold. My question is: Will the Minister of Social Development act swiftly to ensure that emergency funding is provided to those organizations to ensure that all New Brunswickers have a warm, safe, and dry place to sleep at night?

Hon. Mrs. Shephard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question coming from the member for Fredericton South and the leader of his party. A week ago Friday, the Mayor of Moncton, with the RCMP, uprooted a small tent city forcing about 20 people further into the cold. While some people may talk about those actions, it brought to light the very prominent fact that we have people living in the cold. We cannot live with that.

We have mobilized. We have people on the ground who are assessing the situation. They are talking with the people of Moncton, and they are talking with churches and community leaders to understand what we can do. We are also having that conversation in Fredericton and other municipalities to make sure that we can do whatever we can do. We do need to take emergency measures, and those details are being worked on now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Coon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the clear and concrete response.

[*Translation*]

Homelessness is a terrible symptom of much more serious problems that have been overlooked for much too long. When we do not have a fixed address, we cannot get income assistance. If we get income assistance, the amount is so low that we cannot afford an apartment without a



roommate. However, that is not allowed. When we live with mental illness or addiction, no help is available to maintain a fixed address, even if housing is provided.

In July, New Brunswick and Ottawa reached a \$300-million agreement aimed at reducing homelessness. When will the Minister consult members to ensure the money is well spent?

[Original]

Hon. Mrs. Shephard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I could not agree more that homelessness is a very complex—complex—issue. It has been around a lot longer than any of us would like to acknowledge.

On two points that the member asked about... First, the very first question I asked of the staff at Social Development was to understand how someone without a home address could still receive Social Development benefits. We are working on that now to find a way, whether it be through the Salvation Army, Red Cross, or local community groups, that individuals without a home address can still receive benefits.

I also have to say that the minimum benefit goes to what we call socially employable individuals. I also have asked this question. We obviously know that individuals that we might deem employable are probably not and may, in fact, be disabled. How do we deem that disability and make sure that their benefits are increased as...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Shale Gas

Mr. K. Arseneau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As reported in the media, the Premier will be meeting this week with industry interested in drilling new shale gas wells in New Brunswick. It strikes me that Corridor Resources, an out-of-province corporation, is to be consulted before citizens, their local governments, and, of course, First Nations. Let me quote the throne speech: “Your government has appointed a minister with a singular responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs because rebuilding this relationship deserves a full-time minister.” Mr. Speaker, will the full-time Minister of Aboriginal Affairs guarantee that First Nations will be consulted before this government contemplates lifting the shale gas moratorium anywhere in this province, including Sussex, which is located on unsurrendered Mi’kmaq territory?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, the situation is like this. You first understand whether you have an opportunity. Now, if we do not have anybody wanting to invest in New Brunswick, we do not have an opportunity. If we find that we do, then how big is that opportunity?

Then you take the next step and ask: What have we learned? Have we learned anything new? How do we treat wastewater? What are the regulations required? What is being practiced around the world and around North America? What are the best practices? When we consult with the people we must consult with, we will actually have information to consult with. It is



speaking from an informed position of realities, making decisions on facts and not making decisions on emotion. I have said that over and over again. When I go to meet with people to talk to them about the opportunities in New Brunswick, I want to know what the opportunities are because I need their help in order to make the opportunities a reality. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Disaster Financial Assistance

Mr. Austin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As all of us here are aware, the devastating flood...

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: You normally have two questions. During an extended question period, you have three questions. Your leader had two, and you had the third one.

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry, Mr. Austin. Sorry, member for...

Could you please adjust the clock for the leader?

Mr. Austin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the recent flood of this year, a lot of people were affected by that, a lot of people in my riding. Some have received some compensation to help with that. However, the reality is that with this weather, the snow, and plummeting temperatures, there are still people in my riding who are living in camper trailers. Their homes have been devastated, and they cannot enter back into their homes. I think that it is of the utmost importance that we close this file and get these folks who have sifted through the cracks the assistance that they need to get back into their homes and out of those camper trailers at this time of year.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister in charge. When can we expect all these files to be closed and compensation paid so that people can get back into their homes and have a good Christmas season without the worry of living in a camper trailer through this weather? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that the flood was a devastating event and we have had devastating events more frequently. There was an extensive review done back after the ice storm in the northeast, and a lot of recommendations were put forward. We have asked for an update on that. We have also asked for an update in relation to how many people have received compensation in relation to the flood, what is outstanding, and what the timelines are. I will be pleased to share that with the Leader of the People's Alliance because our focus is on the fact that we want to see a timeline in which people are looked after. I think that we have that necessary information, and we will provide it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



