

June 12, 2019

[Original]

## Elections

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, we understand that New Brunswickers have started to receive calls from someone called Pat from New Brunswick, a fictional person who is apparently the brainchild of a group called Proudly New Brunswick. My question today is for the Premier. Is the Premier familiar with the group Proudly New Brunswick?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Actually, Mr. Speaker, I am not familiar with the details of that group at all. I think that I have heard the name before, but that is it. I do not know anything about the group.

**Mr. McKee:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the group that was apparently behind unsolicited texts and calls from Pam from New Brunswick, another fictional person. These were sent to New Brunswickers on the eve of the last provincial election. This is a group that clearly supported the Progressive Conservative Party in its election bid. Does the Premier agree with Proudly New Brunswick and its tactics?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, as I said, I do not know anything about Proudly New Brunswick and its tactics.

However, I do know about the Auditor General's report, and from that report, I do know about the tactics of the Liberal opposition. So, Mr. Speaker, rather than trying to deflect and to go somewhere else with this today, I think that we should talk about the Auditor General's report and the abuse of money that is in there. We have seen a tactic right here in this House over and over again: deflect, blame, and try to go on the offence when the defence does not work because there is no basis for the defensive model.

When we get a report that says, oh, we are going to buy the last election in Saint John and here is \$22 million, without any attachment to how this is going to work, Mr. Speaker... But we know the details behind that: It was politically—purely politically—driven. Then we start to look at other contracts and how they were awarded without any plans, just a distribution here and a distribution there.

I commend the Auditor General, Mr. Speaker. We will look at her recommendations in great detail, and we will react accordingly, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, this is an embarrassment. I am trying to ask serious questions here about a serious issue. This government...

(Interjections.)



**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. McKee:** This government is deflecting a serious issue right here.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. McKee:** The government is deflecting a serious issue, and it is starting to get old. The government members continuously blame the former government on every question that we ask, and the electorate is growing tired of this, Mr. Speaker. I want to get serious answers here.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. McKee:** I want to know whether the Premier is familiar with the Manning Foundation that is based in Calgary, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, here we have it again. And, yes, I am familiar with the Manning Foundation.

(Interjections.)

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Yes, who is not, Mr. Speaker?

But I am familiar with the Auditor General's report. Let's talk about today, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about right here in New Brunswick, right now. Do you know who is not familiar with the reality of this province? It is the folks I am looking at right today, Mr. Speaker, because they do not want to face the reality of the things we have to deal with. And do you know why they are upset about the past six months? It is because we are actually getting something done. And do you know why they are upset about my talking with other Premiers? It is because we are putting New Brunswick on the map and we are joining the rest of Canada to save our province, Mr. Speaker. That is the issue.

Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? We want more than \$100 million for another road. We want something that is going to build our future right here, for our kids to stay home or come home. Okay, they can accept: Give us more money, give us more transfers, and we will build a road. All will be well because we will buy the next job.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to build the next job. We are going to develop the next job for people who want to invest right here in New Brunswick.



**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are going to continue to deflect, but this is a very important issue that we need to address. Unfortunately for me, I am in opposition, but fortunately for me, I get to ask the questions, and I want real answers.

Mr. Speaker, on its website, the Manning Foundation says that it was formed in 2005 and that it is dedicated to promoting conservative principles and is specifically there to support Canada's conservative movement.

I would also like to know whether the Premier is familiar with the Modern Miracle Network.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Does anybody know about that? No, I am not familiar with the Modern Miracle Network.

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, the Modern Miracle Network is another Calgary-based organization, mainly controlled by big oil. Its purpose, again from its website, is to celebrate "the modern miracle of hydrocarbons" and to celebrate the use of hydrocarbons. This sounds a lot like the Premier's talking points.

Mr. Speaker, is the Premier aware that the Modern Miracle Network and the Manning Foundation are the only ones listed as financial supporters of Proudly New Brunswick in its filings with Elections N.B.?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** You know, this is an interesting situation, Mr. Speaker. And, no, I am not aware of that because I am spending my time actually trying to rebuild our province.

