

March 27, 2019

[Translation]

## Government Employees

**Mr. D. Landry:** My question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, during his state of the province address, the Premier was very proud to note that John Mallory, a former deputy minister, is working in the Office of the Premier as a special advisor for a \$1-per-year salary.

Someone named Yennah Hurley indicated on her social media profile that she is the Premier's special advisor for tourism. Is she also paid \$1 per year? If not, can the Premier explain the nature of her contract? Is she working full time? Was she hired through a competitive, merit-based process?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Thank you for the question. No, she is not paid \$1 per year. She is on salary, and she is working in our tourism industry—working with the deputy and working with the minister. She spent an entire summer or year going through the province, seeing what the province has to offer. She ran a private business for many years. Mostly, she is a native of India. She has been in our country, I think, for about 25 years. She is absolutely appalled that we are not able to convince the rest of the world and the rest of our province of what a great province we have. She is an ambassador from outside Canada who is willing to put her effort into New Brunswick to make New Brunswick what it needs to be. I am proud that she is working with the people in the department. I am proud that she is working with the minister because we are going to get things done by thinking differently. I am proud that she is part of the team. Thank you so much.

[Translation]

**Mr. D. Landry:** Mr. Speaker, there is also a former Irving company executive who works as a special consultant for the Premier. His name is familiar to us; it is Bob Youden, who works directly at the Office of the Premier, according to his email address.

There is also John Logan. I am not talking about the Deputy Attorney General, but about someone else with the same name, a former Irving Oil executive who now works at the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure.

We know that Mr. Youden received \$139 443 from the Minister of Finance. Can the Premier explain the nature of Mr. Youden's contract, if he works full time, his salary, and if he was hired through a competitive, merit-based process? I would like to know the same thing for Mr. Logan.



[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** You know, it is interesting, Mr. Speaker, because, if the members opposite were to take a walk through the Premier's Office—which I would encourage them to do—they would find a whole lot of empty cubicles in there. Before we came, it was absolutely full, brimming. Not all the salaries were booked to the Premier's Office, but there were lots of people around.

Mr. Speaker, we have hired subject matter experts. John Logan is one of them. John Logan is somebody I worked with for many years. Do you know what he was focused on doing, as I was? Getting better value for money. He is working with the deputy in DTI. He is working with the minister in DTI because we are looking at every project and figuring out how we can get a better project with better value and do it in less time but do more for the money that is being spent.

We made a commitment that new taxes are not an option, Mr. Speaker. The goal is: Let's put in the right resources. Let's change the game. Let's not keep thinking the way that we have thought for all these years and expect a different result. Putting the right people in the right places to kind of bring in a new thought process, a new mindset, and working with the great people inside to make it happen—that is the goal, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. D. Landry:** Are there any other consultants of a similar nature employed within government? Can the Premier explain the reporting structure of these shadow deputy ministers, the nature of their contracts, and the hiring process?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, we are setting up a different model, as you will have seen from our change in the clerk's role. We are focusing on some major initiatives, so we have created what we call a COO role. We have divided the clerk's roles into one in policy and procedures and then another one in relation to a chief operating officer.

We are going to have four, five, maybe six key initiatives. Municipal tax reform is one of them, and the individual who is currently the clerk on the policy and procedures side of it is going to be leading that. That is our goal—to have her lead that. We are going to have Jean-Marc in our COO role. He is going to lead other initiatives with deputy ministers and subject matter experts in order to look at economic growth in real terms.

It is not just how we distribute more money—more taxpayers' dollars. We will look at health care. The Minister of Health is taking on a major initiative in health reform. The Minister of Education has a major initiative in education. Mr. Speaker, we are building the team to get results. That is our goal. Thank you.



## Carbon Tax

**Ms. Rogers:** Given a federal carbon tax rebate to New Brunswickers and given that the provincial government is collecting an extra \$9 million in HST, I want to draw attention, as my colleague did, to a commitment that was made in the Conservative government platform. I will be more specific. It is on page 6. It states: “If the Trudeau government imposes a carbon tax on New Brunswick, we will refund the money to taxpayers in the form of tax relief.” Would the Minister of Environment explain how and when this refund to taxpayers will be happening?

