

May 28, 2019

[Translation]

Tuition

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government makes decisions without considering the evidence and expert opinion. It keeps making cuts on the back of the most vulnerable New Brunswickers. The Canadian Association of University Teachers passed a motion condemning the Conservative government for its cuts to the Free Tuition Program and Tuition Relief for the Middle Class.

According to this association, these cuts were made regardless of all evidence that these programs were effective in enhancing access to postsecondary education and that the changes would have devastating effects on marginalized students and the most vulnerable people in our province.

This is not the first group to criticize this government for its lack of vision. What does the Premier have to say to the faculty?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, here we go again. The opposition is continuing down this road of fearmongering. The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that we met with the faculty association and with student union groups across this province and they all said that they wanted to leave the upfront bursary money in place. That is exactly what we did, unlike those guys over there, and hundreds and hundreds more are now able to access that bursary program, Mr. Speaker. This fearmongering, as I said the last time that we were in the House, has to stop. We made it more accessible to a lot more New Brunswickers than was previously the case.

[Translation]

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, we are not the ones who just said that; the university professors did. They just said that the most marginalized and poorest groups of students in our society cannot continue to attend university because the government eliminated the Free Tuition Program.

If I look at groups right now, I see that people in northern New Brunswick are the most affected. Last year, in some cases... I think we were talking about 50% of students enrolled at the Université de Moncton campuses either in Edmundston or Shippagan. This year, some of these students are wondering if they will be able to attend university, given that the programs have been cancelled. What does the Premier have to say about this new version brought to us today by the professors?



[Original]

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Leader of the Opposition. When he was in power, why did he think that it was acceptable that someone who was going to Oulton College, studying to be a paramedic, and who was a low-income New Brunswick student did not have access to that funding? Why did he think that it was acceptable, Mr. Speaker, that somebody, a low-income New Brunswicker, who was studying to be a teacher at Crandall University in Moncton could not have access to that funding? I would like to know. Why did the members opposite think that it was acceptable to leave all those New Brunswick students behind?

[Translation]

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, we had launched the Free Tuition Program. I have served as a member in the House for over 20 years. I have made announcements. I recall signing contracts worth over \$500 000—sorry, not \$500 000, but over \$500 million—when we were conducting highway construction projects in the province. I will tell you that, during my time at the Legislative Assembly, the best thing we were able to do to help lower-income youth and families in the province was to announce the Free Tuition Program. We had made changes, and we would have made some more at other stages. I am wondering why the Higgs government continues to attack the less fortunate students in our society.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Holder: What we did not do was choose winners and losers. We decided that every single low-income New Brunswicker who wanted to train at a public or private institution should have access to that upfront bursary money. Mr. Speaker, it is very clear: The Leader of the Opposition wants to pick winners and losers and leave people behind.

[Translation]

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, what we wanted to do was to make the poor winners too. That is what we wanted to do when we announced the Free Tuition Program. As you know, we had established a cap which we later raised. I would say to you that never in 100 years would we have thought of dividing people into groups. What we wanted to do was provide an opportunity to families like the ones I know very well. Their children were able to attend university even though their parents were on income assistance. They had the opportunity to attend university thanks to this program.

At Christmas, I was with a family, and I remember that the second child asked me if, since her parents were on income assistance, she would also be able to attend university thanks to the Free Tuition Program. This is how I answered her: Yes, probably, if the government does not eliminate it. Now that the government has eliminated this program, this girl is wondering if she will be able to attend university. What does the government have to say?



[Original]

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, there is only one reason that students in this province are going to be left with the perception that they cannot go to university next year. It is because of the fearmongering that is happening on the other side of the House. There is all kinds of upfront bursary money in place for more New Brunswickers than ever before. This fearmongering is creating a false perception that New Brunswickers cannot access a university or college education in this province, and that is on them. That is on them. Mr. Speaker, we decided that we were not going to choose winners and losers. They did.