What I am aware of is, in a particular bill that we signed—six signatures from six Premiers across the provinces... It is a bill that had 188 recommendations from the Senate committee, a Senate committee that travelled the country and made 188 recommended amendments to this bill. What I am aware of is that the committee took the time and the effort to understand the impact the bill would have. Not only have we seen \$100 billion of private sector investment leave our country, according to the bank—I think it was RBC—but now we have a bill that is just about going to shut it down. Mr. Speaker, 188 amendments, and what I am aware of from a news flash this morning is that the federal government has decided that 135 amendments do not count. Mr. Speaker, we have a federal government that has put out a philosophy to kill the economy in our country. That is not acceptable, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, what are they doing to rebuild this province? All they are doing is with the help of big oil from Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and only to the benefit of their friends from Alberta. What I am trying to get to here is this: Can the Premier confidently say that neither he nor anyone involved in his campaign was aware of what Proudly New Brunswick was planning in the last campaign?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, what I was familiar with in the last campaign is a government that tried to spend every dime of taxpayers' dollars to get elected. I am aware of a government that



actually spent, I think, \$1.8 billion on new spending initiatives, Mr. Speaker, and I am familiar with a government that did not take no when it lost the election and tried to buy anyone in this House. What I am most familiar with is being part of a team of 25 that could not be bought.

I am familiar with all of that, Mr. Speaker, but I am not familiar with what this guy is trying to do today in order to try to deflect the reality of a report that once again condemns the abuse of taxpayer dollars by the former Liberal government. That is what I am familiar with, Mr. Speaker, because that is current.

I am also familiar with the fact that we have an economy here in our province that is suffering, an economy that cannot afford more taxes. That is why I am aligning with the provinces—because we do not need a carbon tax to help us maintain our direction to reduce emissions. I want to be like Norway. I want to subsidize electric vehicles. Do you know how we are going to do that? We are going to do it through oil and gas industry revenue.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, Premier.

**Mr. McKee:** On November 9, this Premier said that he would give real answers to the questions posed. He continues to deflect what we are trying to get to here, and this is a serious issue when we have outside influence affecting election outcomes here in New Brunswick, Mr. Speaker.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. McKee:** If the Premier wants to know, I will give him a little information about these groups. When we look at the origins of these groups—Ontario Proud, B.C. Proud, Québec Proud, Newfoundland Proud, and NB Proud—we see that they all have links to each other. Ontario Proud was founded by a former Stephen Harper staffer who is now a key adviser to NB Proud. Newfoundland Proud was headed by a PC staffer of the leader Ches Crosbie, and he is now a director of the incorporated Proudly New Brunswick. Mr. Speaker, is the Premier certain that neither he nor anyone involved in his campaign was aware of what Proudly New Brunswick was doing in the last election campaign here in New Brunswick?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know what to say. With what we have going on in our province, this is astounding. I am not familiar with the activities of these... The other night, while watching the ball game, I learned about Engage Canada and another one. I understand that there is a new federal bill that takes effect on June 30 basically to ban that. I think that is great.

I do not think that third parties should be influencing an election, but I watched this during the campaign here in New Brunswick. I watched signs being put up by individuals who supposedly had nothing to do, other than maybe a backroom deal when the thing got done. I watched that



happen against me. I saw that. It had nothing to do with any of the organizations that are being talked about here.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things happening in New Brunswick, and a lot of the things that are happening are favouring New Brunswick. A lot of things were happening just to get our control of what we do politically. The Auditor General is helping us to do that. I am disappointed that the Liberal government, rather than dealing with the facts of the Auditor General's report... I can appreciate why those members are ashamed of it, Mr. Speaker. I can appreciate that, so let's talk about it.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, Premier.

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, while both the Modern Miracle Network and the Manning Foundation are clearly Calgary-based, they give New Brunswick addresses on their filings with Elections New Brunswick. The Manning Centre gives the law firm Lawson Creamer, a boutique law firm in Saint John. You can go on the Internet and see which lawyers are working there. The Modern Miracle Network filing is in care of Nicholas Ouellette, a former executive assistant to the Premier when he was Finance Minister. He is also president of the Saint John—Rothesay federal Conservative riding association. It all seems a little cozy to me. Is the Premier sure there was no collusion between his party and Proudly New Brunswick?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** You know, it is quite amazing. There are things that the opposition members talk about that make you say: Do they really want to bring this up?

Last year, when they were in government and we were in opposition, we put forward a motion actually to ban third-party funding in elections—to ban it, Mr. Speaker. That was when it went in with the same bill...

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** The government that was in place at the time, the Liberal government, put that together with the same bill that said we wanted to get rid of corporate donations. Guess what! The part about banning third parties was removed from the bill. It was not our call, Mr. Speaker. It was the Liberal government's call.