**Hon. Mr. Carr:** I really enjoy being able to stand up and talk about this, because I think I have some questions to be asked as well. When the former government knew that its plan on the carbon tax, which was submitted to Justin Trudeau, was not going to be accepted, why did it just roll over and let it happen?

The honourable gentleman this morning had a statement asking what we were doing and why we did not do anything about it. Mr. Speaker, he was the minister responsible just one year ago, when nothing was done, and I have a feeling it was because the former Premier told him to step aside and roll over for Justin Trudeau. Let somebody else worry about it. We will tax them to the max because we are hungry for tax dollars.

On this side of the House, we are here to clean up the mess. We are here to deal with the negative consequences of an imposed, unfair carbon tax in New Brunswick, and we will continue to do that.

**Ms. Rogers:** Mr. Speaker, I will ask the question in a different way, and I hope to get a clear and precise answer. Again, the Premier’s criticism of—yet taking and running with—the equalization money... And given the federal carbon tax rebate to citizens and also given an extra \$9 million in HST, we know that the government’s platform commitment is possible to honour. Budgets are about priorities. Is this government going to collect money from New Brunswickers—money that it does not even believe in—and break its campaign commitment? How and when will this money be given to New Brunswickers?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Thank you for the question. We said we would refund any extra money we got from a carbon tax, and we will do that. We will put in all our related costs into making that happen, but we will refund it. We will find out how to make that happen.

Right now, our goal is to fight the carbon tax—unlike the members opposite, who believe we can just keep taxing more and taxing more and life will be good. They believe that New Brunswick can have an unfair advantage, which it does. We have put a carbon plan together. We have put a proposal together reflecting what other provinces already have, and that is in the federal government’s hands.

Do you know what we should be getting? We should be getting cooperation from the other side, because every business in this province was at an unfair disadvantage compared to every



other province and we were doing nothing about it. We are doing something about it, and we could use your help. Mr. Speaker, this is about fairness for New Brunswick. It is about standing up and fighting for New Brunswick and putting our province on the map the way it should be.

**Ms. Rogers:** Mr. Speaker, standing up and fighting for New Brunswick means New Brunswickers. We still have not heard how and when this money will be refunded. However, Mr. Speaker, in these times of fiscal restraint yet a surplus budget, this government cannot find money for the homeless, yet it found money to launch a massive political advertising campaign on carbon pricing. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask this: What is the cost to taxpayers for this advertising campaign on the backs of New Brunswickers?

**Hon. Mr. Carr:** Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a great question, and I will take that under advisement and get back to the honourable member.

[*Translation*]

## Tuition

**Mr. G. Arseneault:** The Free Tuition Program is designed to enhance access to university or community college by offering free tuition to students from families with an annual income of less than \$60 000. Last year, 6 000 students took advantage of this program. Can the minister confirm that this program will continue, as we know it, providing free tuition for students who meet the current income criteria?

[*Original*]

**Hon. Mr. Holder:** Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear to the House that we have maintained our election commitment and are conducting a review. That review is under way and in its final stages. One of the things that we have heard very clearly from students around this province who attend private institutions is that low-income New Brunswick students who attend private colleges and universities in this province were left behind with the previous plan. We are taking steps to create a new, renewed program that does not leave them behind.

**Mr. G. Arseneault:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we heard from students—and we heard from many of them—is that the Free Tuition Program worked very well last year. My question is to the minister in regard to that very same program. Is that program going to continue? Is he proposing changes to that program, and if so, can he please table those changes as soon as possible? Students are being held hostage. Their families are being held hostage. We need answers. It is there. We are not talking about campaign promises here. We are talking about a real program that helps real students. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Holder:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite might not be talking about campaign promises, but on this side of the House, we make promises, and we keep them.



We heard very clearly. We heard very clearly. Do you want to talk about students being held hostage? How about the students who were left in the cold because they did not have access to a bursary program that they could take advantage of to attend private institutions?