Immunization

Mr. D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, concerning the measles outbreak, can the Minister of Health update the House on the measles outbreak at Kennebecasis Valley High School? In particular, who should get a booster shot, and where should they go to get it?

Hon. Mr. Cardy: I thank the member opposite for the question. It is a good opportunity to talk about the fact that, yes, we are experiencing a measles outbreak in the south of our province and to pass on some important public health information.

The most important thing right now for people who find themselves feeling ill and believe they may be suffering from measles is this. It is important to remember that, for four days prior to showing the red rash that we often assume is the main symptom of measles... You can go for four days before showing that rash and still be infected. This is a highly contagious disease. Do not go to an emergency room. Do not go to your family doctor. Do call 811 to receive further instructions. This is the instruction right now for people in the south of the province or people anywhere in the province who believe that they are suffering from measles: Call 811 to get guidance on where to go for help and treatment.

We are dedicating all our resources in the public health system to making sure that this outbreak is contained and eliminated. Thank you again to the member opposite for the question.

Mr. D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, the clinic at Kennebecasis Valley High School is a good initiative. We have been informed that pharmacists in Saint John are receiving an average of five calls per hour concerning measles. Pharmacists could help vaccinate many more people. The problem is that they are not considered official providers by public health. What will the Minister of Health do to allow pharmacists to help us fight this outbreak?

Hon. Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, thanks to the member opposite. Pharmacists play a really critical role in our health care system, and, for a long time, I have called for their role to be expanded. I know that the Minister of Health shares that opinion as well. There is a wide variety of areas in which pharmacists can play an expanded role in delivering health care in New Brunswick.



However, in this case, going back to my first answer to the first question, we do not want people who believe they have measles going out into public spaces, and that includes into pharmacies. If you believe you have measles, call 811. This is a public health issue now, not just a question of routine updating of vaccinations and not just a regular part of the health care system. We are facing an outbreak. We have to contain it as quickly as possible, and while pharmacists have a great role to play in many, many areas, this is not one of them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Mr. D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Health tell us whether we have enough measles vaccine to meet the demand and protect all New Brunswickers currently at risk from this disease?

Hon. Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, I thank the opposition member for his question. This morning, I had discussions with officials from the Department of Health and the public health office, and they informed me that, yes, there is enough vaccine for what we are experiencing as a province, meaning measles cases. However, vigilance is essential, and that is why it is important that, if people are exhibiting symptoms, they call 811 to talk to professionals about what to do to make sure they get the necessary treatment.

I will reiterate in the other official language: Please do not go to the hospital, your family doctor's office, or a pharmacy. Stay home, call 811, and follow the advice that health professionals give you in response to your questions. Thank you very much for your question.

[*Original*]

Public Safety

Mr. Horsman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In an attempt to address crime in certain neighbourhoods in this province, the government has funded a Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods unit, known as SCAN, to help address such things as drug trafficking and prostitution through working with property owners. It is our understanding that there have been cuts to this program, and I was wondering whether the minister could confirm whether this is the case.

Hon. Mr. Urquhart: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have not been cuts, but there have been adjustments in personnel to different communities and in the way that they are going to be distributed around the neighbourhoods. The members are all still in place, and they will continue to look after that.

Mr. Horsman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to clarify something that the minister spoke about the last time we sat, which is that this side of the House did not ask questions in



estimates regarding the contraband unit. That was because we were not aware of it or it was not announced at that time, so again, there goes transparency.

We understand that three members have been cut from the SCAN unit, placing more on the resources on police departments that are not specifically meant to do this. They are tasked with enough as it is, to police their communities to keep them safe. I am just wondering why cancelling this program is a good idea, if the minister could answer.