All of this hollow talk, all of this hollow deflection... Once again, "hollow" is the key word. It is smoke and mirrors beyond compare. Say one thing, do another thing, and tax it more, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting that those members supported a motion to restrict third-party advertising. Do you know what? In May 2017, when they were in opposition, the MLA for Woodstock introduced a bill that would have repealed the sections of the *Political*



*Process Financing Act* that prevent such collusion. Since the Premier was Leader of the Opposition at the time, we assume that while he was in opposition, he supported that bill that would have allowed third parties, funded by groups with deep pockets outside the province, to coordinate campaigns with political parties right here. Does the Premier still feel that way about the bill from the member for Woodstock in May 2017?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Again, I think I just want to reiterate the fact of the bill that was actually put forward—a bill where there was a commitment to put in place that third-party donations and third-party influence in elections would be struck out and banned from New Brunswick. I understand that has happened federally. But, Mr. Speaker, the individual who committed to that and then did not deliver is no longer here in the House.

I think about that, and I think about the government putting forward and saying, we will do that because that is the right thing to do. Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, we have not seen a lot of right things to do from that government or from that opposition at this point in time. It is political things to do, Mr. Speaker, and that is what today is about. Today is about trying to get the message from an Auditor General's report that is so clear and condemning about the future of our province and how money is being used and squandered. So, Mr. Speaker, let's go back from one AG's report to another because there is a common theme and it is red.

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, specifically, the bill of the member from Woodstock in May 2017 would have repealed spending limits for third parties during the election period, repealed stipulations restricting third parties to advertise in a way that would lead the public to believe that the advertising originates with a registered political party, repealed provisions restricting third parties and registered political parties from colluding one with the other, and repealed restrictions for third parties to register whatsoever. Do the Premier and the now members of the government still support this bill that they introduced not long before the incorporation of Proudly New Brunswick?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, I mean, if the opposition members want to bring that back and have us talk about it... I do not recall the details around that. But what I do recall the details on is the AG's report, Mr. Speaker—maybe because it is this week, maybe because it is current, maybe because it is an issue that reflects our reality of New Brunswick right today, and maybe because it is current and it is another abuse of taxpayer money. That is what it is—pure, simple abuse.

Now, we can go through a lot of things and find that, Mr. Speaker. Cannabis NB might be one. We have 20 locations when other provinces have 9, so what is that about, Mr. Speaker? Even if we find out that the plan was 15, where did the rest come from? Oh, we need one here, and we need one here. I could look around the room and wonder just why or where or how, Mr. Speaker. Another political abuse—that is what we see.

(Interjections.)



**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Yes, look at the rants. He is absolutely right. Astounding, Mr. Speaker. There is no market play there, Mr. Speaker. It is pure, political abuse.

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, we also have evidence that at least one director of Proudly New Brunswick and another person affiliated with the group actively campaigned with the PCs in the last election. Is the Premier aware—well, I guess his member introduced a bill to repeal that section—that section 84.8 of the *Political Process Financing Act* prevents third parties from colluding with political parties, Mr. Speaker?

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** People who throw stones should not live in glass houses, Mr. Speaker. During the last election, who actively campaigned with the former Premier of New Brunswick? The Premier of Nova Scotia, the Premier of Prince Edward Island, and the Premier of Newfoundland. They all showed up here at once, in addition to the federal counterparts, the MPs and the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, this must be embarrassing to them, to have the details really come out, but you just cannot embarrass some people because they have no conscience and they do not really care about the long-term view of our province. Mr. Speaker, the stones can be thrown, but do you know what happens? They are boomerangs. They are coming right back at you. They are coming back twofold, threefold, and fourfold because there is no end to the abuse that we have seen from that former government, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know which Act he might want to point in our direction that these people would have violated. There was no violation of the Act.

But we have a serious issue here, that there are potential violations of the *Political Process Financing Act*, and they must be investigated, to get to the bottom of it, Mr. Speaker. It is a threat to our democratic institutions here in New Brunswick. We do not think that it is right that parties from outside the province are able to exert so much influence here in New Brunswick, Mr. Speaker. These third parties do not operate under the same rules as political parties. They can exceed the donation limits, for example, and they are not accountable in any real way. You can have a small number of people with deep pockets pay no taxes in New Brunswick and have an impact on the outcome of an election.

Why did the Premier support a bill and now say that he supports the federal legislation? He supports the federal legislation. Where was his legislation during this spring session that would have brought forward those amendments?

