

May 31, 2019

[Translation]

Collective Bargaining

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, it is Friday. Yesterday, I asked the Premier some questions, and he can probably guess what the questions will be about today. Yesterday, he told me that my questions were hypothetical and that he was not answering them. Now, we all know what happened in the House yesterday. There was a vote, and the three opposition parties voted in favour of a motion to send the dispute between nursing home workers and the government to binding arbitration. Since this motion received the majority of votes yesterday in the House, is the Premier now willing to send this dispute to binding arbitration?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, obviously, I respect the vote that was taken yesterday. I understand what it meant in the case of urging the government to make a decision on binding arbitration. I have been very clear from the beginning as to what this means to the province, what we have seen as an outcome of binding arbitration without any conditions, what that does to municipalities' costs to run, and what that does to the indications... what it would do for the province.

I believe that the situation with our nursing home workers, when we look across... Today, there was mention in members' statements of the ads that are currently in place. I happen to believe that people need to understand the facts. When 33 000 employees have taken a program and said: You know, we are here, too, to do our part for New Brunswick, and our salaries and wages are comparable, and... They do get paid properly. Maybe we would like to pay more, but our province is not in a state to do that. I believe that the nursing home workers want to do their part. I am not so sure, however, that all CUPE members and, in particular, the leaders, feel the same way, and that is a concern because we need their help, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. D. Landry: I understand what the Premier is telling us, but he must also understand what we said yesterday. The Conservative House Leader, a man I respect greatly in the House, stepped outside. The Premier is not the one who took part in the media scrum; it was the House Leader. He said that it was a symbolic gesture. How can you consider this a symbolic gesture when 62% of the people of New Brunswick answered and provided their point of view?

I think we gave the government a chance yesterday to easily get out of this mess. All the Premier needs to say to get out of this mess is that the majority of New Brunswickers gave him



the mandate to send the dispute to binding arbitration. Why does the Premier not take advantage of this opportunity to settle this dispute?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, the thing about us getting to a position where people once again look at New Brunswick as a place to invest, work, and live is our having the right cost structure to do that. Pay fair and reasonable wages, and ensure that benefits are acceptable and reasonable and that pensions are available. Mr. Speaker, that is what we see in this group. We have those offerings, and we see opportunities to improve. In every sector, we see opportunities not to use the full sick time complement and to find out the reasons people are taking it off or scheduling days off as though they were vacation. Mr. Speaker, there is that opportunity, and we need to find that in order to make that change.

We have to be the recipients in this government. We have to take responsibility for the outcome of these decisions, Mr. Speaker, because, in this go-forward plan, we are not planning to raise taxes. I know that was not an issue for the members of the previous government. They would raise taxes and raise fees. They would do it wherever they could because they believed in just putting in more money or spending more wherever they could. Mr. Speaker, I have a different philosophy, and my philosophy is to fix New Brunswick for the long haul, to bring our kids back home for a life here in New Brunswick.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

[Translation]

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, before taking office, the current Premier had told the House that he would give it more power. It is time to put words into action and prove to the people of New Brunswick that he can keep his promise.

The Premier tells us our province is almost broke. I have looked at all his advertisements, which are extremely expensive. Why is there no money to pay nursing home workers the wages they want? In the *Daily Gleaner*, the *Telegraph-Journal*, and *Acadie Nouvelle* this morning, I saw full-page ads, which are extremely expensive. Can the Premier explain this to me, since it had to be deliberate? Since the vote took place yesterday, it would have been impossible for these ads to be produced afterwards. The result of yesterday's vote was foreseen. Tell me why there is money to pay for such ads.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, informing the public of the decisions that they are going to pay for, I think, is one of our responsibilities, and that is exactly what that is about. That is saying that if we agree to this, potentially \$7 000 more per bed per patient in a nursing home is going to be the cost incurred. Who is going to pay for that, Mr. Speaker? It will be the people on the



street—the people who are working every day, trying to pay their taxes, trying to run their families, and trying to stay here in New Brunswick.