Hon. Mr. Urquhart: Mr. Speaker, I was in opposition for probably longer than I ever wanted to be. When I did my estimates, I read the budget, and I read the estimates of the party. He was saying that it was not in there. I do not understand. All he had to do was look at it, but he himself, when he stood up with his opening remarks, was talking about the estimates and the fact that this was the only thing that was missing. He was just... Because he was not prepared to do his estimates, he... I think that it is quite insulting to those on the floor here and to the people, when he can stand up to say that it was not in the estimates. That is what research is, and that is what people are supposed to do when they prepare to question the ministers on the speaking...

Mr. Horsman: Mr. Speaker, one thing I did read about was that \$1.1 million was cut from policing services. That is taking away from the safety of the people of this province. I am wondering whether the minister has not sent letters to these three members, the SCAN members, saying that this program is defunct.

Hon. Mr. Urquhart: Mr. Speaker, when you take over a department, especially Public Safety, you look at where you put your resources. In Public Safety, a lot of times, I have found organizations or groups that were put together sometimes to give friends work or to reorganize their ideas and how they want to move forward. You know, there are always two ways of looking at how to prepare your department. First of all, I prefer to look at the problems in society and the problems that they are having and work backward. Instead of trying to address this through looking after my own personal interests, I try to look after the interests of the community. I have reorganized it, and I feel that I can address the needs better.

Tourism

Mr. J. LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, many concerns have been raised about the tourism levy that the province has brought forward. Will the minister advise as to whether this levy will be applied to campgrounds around the province?

Hon. Mr. Carr: That is a good question by the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, and it is the exact question that he asked in the committee when we went over the bill. We went over it very thoroughly, spending many more hours than we thought we would spend on it, but that is okay. The more thorough we can have the questions on those bills in committee, the better.



Mr. Speaker, we have given the municipalities the ability and autonomy to put this levy into place for their benefit. They have been asking for this for several, several years. The previous government gave it to them and then took it away after little Johnny could not get his speaking points in place, so we came along. We said that we would do it. We have done it in consultation with the municipalities and their associations. Mr. Speaker, I am hearing discussions now in some of the regions that they are going to take an overall, holistic approach and not charge a levy or put the levy on campgrounds and bed-and-breakfasts, places with fewer than five rooms.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. J. LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, it would seem that this levy is being imposed to make up for the cuts that the minister made to the tourism marketing budget, which is unfortunate. Given that not all accommodations are located within municipal boundaries, will the minister be applying this tourism levy to unincorporated areas and collecting this levy?

Hon. Mr. Carr: Mr. Speaker, we went over these questions in committee as well, so it appears as though the member opposite is looking for a sound bite or a clip to put on Facebook. That is okay. I used to be the master of that at one point. You can check out my Facebook page. They are all over there.

But, Mr. Speaker, you know, this is a levy that the municipalities are going to put in place themselves. What the member opposite is looking for... He wants government to tax people in unincorporated areas. When that happens, when governments take a tax out of the communities and decide to redistribute it, it creates winners and losers. Now, we know that the party opposite loves to create winners and losers. We saw it with the Free Tuition Program, which was not free for anybody. We have taken this as an approach—a levy that the municipalities can voluntarily put in place. It is not a tax, Mr. Speaker. We do not believe in that.

Petitcodiac River

Mr. McKee: Mr. Speaker, full river restoration of the Petitcodiac River with a new bridge and upgrades to the TransAqua wastewater facility are good for the environment, so it is not surprising that the Conservatives have never been strong supporters of this project. They are not really interested in what people such as scientists have to say.

Mr. Speaker, delaying projects like these brings added costs, whether from cancelling work that has been awarded already or from inflation driving up the cost the longer you wait. In addition, families around the area have found new, alternative day care solutions to avoid traffic delays. Cities and towns have upgraded infrastructure around the area to take on bigger traffic loads, so why delay these projects? What will this cost if it is ever finished—three, four, or five years down the road, Mr. Speaker?



