

June 14, 2019

[Original]

Nurses

Mr. D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, more than 2 400 nurses will be needed within the next five years, but we are facing resistance from this Conservative government on hiring new nurses and nurse practitioners. Can the Premier confirm whether his government has received a report on the retention and recruitment of nurses in the province from a working group composed of universities, nurses' organizations, and other groups? Can the Premier explain why his government has been keeping this report secret since January?

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, there is nothing being kept secret here. All we are doing, Mr. Speaker, is making sure that we get a strategy, working just as the member opposite said, with the Nurses Association, the Nurses' Union, the universities in this province, the various departments within government, and the RHAs to make sure that we get a nursing strategy in this province that delivers the nurses that we need. That is exactly what we have been trying to do from day one.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I have said it many times on the floor of this House and I will say it again: It is not enough to shovel \$8.7 million per year out the door year after year and never create any of those additional seats that it was supposed to create. Those are the tough questions that we are asking. We want to make sure that we spend our money effectively and get the nurses that we need in this province.

Mr. D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, if the report is not secret, I challenge the minister to table the document today in this Legislature. It is clear that we need to see that report. We need to prove to the people that we are here to work for them.

Mr. Speaker, while government is saying that there is a shortage of nurses in the province, government is simply not hiring nurses and is saving money. We have heard that two newly graduated nurse practitioners as well as registered nurses have signed contracts with Nova Scotia. Why is government letting nurses leave the province when nurses are needed all over the province? Is it because you just do not want to invest in human resources in health for the betterment of this province and the betterment of the citizens of New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, the issue here is that we are in a competitive environment, as the member opposite just alluded to. This is not specific to New Brunswick. This is across the country. There is a crisis with attracting nurses in various jurisdictions. We are competing with other jurisdictions.



What I can tell the member opposite is that we are going to come up with a strategy that is going to lay out a whole host of options, some of which are going to be about going across this country and attracting nurses back home. It is going to be about attracting more new Canadians than ever before to come here to New Brunswick, nurses from around the world, and making sure that we have the proper bridging programs in place. It is going to be making sure that we are getting the right results from our universities. At the end of the day, we need to make sure that we are delivering the nurses that we expect from our university programs, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, if the minister is talking about the report, he should make it public and table it in the House today—not tomorrow, today—to be sure that we know what is going on.

Mr. Speaker, UNB met with PETL in November 2018 to discuss increasing the number of seats beginning in 2019. In January 2019, UNB sent a proposal to PETL, the minister's department, to increase the number of nursing seats over the next five years. UNB then recruited and accepted 28 new students in addition to filling the 98 seats that had been in place for first-year students in 2018. These students had received their letters of acceptance to begin the program in September 2019 before the minister announced the cuts to the nursing program. Can the minister explain why this information was not given to this House and why the funding was then cancelled by his government?

Hon. Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, I have said it before and will say it again: Each and every year for the last number of years, \$8.7 million was pushed out the door, and we had no results. Before we release a strategy, we need to make sure that the strategy is making sure that the universities in this province are delivering the results that we require them to produce.

I know the members opposite. I know that they think it is okay to keep spending money with no results. I know they believe that. We do not believe that is okay. I have said it before and will say it again: We cannot continue to do this in this province, and this government will not do it, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Mr. D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, we need nurses and nurse practitioners throughout New Brunswick. The minister has had a report since January 2019. He is the minister, and this is his government. This report was meant to solve the problem of recruitment and retention of nurses and nurse practitioners.

The minister lets new nursing and nurse practitioner graduates leave for Nova Scotia and other provinces. When will this government and this minister assume their responsibilities to make sure they are hired? It is not only a recruiting problem, but a hiring issue as well.

This government and this minister must assume their responsibilities and immediately hire these graduates who will, otherwise, continue to go work in other Canadian provinces or



elsewhere, while people in every one of our ridings are in need of nurses and nurse practitioners. It is obvious. When will they assume their responsibilities?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Holder: I would be remiss if I did not quote the former member for Shediac—Cap-Pelé. He used to get up in this House and say “woulda, coulda, shoulda” when he referenced the former government. I mean, the members opposite had years to deal with this, Mr. Speaker. It is pretty rich that they are standing here today.