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, member.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, this is a confusing process this morning, is it not? If there is a violation of some sort, put a charge in, Mr. Speaker, because I do not understand it. I do not get it, but I do get the AG's report. I do get the question there about violating the actual *Local Governance Act*. I get the idea that we tried to bail out a city without any plans. How was that



generated, Mr. Speaker? Was that to buy candidates in the Saint John region? Was that the reason? Is that how that was set up? I will come and be your candidate, but I will need this and this and this and this to do it. At what price will you come? How many times was that done across this province, Mr. Speaker? I know of several times when someone said: Well, if you vote for me, I will give you this in the riding. If you vote for me, I will give you this in the riding.

Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? I am proud to stand here right now, right today, and say: My colleagues who are right here on this side of the House did not get any promises from me for something to run. They ran because they had a conviction to do so, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, during the election, NB Proud was sending out messages using a vendor that it would not identify, a budget that it would not disclose, and donors it would not name. Nothing from NB Proud was disclosed on September 14, when it registered as a third party. We found out only in early January of this year, when it filed its return late, that it had begun expending money as early as August 27. This is a clear violation of the PPFA, and it could incur hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines, Mr. Speaker. This is a hit to our democratic institution. How can the Premier not share these concerns? What is he prepared to do about it, Mr. Speaker?

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, you are just wasting your time.

**Hon. Mr. Cardy:** Mr. Speaker, it is nice to get such a warm reception on a Wednesday morning here in the House. To the member opposite, I had the privilege of working for the now Premier as a staff person, and we sat in the anteroom of where you now sit, on the other side of this House. We proposed amendments to legislation and received commitments from members of the party now sitting in opposition that they would act to ban third-party engagement in New Brunswick elections and politics. They gave that word twice on the floor of this Legislature. Do you know what they did? They broke their word. They misled this House because they did not do it.

The evidence is right there. The evidence is there in the record of this government. That is what we are standing here today to talk about. We are standing here to talk about what we, as a government, are doing to change New Brunswick and to advance our province. All we hear from the opposition is a bizarre retread of groups that have nothing to do with us, when you could have, if you had had that decision, banned these groups when you had the chance, and yet you did not do it.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, minister.





## Auditor General's Report

**Mr. DeSaulniers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report highlights the reckless overspending of the former government within the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure. Millions were spent on private contracts that were far more expensive than they would have been had the work been done in-house. Can the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure explain what measures his department will take to ensure that the taxpayers are protected from the kind of overspending of the previous government?

**Hon. Mr. Oliver:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. I am certainly proud to stand today and talk about the Auditor General's report. We believe that a government that gets challenged is a government that gets results and gets better. Implementing recommendations from the Auditor General is an important part of making improvements to the province to ensure that we are more accountable to the people of New Brunswick for programs. We are studying the recommendations of the Auditor General. We thank her for those recommendations, and we will be working to implement each and every one of those recommendations in due course. Thank you, Mr. Speaker

**Mr. DeSaulniers:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the minister plan to examine the practices used by his department under the previous government in terms of its spending decisions for road construction and maintenance?

**Hon. Mr. Oliver:** Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. We certainly have taken into account the recommendations that were made in the past, and we are implementing those as we go through. We certainly want to make sure that those are addressed in a timely manner. We certainly are thankful that the Auditor General has given us these recommendations to work on.

Unfortunately, members on the opposite side said in the past that they would like to work on those recommendations, but we did not seem to see the program come to fruition. We will certainly take no lessons from the opposition.

We are working together with the Office of the Auditor General and the members of the House, and we will make sure that our programs are implemented to actually move the province forward in the best way. We want to develop evidence-based outsourcing, and we want to make sure that all avenues are addressed when we look at these recommendations. I thank you for the question, and we will keep working on it.

## Herbicides

**Mr. Coon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week during question period, the Minister of Environment indicated that his government intends to reduce spraying in protected watersheds. New Brunswickers are wondering exactly what the minister meant by that. There



was no formal announcement. The expectation is that spraying will be legally prohibited in those watersheds that provide drinking water to our municipalities, as Turtle Creek does to Moncton. Is the Minister of Environment and Local Government amending the drinking water watershed designation orders, which are appended to the regulations under the *Clean Water Act*, to prohibit the spraying of herbicides such as glyphosate in designated watersheds this year?

**Hon. Mr. Holland:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite very much for the question. We have had significant amounts of discussion, review, and analysis, and we are putting a plan together going forward that is holistic as it relates to the way that we look at industry and conservation.