We have to be realistic. Mr. Speaker, is it an unreasonable request to have conditions or criteria around a binding arbitration policy? In other words, compare it with where you live, where you spend your money, and where you earn your money, in the private and public sectors. Look at the benefits and the pension plan, look at the criteria around your sick time, look at the salaries in comparison to others, and look at the 33 000 who have already taken it. Mr. Speaker, yes, we will go to binding arbitration, but it will have conditions. It will have conditions and criteria that reflect living and working in New Brunswick.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

[Translation]

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, going to binding arbitration with conditions means these are no longer the rights unionized workers fought for. Going to binding arbitration with conditions is no longer binding arbitration; it is simply bargaining similar to the bargaining taking place now.

Does the Premier think he is going to attract people to New Brunswick with starvation wages and conditions that make it impossible to retain employees? Who is going to be interested in coming to work in nursing homes when workers are out in the streets and in court? The Premier tries all sorts of things in the newspapers, instead of sitting down at the bargaining table.

What we are asking the Premier this morning is that he allow binding arbitration, given that 62% of the House voted in favour of nursing home workers and the government settling this dispute at the bargaining table.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, I am very prepared to put every criterion in place to compare the salaries here and the working conditions, to make improvements where we need to in hours, and to look at the health care, look at the pensions, look at the sick time, and look at the salaries in comparison with like jobs in hospitals in Atlantic Canada. Mr. Speaker, that is not a problem.

It is hard to believe that the opposition would be over there saying: Oh no, we should compare with anywhere—anywhere in the world. That is not reasonable. No one does that, Mr. Speaker. This is the only place that would come up with an idea such as that. So, Mr. Speaker, I have an obligation. I have a moral obligation, and that is to ensure that people can afford to live and work here. I believe that the people in the nursing homes want to do just that. They want to be treated fairly. They want to be part of a solution, and I want to work with them to be that solution, Mr. Speaker.



(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: But do you know what? If it means going to an election, we will do just that, Mr. Speaker, because we will stand our ground.

Immunization

Mr. D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain why the Minister of Tourism can count how many tourism guides are left at the end of the tourism season, but the Minister of Health cannot count how many vaccine shots there are at the beginning of this outbreak? I think, Mr. Speaker, that it is time for the Premier to ask one of the colleagues of the Minister of Health to find out exactly how many vaccines are available in New Brunswick.

Hon. Mr. Higgs: I guess, Mr. Speaker, that I am just standing up because of the connection between Tourism and Health. Here we have a situation where the Minister of Tourism actually said: Here is a case where this is not being used, and here is the example. I am pretty impressed that he had those numbers, Mr. Speaker. He laid it out, and there is really no debate. I mean, we could let these guides be paperweights and not be used and keep spending \$400 000 or \$500 000 per year, but I guess that is okay with the members opposite.

Then, Mr. Speaker, in relation to what was created yesterday and the challenge to the Minister of Health, do you know what? We have had 11 cases in Quispamsis and Rothesay—11 cases—so we are not talking about an epidemic here, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about an isolated case that the Department of Health has contained.

Mr. Speaker, do you want to know how many questions I, as the member for Quispamsis, have had in my email with regard to this situation? Zero, Mr. Speaker, so let's not blow this up and out of hand. Let's contain it where it is. I believe that the department is doing just that.

Mr. D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, I think that the Premier should check his email. He may find some new information.

You know, Mr. Speaker, since the Minister of Health cannot count, can the Premier confirm to this House that New Brunswick has received 15 000 vaccine shots and tell us why the Minister of Health did not provide this information to this House and to the people of New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Flemming: My job as Minister of Health is to make sure that Public Health has the necessary resources. It has sufficient amounts of vaccine. It has access to additional amounts if needed. It is dealing with this outbreak, and I, quite frankly, believe that medical professionals have better things to do than to count individual vials when they know that they have all the supply that they need.



It is a silly question. It is poor management. Nobody would pull resources away to count how many little vials they have. It changes every day. People get done. What do you want to do—count vials at noon and then vaccinate some people at three o'clock and count them over again? Then we will count at five o'clock, seven o'clock, nine o'clock, and twelve o'clock? It is silly. It is clear that the guy has never been in the public sector or run a...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. D'Amours: As I mentioned yesterday, if the minister thinks that he needs to count one shot at a time, in the end, there is a problem. There is a real problem in his department if he cannot know exactly and cannot tell the population of New Brunswick how many vaccine shots we have in New Brunswick. We are in trouble, and we are in trouble with this minister, Mr. Speaker.