We are going to develop, with all stakeholders at the table, a strategy that is going to produce nurses in this province. And unlike the previous government, it is not going to be written on the back of a napkin like everything it did, like that deal to Saint John, like NB Power—you name it. This is a party with a history of ramming things through and not getting results. We are going to spend money in this province strategically, Mr. Speaker, and deliver results for the people of New Brunswick.

[Translation]

Economic Development

Mr. D. Landry: Yesterday, in the House, the Premier stated that he was firmly opposed to using taxpayers’ money for economic development. If that is the case, why did he strongly support the huge tax break negotiated by the Irving Oil Company with the city of Saint John that means the city is losing millions of dollars in taxes every year for 25 years?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Steeves: Do you know what? Economic development is what we are about. Economic development is what we are about, saving money is what we are about, and balancing the budget is what we are about. Do you know what? We continue to do hard work for all aspects of business. Do you know what? That includes things as simple as the passive income bill, keeping industry and small business tax rates from going from 2.5% to 14%. That is what this government has done. There is the Tuition Tax Credit to get our students to stay here and work here. That is what this government has done.

We have helped the cooperators with the *Co-operative Associations Act*. We have helped credit unions and have stabilized credit unions within rural New Brunswick with our *Credit Unions Act*. We have done so much for all small businesses so that they can get loans from those institutions. We have done so much for all small businesses in New Brunswick. Economic growth is important. It is absolutely our goal in this party and in this leadership.



[Translation]

Mr. D. Landry: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the minister did not understand my question, as he did not answer it, so I am going to repeat it in English.

[Original]

Yesterday in the House, the Premier said he was strongly against using taxpayers' dollars for economic development. If that is the case, why did he so strongly endorse the huge tax break that Irving negotiated with the city of Saint John, which saw it forgo millions of dollars every day for 25 years?

Hon. Mr. Steeves: We supported them. Do you know what? We support the people. We support the businesses of New Brunswick. We do our due diligence on behalf of the people of New Brunswick. We do our due diligence so that with respect to the finances of Saint John we will now have a better look at what is going on. Do you know what? We do not just go out and spend money. We actually look at it. We manage it responsibly.

We have due diligence toward following the law, and we will do that. The last government did not. We have due diligence toward running WorkSafeNB. The people from PETL have helped small business and economic development just through savings in WorkSafeNB, taking the rate down from \$2.90 and lowering it immediately by \$0.30. Now, they are going to lower it again. We do all this due diligence, we do all this work, to help economic development and to help small businesses as well as large businesses here in New Brunswick. That is what this party does.

[Translation]

Mr. D. Landry: I still did not get what I would call an answer. When this agreement was signed by the Irving Oil Company, it was worth well over \$100 million. According to the announcement made by the Premier at the time, 20 permanent jobs would be created after the construction.

Mr. Speaker, can the Premier tell us why what was good for Irving is not good for others today?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Steeves: Do you know what? What is good for businesses in New Brunswick is good for all of New Brunswick, whether it is in Saint John with Irving... If it is good for businesses, it is good for businesses. But we do not waste money. We look at where the money goes.

There was \$1.7 million in a failed attempt to bring the Francophonie Games to New Brunswick. We read about that in the CBC news this morning, did we not? How about Atcon? That was \$70 million gone, against the wishes of senior civil servants who were telling the government members what they should not be doing. Yet they still spent that money.



We look at things and do them right. We look at things, analyze them, and spend the money wisely, Mr. Speaker. That is what this party is about. That is what New Brunswick should be about, Mr. Speaker.

Government Spending

Mr. Harvey: Mr. Speaker, the throne speech traditionally signals the direction the government will take. Well, Mr. Speaker, those members do not practice what they preach. I am going to quote from the throne speech:

All MLAs will be invited to budget briefings and receive up-to-date information on our financial side.