Hon. Mr. Oliver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the member opposite, I am not sure exactly when the members opposite are going to get it. In December, we made announcements. We told them that we were going to cut a number of projects in order that we could balance our budget, move forward, and pay down the debt. We have done that. That is exactly what we have done. It is the first time in many years that we have been able to do this.

I want to assure the province that the safety of our roads is paramount, within the limit of our ability to pay. In fact, with this particular project, I know that the mayor has already said that the action that the department is taking is going to give them more time to accommodate and get ready for the closure that is coming in another year. We are moving ahead with the project this year, and we will complete it in the years to come. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Government Contracts

Mr. K. Arseneau: Mr. Speaker, page 4 of Mr. Higgs's Conservative Party campaign platform said that this government was going to carefully review the Medavie Health Services New Brunswick extramural contract within six months of the election. It is now eight months since the election. In the throne speech, this government reiterated the commitment. This is a quote from the throne speech: "Within six months, your government will review the Medavie Health Services New Brunswick contract for home care services." It is now six months since the throne speech.

To avoid any confusion, which is the norm these days, my question is for the Premier, the member for Quispamsis, the leader who signed off on the campaign platform. Since this government is focused on results, I suppose this double promise was kept. So, can the Premier share the results of this careful review with us today?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, yes, with the review of Medavie, we have had different checkpoints along the way to see how the process is working and whether indeed the results that it claimed to be able to make were being made and we were seeing benefits within the province. Interestingly enough, we have not had any real complaints in regard to service levels that have come through our offices or through any of the MLA offices that I am familiar with.

But the intent is still to have... I have asked that most recently. We do not have a report at this point, but the intent is to have something that would reflect what the service level has been. Within the first six months of applying it, actually... My point was to have it by the end of June and to have something so that we could say: Okay, has this worked? Has it not worked? Where have there been pitfalls in all areas? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.



[Translation]

Appointments

Mr. K. Arseneau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We look forward to getting this report. We only have a few sitting weeks left before going back to our ridings for the summer.

Excuse me, my question has changed, because an announcement was made this morning. In July, it will be one year since the Commissioner of Official Languages was appointed on an acting basis. However, subsection 43(5.5) of the *Official Languages Act* states that the Lieutenant-Governor in Council may appoint an acting commissioner for a term of up to one year.

Since this government is focused on results... I saw this morning that the government changed the process. So, why did the Premier no longer have confidence in the selection committee? Can we expect an appointment by the July deadline?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Once again, thank you for the question. To the member opposite, through the Speaker, we were renewing the process. It got kind of slowed down and delayed during the whole election cycle, and things moved on rather slowly, if at all. We are going to put out a new setup. That will be going out through the same process where we do an independent... We will follow the selected... The existing candidates that have already put in can also apply. For all the parties, we will consult on any chosen candidate, so we will have that discussion as well. All candidates, as I said, can apply again. We will announce some more details soon, but it will not happen before the July case that the member opposite is mentioning. Thank you.

Paramedics

Mr. Austin: Mr. Speaker, advanced care paramedics are an invaluable part of our emergency system. They have more training and ability to perform much-needed medical care that goes beyond what primary care paramedics are licensed to do. Unfortunately, with the continued unnecessary language requirements imposed on these paramedics, we are losing those with years of experience.

Is the Premier aware that every ambulance has a dedicated translation line, which is a lot like we use right here in this House? With modern technology, these language issues should be a thing of the past. More importantly, will the Premier be bold enough to stand up against this nonsense that has been perpetuated upon the people of New Brunswick and finally apply some common sense when it relates to language and our frontline services?



Hon. Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. Certainly, the use of technology in all forms of government and around the world is something that is increasing. It is certainly something that has been a long-standing commitment in New Brunswick that we have bilingual service from people. Those are the sorts of discussions that are taking much, much longer than making announcements and standing up here in the Legislature on a short-term basis in response to a specific issue.