You particularly mentioned the area of Turtle Creek. This year, in this area, there is absolutely no spraying that will be planned or put forward. That is what we are putting forward here. There are spraying programs in place. That is in an effort to protect investments that have been made in previous years.

However—I have spoken with the media, and I have spoken with members opposite—it is very important for us to talk about the overall forestry strategy that we are preparing going forward. We are doing certain practices throughout this calendar year that are taking into consideration forestry practices that were done in previous years. However, toward the end of this year, sooner rather than later, we are looking forward to putting together a collaborative forestry strategy that is unlike anything that we have seen in quite a long time here in New Brunswick. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Coon:** Mr. Speaker, I did not realize that responsibility for the *Clean Water Act* had been transferred to the Minister of Energy and Resource Development. There has been no announcement on that, but maybe we are again during question period getting an indication of changes.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environment has powers not only under the *Clean Water Act*, but also under the *Pesticides Control Act* to refuse to sign the permits to spray glyphosate on Crown land. The Conservative government budget, supported by the People's Alliance, budgeted \$2.3 million to pay the big forestry companies to spray glyphosate on Crown land this year. The minister could redirect this money, \$2.3 million, to more worthy purposes. He could end spraying and prevent this by withholding his signature from the permits. New Brunswickers want to know this: Has the Minister of Environment and Local Government signed the permits to spray glyphosate on our Crown forests this year?

**Hon. Mr. Carr:** It is funny, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is complaining because I do not get up to speak, but now he is asking me about the budget of the member beside me. I do not know which way he wants it. He cannot suck and blow at the same time. I will just say that right here today.



What I will say is this. We have been working in tandem because our departments are not working in silos, much like what the member opposite had seen for many, many years in this Legislature. For this year—and we have said it here in the Legislature—we are taking the approach of talking to our stakeholders so that we can reach our goals and our objectives. This year, obviously, as I stated earlier, there will be no spraying in our designated watershed areas on Crown land. That means the areas that JDI would look after and the areas that NB Power would have its power lines going through.

I would like to ask the member opposite whether he has seen any time in the history of this province and this Legislature when any other minister responsible for this file has made these moves.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, minister.

## Elections

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Education for standing up and bringing some clarity to this, but I am not sure whether he has all the facts correct. What I do know is that the Minister of Education has railed against outside influences in New Brunswick matters before and we believe that an attempt to subvert our democratic process is the worst kind of outside influence. When Preston from Calgary can invent a Pam from New Brunswick to tell us how to vote here, it is wrong. Would the Premier agree to consider amendments to our laws to put an end to this despicable practice?

**Hon. Mr. Cardy:** What was interesting to watch in the little round of seal flipper clapping there, Mr. Speaker, was that we did not hear applause from a former Premier of this province. I would guess that is because perhaps there is a degree of shame and humility there. At some point—at some point—there has to be some conscience on the opposite side of this House that you cannot, simply because you have physically moved several metres from one side to the other, completely abandon all your policies that you espoused before. It gets tiresome. This party voted down and misled the Legislature.

**Mr. Speaker:** Could you stop the clock? This is the second time you have used the word “misled”, and that is not proper language for this House. I would ask you to take back your words—retract. Start the clock.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. McKee:** Mr. Speaker, the members opposite continue to deflect. It is an important issue. They do not want to answer the questions. To quote the Premier, he talks about transparency. He says: Let’s talk about transparency. We want to talk about transparency. Let’s talk about what happened in the last four years. Let’s open up the books and talk.



Well, I want the members opposite to open up the books on this very important issue and tell New Brunswickers their involvement in NB Proud.

**Hon. Mr. Higgs:** Mr. Speaker, we will be very happy to open the books, and we will do it in every category. If that is what it is going to take to bring the reality to both sides of the House, then let's have game on, Mr. Speaker. I have said that in a scrum. Let's make it happen.

This hypocrisy of going back and forth and back and forth when we know the very issue that the member is talking about was voted down and removed last year when the members opposite were in government... I think that we should look at that again because I experienced it firsthand. I experienced it, Mr. Speaker. How much money was spent by CUPE against me in the election? What kind of deal was struck before the election? I will never know, but it was pretty obvious that it was not in my camp. I think this is great, to put this out there.

But do you know what? It is interesting how the things the members opposite bring up, trying to make it look as though they are holier than thou, only further identify and show the reality of the screen that they are trying to hide behind, Mr. Speaker.

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