Your government will work with all parties to review the mandate of Opportunities New Brunswick.

Your government will meet the demand of the Auditor General for an all-party review of the money government spends on subsidies and incentives.

Mr. Speaker, none of this has happened across the aisle. They are used to inaction. I know that, and New Brunswickers understand that. But these are hollow words, Mr. Speaker—hollow words. When will this government honour its throne speech commitments to the people of this great province of New Brunswick? When will the members opposite stand up for New Brunswick, Mr. Speaker?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to say that, as for my department, I have invited members many, many times to come and see me. We sat there often. From the opposition, only one Liberal member has come to see me in my office. It is the Tourism, Heritage and Culture Critic, and he is not here this morning. I told him: You have worked hard; you are allowed a day off. He is the only one who has come to see me.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Gauvin: I take back what I said. I am sorry I said that he was not here.

That being said, he is the only member who has come to see me.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Minister, you mentioned it once, then you took back what you said, but you mentioned it a second time.



[Original]

Mr. Harvey: Mr. Speaker, that is an indication of the answers we get from the members on that side of the House. They say mumbo-jumbo, and they go on and on. They do not understand the reality, Mr. Speaker. He got up and... I asked the question to the Minister responsible for Opportunities NB, and the Deputy Premier got up.

Will the Minister responsible for Opportunities NB stand in this House and explain to New Brunswickers, on those points that I just mentioned—they were in the throne speech, Mr. Speaker—why you are not doing these things? I would like to understand this. Thank you.

Hon. Mrs. M. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite. The member opposite has been welcomed to come to my office, and he has come to my office, for which I thank him very much. Everybody else is also welcome to come to my office anytime. We are all here for the same reason, and you are more than welcome to come to discuss economic development at anytime.

I have to say that we in this government have done an amazing job in such a short time on behalf of the province. Business owners have more confidence in this economy right now than they have had in years. They are excited. They are creating jobs. They are making things happen. They are going to reinvest and grow their businesses because they know that this government is here on their behalf to do what it can do.

I will mention that over the past four years, there were 5 800 jobs lost in the private sector. We are going to replace those jobs and more, and we are going to be showing you guys how it is all going to be done the right way. Thank you.

Tax Reform

Mr. Lowe: In March, this House passed a motion directing the law amendments committee to conduct hearings on tax exemptions for heavy industry. These exemptions can cause a great deal of impact on municipal budgets, particularly in Saint John. Can the minister inform the House when these hearings will be held?

[Translation]

Hon. Mrs. Anderson-Mason: I thank the member opposite. I can answer in French.

[Original]

I will answer in English for the purpose of the question that was asked.

Thank you very much. It is the last day that we are sitting in the House, and I am very excited that I had a question on this very last day, this very important question. Of course, we will be



convening, and I cannot think of any better way to spend the summer than to be right here in this House debating such very important matters. Not only will the law amendments committee be addressing the matter that was raised by the member opposite, but of course, there is another matter that will be brought forward. I hope that he is just as excited as I am to spend the warm summer right here in Fredericton addressing such very important issues. I am looking forward to it very much.

Social Policy

Mrs. Harris: Mr. Speaker, this government promised social assistance reform, something we assumed would be brought before the Legislature. Again, there was nothing. All this government has done is make life tougher for families living on social assistance by taking away tremendous programs such as free tuition and the caregiver tax benefit and by cutting over 600 student jobs. What happened to social assistance reform? When will this minister start to stand up for the people that she has the privilege to serve and stop letting Premier Higgs follow in Doug Ford's steps by constantly cutting and hurting our most vulnerable New Brunswickers? When will she finally stand up for the most vulnerable New Brunswickers?

Hon. Mrs. Shephard: Mr. Speaker, it has been an honour for me to stand in this House since 2010, serving not only the people of Saint John Lancaster but also the people of New Brunswick.

In 2016, the Minister of Social Development told me that kinship legislation would be proclaimed very soon. In 2017, another Minister of Social Development told me that kinship legislation would be proclaimed very soon—in weeks, not months—and that we would not be here a year later talking about it.