Mr. Speaker, we made it very clear in the budget speech that we are committed to a renewed program that is there for every New Brunswick student who wants to attend a postsecondary institution. We will have 120 000 New Brunswickers leaving the workforce over the next 10 years. We need to make sure that our students meet those challenges coming before us so that we have the workforce to provide the prosperity that we need in this province.

### **Nurse Practitioners**

**Mr. D'Amours:** Mr. Speaker, access to health care in many parts of New Brunswick is a big challenge. Many citizens are left without even a family doctor. Emergency rooms should be used for urgent needs and not for regular medical needs.

We all know that using nurse practitioners is one of the solutions. On the other hand, when it is time for the government to promote the profession and recognize the benefit of having them in our province, it makes sure to limit the services the nurse practitioners can offer. When will the Minister of Health put in place a process that will allow nurse practitioners in private clinics, such as the one in the northwest, to adequately serve the citizens of New Brunswick who wish to use that service, Mr. Speaker?

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** Thank you for the question. The member opposite is quite correct in his suggestion that nurse practitioners can play a legitimate and beneficial role in the delivery of health care to the people of New Brunswick. I want him to know that we are working on that. I want him to know that this evening, as soon as the Legislature finishes at 6 p.m., I will be meeting with the chair and the CEO of Vitalité to discuss this very matter. I can tell you that I have an agenda of items to go over with them on this and that this item is No. 2 on my agenda. Thank you.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. D'Amours:** I think this should be the first item, because the crisis is ongoing in the northwestern part of the province. I believe the Minister of Health did not understand the Premier's commitment to answer all questions directly without trying to avoid them. I hope the minister will not only answer questions from people here, but also ones from journalists outside this House.

The lack of family doctors means primary health care is clearly inadequate and unacceptable with regard to people in the northwestern part of the province. Today, this is the situation in the northwestern part of the province; tomorrow, it will be elsewhere. In recent years, nurse practitioners in the private sector have had no problem getting their patients examined at hospitals in the area. Today, the minister can rectify the situation for nurse practitioners in the





northwestern part of the province by grandfathering them in. Will the minister accept this solution immediately, yes or no?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** Well, somebody has got to offer me a solution in order for me to consider it. A diatribe in a journey about a number of issues in something that purports to be a question is something that I am really having some difficulty in dealing with. Having said that, as I have said, the challenge of primary health care is legitimate. We are dealing with that. We are working with the Medical Society. We are working with the Nurses' Union. We are dealing with nurse practitioners. These are things that we are dealing with and we are working toward.

These are challenges that the previous government had. They are challenges that this government has. We have a shortage of health care professionals, and that shortage is global. That shortage is in the United States, it is in other provinces, and it is in Europe. The fact of the matter is that health care is growing at a rate faster than we are producing health care professionals. It is a challenge that we all have to deal with and that we all have to work together on, and I hope that we will be coming forth with some solutions very quickly.

### Carbon Tax

**Mr. Melanson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue about the New Brunswick carbon tax relief that this government has committed to in its platform was not answered during question period this morning. Let's remind New Brunswickers that the provincial government—the Premier, the minister, and the Cabinet—has the authority to be able to do that and they have committed to doing that. The platform is clear, black on white, that if a federal carbon tax is imposed on New Brunswickers, they would come up with provincial carbon tax relief. When is this going to happen? New Brunswickers are asking the question through us. Premier, when are you going to bring in this tax relief that you committed to do?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, I assume that the member opposite realizes that we are fighting the carbon tax and we are doing it in the legal manner, working with Saskatchewan and Ontario. We are fighting the carbon tax. So, at this point in time, we are not bringing forward a proposal for anything in terms of revenue sharing because we do not want to collect the revenue to share it. We want New Brunswickers to keep it in their pockets to begin with. That is the goal. That is the difference.