In this morning's *Telegraph-Journal*, it is stated: "James Turk, director of the Centre for Free Expression based at Ryerson University, said the lack of available protocol information is 'irresponsible'". This morning, in the *Telegraph-Journal* and other newspapers, we saw anti-union advertisements. Can the Premier tell the House how much these advertisements cost New Brunswick taxpayers and why this money was not put into protocol information concerning the measles outbreak?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: In relation to our advertisements that are in the papers, Mr. Speaker, they cost \$16 000. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? We can do both. We can inform New Brunswickers of what it is costing them and what they are going to pay in taxes for an unreasonable request that is being put forward and that this House supported. We can show them that so that they will know the outcome because they are going to be paying. That is the situation.

In relation to the vaccine and the measles, Mr. Speaker, this is not an epidemic. This is a localized outbreak that the department is handling very well. As far as the number of people getting vaccinated goes, if people want to get vaccinated, that is great. The Department of Health is handling that and handling it very well. In our community—in my community—it is being dealt with, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Carbon Tax

Mr. Bourque: Mr. Speaker, the Premier says he submitted a carbon plan to Ottawa. Under the previous government, the submitted plan was made public and posted on the government website. We have yet to see this plan published by this government. However, we did learn a few things through some public comments that he made, namely, that there would be no additional cost to consumers and that there would be a price on carbon for industry. I believe he mentioned \$11 million in additional costs for industry. That sounds a lot like the previous government's plan. I guess my question is this: Why has the Premier not made this new plan available to the public? In the interest of transparency and good government, will he commit to



making that plan available to the public today, and will he demonstrate if there are any differences between both plans?

Hon. Mr. Carr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite. This is an ongoing topic that we on both sides of the Legislature have been discussing here for many months. We saw how the last plan was administered, was publicized, and was politicized, and it did not go anywhere. Now, we are left behind the eight ball. The former Premier decided not to use any advice from anybody in government to put his plan forward, and it failed. We do not want this plan to be in jeopardy. There are ongoing discussions between our officials in the Department of Environment and the federal officials as well.

When we unroll this process and get through it, each member of this Legislature will have a chance to have a look at that before the public does. The media will also have their own locked-down, embargoed technical briefing. I think that is the only fair thing to do with respect to all members in this Legislature. We will get through this plan.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Bourque: Mr. Speaker, that does not sound to me like full transparency. Full transparency would be to have the public see it as we go, and I think that is the fair thing to do.

We assume that in submitting this plan, the Premier finally agrees with the need for a carbon plan to reduce emissions here in New Brunswick, which includes a price on carbon. If that is the case, Mr. Speaker, then why is the Premier continuing to pursue legal action against Ottawa on this file? Maybe he is doing a personal favour to Doug Ford, his friend. That is possible, but, other than that, I just do not see the point. We are spending costly dollars in the court system, and there has already been a ruling. Mr. Speaker, they are talking about a carbon plan. Let them talk about a carbon plan. Why is there still court action going on? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Carr: Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that this is one of the most important documents, I guess, that this province will put forward to the federal government. We have said all along, Mr. Speaker, that we agree. We need a carbon plan in New Brunswick, and this Legislature endorsed one. It is called the Climate Change Action Plan. It was put together by a nonpartisan policy group of people, a committee here, and we have taken that plan, along with what our proposals are, to protect the people of New Brunswick and, at the same time, protect our environment in New Brunswick. We are in very preliminary discussions with the federal government, between officials, to get this plan approved. We do not want to jeopardize it by politicizing it publicly. This is what happened with the last government, Mr. Speaker, and it rolled over and let Justin Trudeau impose his federal backstop on New Brunswickers.



Social Programs

Mrs. Harris: Mr. Speaker, it is Disability Awareness Week in the province, and, as we know, there is a great event in Moncton today, with Ability New Brunswick hosting the federal minister.

It must be a little embarrassing for this government, which, as we know, heartlessly cut the informal caregiver benefit. This would provide a little help to somebody with, let's say, a disabled relative, such as an adult child, and this government cut it. Mr. Speaker, I will ask the Premier this: In the spirit of doing the right thing and actually helping those who need the most help, will you overturn this heartless decision? Yes or no?