Mr. Speaker, in the six months of our government, kinship legislation was passed. It was updated, and it has been fixed. We are on the road to child protection legislation becoming a reality in New Brunswick in very short order. Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that we have not got social development reform completed in six months. I cannot imagine that we could not have done it, but I promise the members opposite that we are on it.

Government Agenda

Mr. Austin: Mr. Speaker, last fall we had critical choices to make in our caucus. First, we decided to defeat the previous Liberal government to give the PCs an opportunity. Second, we had a choice either to sit on the sidelines and accomplish nothing like our red-green friends daily from Possum Lodge or to be at the table to actually bring much-needed change to New Brunswick. We chose the latter.



Mr. Speaker, we have a couple of months to prepare for the fall sitting, and it is an opportunity to set forth a plan to bring results. My question is for the Premier. What does this government have planned as its vision for the fall sitting?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, thank you for the question. It was very important for the government to sail the ship away from the storm. We did that. Now it is time for New Brunswickers to come on board the ship. That also means the 49 members who sit in the House.

This will be done through small and medium-sized businesses. We must do better. The contributions from the private and public sectors cannot be equal. It is like a snake devouring its own tail; it is a recipe for disaster. So all New Brunswickers must be involved and board the same ship together, to sail toward more prosperous horizons. That is what we promised, and that is what we will do for New Brunswickers.

[*Original*]

Mr. Austin: Mr. Speaker, over the summer, our goal is to build a strategy for results when we return here in the fall. My team and I will use this time to prepare for the continuation of the movement toward real change when we return to the Legislature. Parts of this vision will be to bring about comprehensive tax reform, including the elimination of double tax, a common-sense approach to language policies, and a restructuring of the way government is involved in the sale of alcohol and cannabis.

I will ask again: Will this Premier commit to working with our three members to make these and other goals a reality?

Hon. Mr. Steeves: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will work with not only the People's Alliance Party, but we will work with the opposition, the Liberals, and we will work with the Green Party.

Yes, we are undertaking moves. Do you know what? There is a great opportunity this week to work together on the *Credit Unions Act* and the *Cooperatives Act*. We gave a technical briefing last week, and all parties said that that was very useful. We will be doing that again.

As for the tax review, yes, we are undergoing a tax review. We have been working on that for the last couple of months. It will continue well into the fall, and I am hopeful, Mr. Speaker, that we will have some answers by December. Okay?

The minister has already talked about the social development review. The cannabis review is ongoing. That is a company in need of some help. Yes, we will continue to review that as well, look at the business model, see where we can make some changes, and try not to waste any more of the money of the taxpayers of New Brunswick.



Mr. Coon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This summer, the Premier will be travelling to Saskatchewan in the second week of July to attend the meeting of the Canadian Premiers without the Prime Minister. This will afford him the opportunity, on the side perhaps, to chat briefly with the Premiers from Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Given that the interests of our peoples in Atlantic Canada are aligned far more closely than with those in Central Canada or Western Canada, this will be an opportune time to invite the other Atlantic Premiers to a meeting in New Brunswick. There is an urgent need to forge common strategies to tackle the challenges our four provinces face here in the East concerning health care, our aging populations, and the threats posed by climate breakdown to our communities and families. Will the Premier commit to inviting the other Atlantic Premiers to a summit in New Brunswick before this Legislature resumes in the fall?

Hon. Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for the question around cooperation. Absolutely, we have got to look at all the ways in which we can cooperate, and the Premier has been very clear in his many statements on the subject that we need to find ways to break down barriers, not just across the country with our partners in Central and Western Canada but, as the honourable member rightly points out, with our colleagues here in Atlantic Canada as well. That was why last week, when the honourable member stood and asked the Minister of Health whether there was a willingness to work across party lines on the issues of health care, the answer was yes. This is a government that wants to cooperate across party lines.