The difference between us and the members opposite is that they feel that they can spend taxpayers' dollars better. Mr. Speaker, we do not feel that way. Our goal is to fight the carbon tax, not have it implemented, and get a stay on it if we can, but we do not want to see a carbon tax. Having said that, if it is imposed on New Brunswickers and it is not rebated as the federal government has said and it is cold money being collected and coming into our coffers, we will refund it. They can count on it because it is in our platform and we do believe what we say. And we will do it, Mr. Speaker.



**Mr. Melanson:** Mr. Speaker, we have a Premier who criticizes transfer payments to New Brunswick, saying that there are too many, and who criticizes this new carbon tax. But at the same time, he wants to take that money and do whatever the government wants to do with it. You cannot have it both ways. On top of that, those members are trying to fight every single issue that they do not agree with in the courts, costing the taxpayers money in legal fees.

Mr. Speaker, I think this is unacceptable. New Brunswickers do not want to have their tax dollars used for legal fees on issues where this government, on a matter of ideology, does not agree with some decisions made by the federal government. You promised a tax relief. It is in your platform. You have the authority to make that happen now. When are you going to do that, Mr. Premier? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, it seems that there is confusion here. We have not collected the money to relieve. We have not collected anything on this carbon tax. The federal government is imposing a backstop—news flash, a backstop—because the former government did not deal with it. It left it until after the election, hoping that maybe Minister LeBlanc would bail out the government.

Well, Mr. Speaker, something has changed. The fact that has changed is that there was not a carbon plan put forward, it was not accepted by the federal government, and we are left to clean up the mess. We have put a plan forward, but it does not include more taxes on individuals, Mr. Speaker. It includes meeting our environmental standards, doing it proudly, and not doing it on the backs of taxpayers. That is our goal, Mr. Speaker.

## Vehicle Registration

**Mr. Austin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is our understanding that with these taxes that are involved with the carbon tax, the New Brunswick government is going to be receiving an additional \$9 million that it has not had before. Just shortly, I am going to be presenting a bill to amend the *Motor Vehicle Act*, which would include onetime vehicle registrations. The question that I have for the Premier is this: Is he willing to take that \$9 million and put it toward onetime vehicle registrations to put money back into the pockets of people who have to register their vehicles every year?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, as I said in answer to the member opposite, yes, we will refund any money that we get on the carbon tax that is over and above what we had planned on, and we did not plan on a carbon tax. If the federal government... If there is excess coming into our coffers, if there is money that we have in excess in that regard, in relation to the costs that we are incurring, we will refund it.

Yes, I will put it in this initiative or another, but I guess we would have to decide whether that is the refund model that taxpayers want—picking a particular issue. The money that is available will be identified, and then we can decide collectively where it should go to get it back to taxpayers, so that is fine.



**Mr. Austin:** Mr. Speaker, I will take that as a yes, but at the end of the day, those watching this today know that registering their vehicles every year is a redundant, useless way to get money back into government coffers—ripping it out of people’s pockets.

I do believe that this government is committed to reducing taxes and fees on everyday New Brunswickers. This is a great way to do it. Take the \$9 million in extra revenue, put it against these vehicle registrations, and make it a onetime deal, as we are going to be presenting in the bill. Again, I will ask this, and I am asking the Premier to be specific: Will he commit to onetime vehicle registrations and use the additional tax money to put it against that lost revenue?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Thank you for the question again. Mr. Speaker, I will commit to working on this issue, on the one registration and what that means. I think what we need to do in that regard is to share all the costs related to going to a onetime registration. Right today, under the way we actually do this and implement it, it is a huge cost. However, maybe there is a new way to do things. Maybe there is a new way to do registrations. Maybe there is a whole new system that we can discuss to make it a reality.

I am willing to look at any item to reduce the burden on taxpayers. If we can find a way that we can make this affordable, because I do believe that my colleague, the leader of the Alliance party, also wants to keep taxpayers’ dollars to a minimum... We want to find ways to make it cheaper to live and work here in New Brunswick. Our ultimate goal is the same: reduce taxes. I cannot say that same thing about the opposition. That is our goal. I will work to make something happen there, and we will collectively review the numbers.