Mr. Austin: Thank you to the Premier for that response. As a follow-up to that, I know that the previous government had committed to a review of the flood. It is not so much the fact that we had a flood, as floods have happened in the past, but it is the level the flood hit and how rapidly the waters rose. I think that it does, indeed, need some review and some study as to why that happened. The question that I have for the government is, again, with regard to that. Will the government continue to commit to some type of review of that flood to see exactly why it was as devastating as it was?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that this is one of those clear examples where all parties would be very interested to see how this happened and how it happened so quickly. We all have friends and neighbours who experienced it. I have a cousin in the Sheffield area who has lived there for the past 20 or 25 years basically, and he has never had the water come up as quickly as it did this time. We deserve an answer. However, let's work on that together.

I will ask our minister to make some inquiries. I already kind of set that ball in motion several months ago, asking what was different. The only way that we can figure out what was different is by getting straight answers on what we can do next time and why it was so unique. We will pursue that, and I would ask other members who are interested to be part of that, working with NB Power initially to get a really clear understanding of not only what changed in this particular situation but also how to mitigate these situations going forward, which will give us a better result when disaster hits. Thank you.

Highways

Mrs. Conroy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I continue to receive numerous calls from constituents concerning the Highway 11 bypass and the northern bypass in Miramichi. People are asking what is happening. People are continuing their calls for the stoppage of the Highway 11 bypass, which would waste millions of dollars when the money could be reallocated to the much-needed northern bypass.

I asked the previous government, and I will ask this current government as well: Could the Premier or minister provide some insight into what is happening to both bypasses and what people in my riding can expect? This is an issue that was raised continuously during the campaign and promised by this government during the campaign. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you to the member for bringing this up. We are currently going through all projects with DTI. I have said over and over again in the past that I am tired of bypassing New Brunswick and bypassing businesses.

Having said that, there are routes that we have had some discussion on and that are priorities in the region. It was a priority when we discussed it before, and we wanted to ask why this was not... I know that the northern bypass is one thing that was very much considered a requirement. I want to work with the member and with my other colleagues from the Miramichi area to determine what the priorities are as we build that. We are not going to do



everything, but we are going to do what is important to the communities and to the members who are representing those communities. We will have that discussion before any decisions are finally made. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Herbicides

Mr. LePage: On the issue of glyphosate, the throne speech is both clear and not very clear. As you know, the government committed to giving clear answers, so I am asking the Premier to answer yes or no to the following question: Is the government prepared to ban glyphosate throughout New Brunswick if the proper scientific review of its use concludes that this product must be banned?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: I have been very clear. We will base our decisions on facts, and we will base our decisions on reality. We will make a decision on glyphosate if it is found to be hazardous to health and something that should be banned. We do not have that information now, but we have committed to do it in a very short time frame. We have committed to it not only singularly, but we have also committed to an evaluation of our *Crown Lands and Forests Act*.

We want to do what is right. We want to do what is right to ensure that we have an industry here in our province, but we want to do it in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way that ensures that we can all enjoy the benefits of what we have here. I will look at best practices around the world, and I have said that. We will make decisions based on the science that says what we need to do. I do not know how else to say it. We will base all our decisions on facts, Mr. Speaker.

Climate Change

Ms. Rogers: The previous government, through a multiparty consultation process, introduced a climate change plan with over 100 action items. This enables government to lead in significant steps to protect the environment without adding new costs for consumers. Will the Minister of Environment build on the progress toward implementing these action items, and will he demonstrate a will to collaborate across the floor? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Collaboration is required in order to get a carbon plan that works for New Brunswick. I think that it is unfortunate that we are kind of in a situation with a plan that was rejected by the federal government. We are, in very short order, forced to find something that works for New Brunswick, at the eleventh hour. It is a tough position to be in, but we will deal with it.



We are working with departments. We have had meetings—meetings that will get the facts on the table. As I mentioned earlier, when we have the facts, we can actually talk about the situation in New Brunswick. I alluded to the baseline situation where there is no credit showing for people who have done something and there is very much a differential between provinces.

However, when we have all of that put together, I want to involve the other parties as we build a model that works for New Brunswick—a model that does not disadvantage New Brunswick and a model that does not tax people more with no end result. I do not believe that new taxes are the answer, but a model that continues to improve and reduce our emissions in our province to meet the standards that we must is. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Question period is over.