Hon. Mrs. Shephard: Mr. Speaker, the one thing that can ensure that every penny the Liberals want to spend is there, is to have a prosperous economy. They did not do it. They did not provide it. They implemented a program in June, before the election, that was going to cost over \$11 million, and did they provide for that money to be there? No. They put in a program when the Department of Social Development was over \$20 million over budget. They did not have the money to do it. They did it because they wanted to get reelected. They did it because they wanted to show that they could just keep spending taxpayer money without any regard for how they were going to get it. Mr. Speaker, I would love to give this program back today, but the fact of the matter is that they did not give us the money to do it.

Abortion

Ms. Mitton: Mr. Speaker, the recent attacks on reproductive rights across the United States and Canada are shedding light on the lack of reproductive justice that still exists here in New Brunswick. Over 3 000 people have signed an online petition calling on the New Brunswick government to repeal Regulation 84-20 of the *Medical Services Payment Act*. This regulation is in violation of the *Canada Health Act*, which states that abortions are a medically necessary procedure.

Some 25 years ago, the federal government ruled that provinces must fully fund private clinics that perform medically necessary procedures such as this one. New Brunswick is the only province in Canada that is not funding reproductive health services at a clinic within its borders, which is unconstitutional.

Will the Minister of Health remove the restrictive Schedule 2 of Regulation 84-20 of the *Medical Services Payment Act* and enable physicians to provide abortion services in their clinics in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Flemming: Thank you for the question, member. I will take it under advisement. Thank you.



Ms. Mitton: Through the Speaker to the minister, thank you for that response. I guess I will follow up with a little more information that the minister can take under advisement.

The *Canada Health Act* requires provinces to fund reproductive health services and medically necessary procedures in clinics such as Clinic 554 here in Fredericton. The consequences of not funding Clinic 554 disproportionately affect those with lower incomes. Many who require these services do not have the means to pay for them, and they should not have to. Private community-based clinics also offer more support, more inclusive care, and greater privacy to patients. Only three hospitals, two in Moncton and one in Bathurst, provide surgical abortions in New Brunswick, and, according to Adrian Edgar of Clinic 554, the cost of providing abortions in hospital is double that of community-based private clinics.

The status quo in New Brunswick is unconstitutional and unjust. I guess my question was going to be this: Would the minister please fund the services provided by physicians at Clinic 554?

Hon. Mr. Flemming: Thank you for the question. On the issue of constitutionality and legal issues like that, I will consult with my colleague the Attorney General. Otherwise, I accept the comments and, again, will take them under advisement.

NB Power

Mr. Austin: Mr. Speaker, soon, people will find out by how much their NB Power rates are going to increase. NB Power's proposal that residential customers pay 2.9% more while other customers face suggested increases of between 1.7% and 2.5% is not fair. My question is for the Minister of Energy and Resource Development: Does the minister worry that NB Power's plan to increase power rates to its residential customers will place those customers in even greater financial hardship than they are already in?

Hon. Mr. Holland: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand in this House to answer a question. I have gone through quite an outstanding drought without any questions over the last couple of months, so I look forward to being able to address concerns and any issues as they relate to my department.

To the member opposite, I certainly appreciate the nature of that question and the discussion surrounding ratepayers in New Brunswick as it relates to their utility bills. As the minister responsible for NB Power, not necessarily the minister of, it is very important that I have a position and role as an advocate for the ratepayer.

I could answer that question by saying that I am very pleased and very confident in the fact that we have our Energy and Utilities Board. Our EUB is in place, and it has a pretty long-standing tradition of holding utilities' feet to the fire and ensuring that they have solid justifications for whatever they bring in front of it. That is a system that is in place, and I have great confidence in it. I look forward to hearing from it, and I look forward to working with NB Power as it follows the recommendations of the Energy and Utilities Board.



Mr. Austin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow that up by asking this of the minister. NB Power says that it intends to submit another application for its \$100-million plan to install smart meters across the province, which will allow NB Power to collect individual consumption data electronically for customers in real time instead of once per month by a meter reader. Can the minister say whether he has had any conversations with NB Power about this controversial plan? Also, what is his opinion on smart meters?