## Health Care

**Ms. Mitton:** Mr. Speaker, this budget holds the status quo on health care spending. The Department of Health’s budget increased by only 1.8%. This is not enough to keep up with the cost of health care.

I saw firsthand the real-life consequences of overcrowded hospitals, overflowing emergency rooms, and difficult working conditions. When my dad was dying of pancreatic cancer, he was staying in my home and required medical attention in a hospital; however, there was no room for him. We pleaded for help, and eventually, his family doctor said to take him to the ER, where she had a bed for him. When we took a break from caring for him to get some sleep—when we thought that we were leaving him in a safe place—he was moved into a hallway and left without care and without medication, alone and in severe pain.

Will the Premier explain why he has not given the Department of Health the budget necessary to implement his party’s platform commitments to reduce the strain on our emergency rooms?

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** Thank you for the question. May I express my sincere sympathy on the story concerning your father. I experienced similar things with my own father, and I know how difficult that is. I am sincere in offering you that.





Health care is a challenge. The budget was set at 1.8% because that was the minimum amount at which we felt that we did not have to go backwards and that there would not be deterioration in the system. There are challenges moving forward, and they are real challenges. Health care and the demand for health care are growing at a greater rate than our economy is growing. I have discussed that matter with your leader on several occasions, and he understands it, as do I. There is a two-pronged approach here. We need to revisit the federal-provincial relationship with respect to health care, and we need a formula based on age rather than population. We also need to look at all the efficiencies in our system that we possibly can. Thank you for the question.

**Ms. Mitton:** Mr. Speaker, as acknowledged by the Minister of Health earlier, these problems are not new to this government. Successive governments, regardless of colour, have pushed the issue of solving the crisis in our health care sector down the road. Now, the system is bursting at the seams.

This past weekend, a 58-year-old woman died just hours after waiting 11 hours to see a doctor at the emergency room at the Moncton Hospital. Dr. Serge Melanson, an ER doctor at the Moncton Hospital and the President of the New Brunswick Medical Society, said that half of the hospital's ER beds are occupied by people who cannot be transferred to another unit due to overcrowding. This death comes just one year after an infant died only hours after being turned away from the Miramichi hospital last March due to overcrowding. What will the Premier do to ensure that hospitals have the resources necessary to ensure this situation never happens again?

**Hon. Mr. Flemming:** Again, thank you for the question. Those are indeed tragic stories which are a challenge to all of us. Stories like that transcend political affiliation, and they transcend political colour and everything else like that.

We all know what the challenges are. We know that our population is aging at a faster rate than our economy is growing. We know that people are retiring earlier than they used to, and as a result of that, they are living longer. We know that we are facing very, very, very serious challenges.

As I said, the solution is not in pat answers. It is in working together, and I ask the Green Party to work with me as we work forward. Your leader well knows—and I can tell by your questions that you understand—what the challenges are. I will not insult your intelligence with a pat answer. I will say that we need to work together on a federal-provincial relationship and we need to work together to bring efficiencies and consistencies to our health care. Again, thank you for the question.

## French Immersion

**Mr. C. Chiasson:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to give the Minister of Education an opportunity to clarify what he said yesterday about French immersion. He said that a decision will be made on



this very soon. Can we assume that means by the time we have another question period after this hardworking government takes a five-week break from a full sitting of the House? There are a lot of people feeling a lot of stress over this impulsive move, and they deserve answers. When can we expect a decision from this minister?

**Hon. Mr. Cardy:** Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Yes, I can give that assurance, that when this House resumes sitting following the break that begins after the budget vote on Friday—when we will pass the best and first balanced budget in 13 years, paying off the debt for the first time, preserving investments in education, and preserving investments in health care—we are going to come back, and we are going to talk about our plans to make sure that New Brunswick's education system is world-class and something that everyone in this Chamber and around this province will be proud of. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. C. Chiasson:** Mr. Speaker, I thank him for that weak answer.

Mr. Speaker, at the minister's urging, I revisited the Auditor General's 2018 report. I draw the minister's attention to pages 3, 4, 15, 16, 17, 20, and 41. They all mention the need for stability in our education system.