We absolutely have to make sure that we are providing the highest quality possible level of care, and that has to include the ability to clearly communicate with people. Having had the experiences of working with health care systems—not working with, but having been worked on by health care systems—in multiple countries around the world where translation devices were used, I can say that they have their drawbacks. They are certainly affordable, but they also lack the ability to convey nuance and the sort of details that you would want and expect from your home country. I expected that in Thailand. Here in New Brunswick, I am glad that someone could speak to me in English or French.

Mr. Austin: That is just not reality. Mr. Speaker, here in New Brunswick, we have paramedics with years of experience—I am talking 10, 15, or 20 years' experience—who are being denied positions as advanced care paramedics. I might add that advanced care paramedics are the second on the scene, not the first on the scene, in the vast majority of situations. I cannot understand how we have translators in this House who are available to us on the go, in real time, and yet for frontline services, it is unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, in places such as Toronto and Vancouver and all across the world, there are multiple languages, and they offer great service to their citizens. Why is it that in New Brunswick, we continue to allow unilinguals to be left out in the cold when it comes to frontline services? I will ask again. Will this government consider changing the language requirements to a reasonable level so that unilinguals can get permanent, full-time work?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I think that one of the things that we started off with very early in the program in relation to the paramedic situation is that we do not believe that anyone should be denied a job, the right to a job, or the right to a promotion simply on the basis that they cannot speak one or the other of the official languages. We believe that the opportunity should be provided and then the language would be taught as required.

If that is still the case and people are not being promoted, either because they are unilingual French or unilingual English, that is not the direction our province should be moving in. I would want to know of those situations because, particularly with Medavie and particularly with the paramedics, we said that people were not going to be denied full-time employment and we were not going to have people sitting on casual because they are unilingual. That is the commitment that we talked about collectively in this House. We have talked about it with Medavie. If it is not happening, we need to make it happen, Mr. Speaker.



[Translation]

Appointments

Mr. LePage: This morning, we learned from the Premier that a new selection process for the Commissioner of Official Languages will be established. The Premier is in fact blaming the election date for the delay. Did he not know at the time, though, that elections are held on fixed dates? Is he questioning the process? I would like to know this: On what provisions of the *Official Languages Act* is the Premier relying to change the selection process for the Commissioner of Official Languages?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, it was my position that we had a situation that had drug on too long. It had gotten lost during the election process, and the intent was to open it up and ensure that we had an adequate number of candidates applying and that we would make the process independent and fair for all.

I think that through all this process, it is also about understanding—and I am interested as we go through it—the role of the Official Languages Commissioner because, as the title states, Mr. Speaker, it is indeed Official Languages Commissioner. We should not be debating here in this House the issues of French and English after 50 years. We should have that resolved. In the case of this role, I am anxious for the commissioner's role to become one that looks at the root cause of our kids not being able to learn both official languages in our province. What is the issue? Why is that not part of the understanding in our education system? How can our English system have been such a failure at delivering both language services to our kids in this province?

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

[Translation]

Mr. LePage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This answer really puzzles me. The process has changed, but what worries me the most is whether the role and responsibilities of the Official Languages Commissioner have changed. I would therefore like to know if, with this new selection process, the government has changed the role and responsibilities of the Official Languages Commissioner.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: No, Mr. Speaker, we have not made any changes to the current roles and responsibilities. However, what I am saying is that it is stated as an Official Languages Commissioner. In saying that, the purpose has to be how we ensure that languages, both



English and French, are able to be used fluently throughout this province. How can we ensure that happens? I feel that this office needs to play a major role in that happening.

When I look at our education system—and I have said it in this House many times—about 20% of our kids in the English system graduate bilingual. That is pitiful, Mr. Speaker. It is sad to think that after 50 years, we have not learned how to teach our kids to speak both official languages. I want, as part of any new requirement—and I would assume it was part of the old requirement—to understand why we are not able to achieve what we all aspire to achieve, which is to have every child coming out of our schools able to converse in both official languages. What is our problem, Mr. Speaker?