Hon. Mr. Holland: Once again, thank you very much for the opportunity to rise and answer a question. Taking on the role of minister responsible for NB Power was an area that I did not have a significant amount of experience in, so I had the opportunity to dig in significantly on those files. That process allowed me to educate myself on a variety of different things, smart meters being one of them. There is a variety of different initiatives that are taking place through NB Power that have some significant potential. As I review and look at smart meters, from my own perspective, I see potential that is there. I see that there are opportunities in a very, very fine way to determine ways that we can be more efficient in our homes and use less electricity. Ultimately, that being the goal, it is a phenomenal goal to see.

Now, in this situation where it is bringing it back to the EUB, I have had conversations with NB Power, and I have indicated that, although unsuccessful in the past, if there is merit to it, the onus is on the corporation to ensure that it is putting together a strong and solid case. Once again, I said that I have confidence in the EUB. I look forward to it having its homework done and hearing the results of those hearings. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

The member for Miramichi Bay-Neguac has some supplementary questions.

Social Programs

Mrs. Harris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When you look at this government, you see that it has money to hire its executive friends, it has money for slush funds, and it has money for full-page ads against the people who are working for the most vulnerable people in our province. Those members stand up and celebrate a cut of \$108. Shame, shame, shame. It is sad that this Premier and his uncaring Cabinet worry more about the interests of western oil companies than they do about New Brunswick families with disabled children that live here in New Brunswick.

Haley Flaro of Ability New Brunswick said of this heartless cut: This is quite concerning, and we see it as having a significant bad effect on families. My question for the Premier is this: Is Ms. Flaro wrong? Can you make an argument for that? Can you seriously stand in this House and agree that taking \$108 from the most vulnerable families in this province is the right thing to do?

(Interjections.)



Hon. Mrs. Shephard: My goodness, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Miramichi Bay-Neguac will calm down, please.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The government too. Members of the government will also calm down.

Hon. Mrs. Shephard: Mr. Speaker, we increased the disability budget by \$21.5 million for the fiscal year 2019-20. The last government increased taxes to the people of New Brunswick by \$1 billion per year. I never ever would have thought that it would have been hard to get a piece of that to take in over here, and, yet, we increased our budget still.

Mr. Speaker, those members spent it. Not only have they spent it for today, they have spent it into the future—a good many years into the future. They have not been considerate of the needs of the people of New Brunswick. Yet, they are willing just to say: Tax more, increase more, take more. They do not know, Mr. Speaker.

Government Agenda

Mr. Melanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I listen to and follow the way the government of the day governs and tactically makes decisions, I think that it is pretty obvious that there is an underlying tactic, which is to try to divide and conquer New Brunswickers. You know, Mr. Speaker, when you see government putting ads in the newspapers to try to sell the idea to New Brunswickers to put pressure on these workers in nursing homes that they should accept the deal, that is quite unfortunate. They go to court to fight climate change with the federal government, and, on the other hand, they put a plan on climate change to the federal government. Dividing and conquering.

Mr. Speaker, the government members also divide and conquer when it comes to language issues. One day, they say: We will respect the law. On another day, they will do something different. Can the Premier please be the Premier of the day, unify New Brunswickers, and be consistent in trying to make sure that dividing and conquering New Brunswickers does not move our province forward?

Hon. Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, it is really rich, is it not? The last things that the members opposite like to deal with are facts. It is all about what kind of hype we can create in here and what kind of emotion we can create in here. The facts around the whole issue of the negotiations with the nursing homes... The nursing home workers themselves know—they know—about the program that the other 33 000 have accepted. They know about the benefits that they get out of that. Obviously, there is another motive that I think goes a whole lot deeper here, Mr. Speaker, and our province cannot get caught up in that.



Then, you talk about a carbon plan. We are going to meet our emission standards. We put a plan forward. We do not believe that people need to spend more of their tax money in order to achieve our emission standards. We can do both, Mr. Speaker. Now, I know that there may be a singular focus in some areas, Mr. Speaker, but we can do both. That is why we are fighting having more taxes on people. It is because it becomes a free-for-all—a free-for-all of Liberal spending of one increase more and one increase more. That is what those members do once they get into government—they just throw out the money and throw up the taxes. Mr. Speaker, there is a plan, all right. It involves the facts.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier. Question period is over.