On page 43, the recommendation is that before any changes are made, a detailed implementation plan will be prepared with: a realistic time schedule; consideration of all supports that need to be in place, resources, curriculum, tools, and methodologies; adequate funding; and a comprehensive risk assessment of the change's impact on operations and other ongoing initiatives at the department, school district, and school levels as well as a risk-mitigation strategy. My question to the minister is this: Has he prepared such a plan, and will he table it in the House along with a signed affidavit from the Auditor General that says that she is okay with this move according to the minister?

**Hon. Mr. Cardy:** Mr. Speaker, thanks to the member opposite for a variety of questions. First, in response to his previous question, I am not sure what... He asked a simple yes or no question, and I said: Yes, we will come back with that plan around French immersion.

Now, on to the next question. I will try to speak slowly and clearly so that it is understood by the members opposite. The Auditor General, whom I met with, said that she believed that the plan that we had put in place for the French immersion consultation was within the framework she had laid out in her report. If the honourable member opposite would like to review that report in detail, he will find the sections in that report where she specifies that the plan that we are putting forward is entirely in accord with what she wants. I encourage the member opposite, if he wants to talk about it, to drop by my office. I keep inviting him, but he never comes. I am feeling lonely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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



## Carbon Tax

**Hon. Mr. Carr:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought that it would be prudent that I get the information for the member for Moncton South as quickly as possible on what the campaign has cost so far. To lead into that answer, if she has any questions for me after that, I will be happy to stand aside and answer them and get her any more detailed information.

Mr. Speaker, the cost of this awareness campaign is under \$50 000. I will show you, as an example, how this is benefiting New Brunswickers. I got a message already this week from a senior in my riding. She said: Mr. Carr, thank you for putting those numbers out there. We know that you are doing what you can. Your government is doing what it can to move through this. Deal with the hand that you are dealt. I filled my oil furnace last week, and I saved \$48 compared to what I will save next week.

That is \$48 she can spend on something else, Mr. Speaker. We are doing what we can. I have also instructed the department—and we have done this—to add a reminder that New Brunswickers can apply for the rebate. We have to do everything we can to make sure that New Brunswickers get every little bit out of it back to themselves. That is what we are doing. We will continue to do that, and we will continue to work with all members on the floor toward a solution that works for New Brunswickers. That is the best we can do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Under our rules, the minister took the question under advisement. He came with the answer. You are entitled to your questions, and he has the prerogative to answer your questions. The questions and the answers are a minute each. You have the floor.

**Ms. Rogers:** Mr. Speaker, I had to think about what that meant.

I would like to thank the minister for getting this information so quickly. That is great. The answer was that the cost is under \$50 000 to date. I believe that is what it was.

I guess my question still remains. The ad on the front does not talk about the rebate that is automatically provided back to New Brunswickers from the federal government through its income tax system. It is not even something that they specifically have to do. It automatically comes back through their income tax. I know that some people have their rebates already. My question still remains. It is not visible on this advertisement whether this government is going to provide a rebate as it committed to do in its platform. I will leave that with the minister. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Carr:** I appreciate having the member opposite point out that it is an automatic rebate, but it is not. Now, I am hearing from New Brunswickers, including some in my riding, who do not use their Internet well or they do not use the online filing system. They do their taxes by phone, and there is no prompt on the phone program to apply for the rebate. There is a whole host of problems with that.



With regard to whether it is on the front page or on the second page, I think that we are getting down into the little details a bit much, but it is there. And we will improve upon it, as we will.

Now, the projections into the future are projections of what we will return, and the Premier has been pretty clear on what we plan to do and to try to do for New Brunswickers going forward. That is what we will do. We are here to stand up for New Brunswickers. We are here to deal with the hand that was dealt to us by the former Premier, who decided just to let this go into the hands of Justin Trudeau, taking our money and telling us he is giving us back more than we are going to pay, which we know is absolutely untrue, Mr. Speaker. Simple math will show you that. Thank you.