I know that on education, I have reached out to members opposite and thanked the honourable member for the representation from his Education Critic around discussions across party lines on education, similar to the Education Critic from the People's Alliance and, from time to time, even the honourable critic from the Liberal Party. So those are the cooperations. Those can be extended across the floor in this House, across this region, and across this country.

The honourable member's point is well taken. I will be sure to pass that along to the honourable Premier, and hopefully, we can move ahead to cooperate together across this Chamber and across this country. Thank you.

Mr. Coon: Mr. Speaker, New Brunswick and the other provinces in Atlantic Canada carry the legacy of, well, economic conquest by the big banks and head offices of Montreal and Toronto. We continue to face the biases of federal governments, whether red or blue, that discriminate against us in favour of Central Canada and the West. Do you think that is harsh, Mr. Speaker? The Prime Minister appointed an MP from Mississauga as the Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

The time has come once again when we must stand up and say no to the crumbs of Confederation. To be taken seriously, though, in this federation, we must present a common front from the East Coast—not with the Premiers from the West, the Prairies, or Ontario, but



with the Premiers from right here in Atlantic Canada. Will the Premier make it his priority to build that common front with Premiers King, McNeil, and Ball? Mr. Speaker, I would be happy and the Leader of the Official Opposition in P.E.I. would be happy to help the Tory and Liberal Premiers communicate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Cardy: Mr. Speaker, thanks to the member opposite for that question. I find it unfortunate when we have to present ideas of unity in one part of the province and counterbalance them with ideas of disunity and separation in others. Why can we not work together with Western partners and Eastern partners? This is one country. This is Canada, and we should work together.

We should not be having statements on any floor of this Legislature saying that we believe that one province is more important than the other. That is a battle that Central Canadians have sometimes used to play against our province, so exactly the point that the honourable member is making has been used as a weapon against us. The last thing we should do is play into the hands of those who wish to say that Eastern Canada is more or less important or that Western Canada is more or less important. Every province in this Confederation is equal. Every province in this federation should be working together.

Absolutely, we should work with other Atlantic Canadian Premiers, but why on earth would we not do that at the same time we are working with people in other parts of this country? Why on earth would we not look for commonalities across this great country? I hope that the honourable member will reconsider his words. We will work with everyone, Mr. Speaker.

Education

Mr. C. Chiasson: They certainly like to work with Doug Ford, Mr. Speaker.

In the throne speech, we were promised a classroom freedom Act. We know that a Tory promise is not really a promise and this minister likes to hold all the power and authority in his back pocket. So, to the minister, when can we see this Act?

Hon. Mr. Cardy: I am very happy to answer this question. It gives me an opportunity to do something that, unfortunately, I have not been able to do over the last little while. Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I did when I first became minister was to organize an all-party group on education for members and critics from the other parties to come and talk about education issues. We had one meeting, and unfortunately a member from one party said afterward that he was not particularly interested in participating because he feared it could be used against him for political reasons.

Interestingly—interestingly—I have had good discussions with the member from the Green Party and good discussions with the member from the People’s Alliance, so they know the answer to this question. And the honourable member across would know it as well if he had actually responded to the invitation to come to a meeting in my office a couple of weeks ago.



But given that, unfortunately, he did not take me up on that, I am very happy to answer the question today. We are going to be having the summit on education between October 16 and October 18, and legislation will come out from that process. Again, the honourable member would have known if he had just answered my phone calls. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Agenda

Mrs. F. Landry: The throne speech also promised that ministers would meet regularly with shadow ministers and that an online dashboard to track progress or the lack of progress would be put in place. That did not happen. All the nice words in the throne speech about greater cooperation and transparency will soon be available in the fiction section of your local bookstore. To the Premier, what happened to all your promises of greater cooperation and more transparency?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gauvin: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question. Once again, I do not understand it, because, just this week, we had a meeting with the member opposite to talk about an issue that was very important for her region. We did not refuse, and we showed up to the meeting. The member for Edmundston—Madawaska-Centre was also there.

We did not refuse to meet these opposition members. We met, and we achieved a favourable outcome for their region, because we had a discussion and we are always open to doing so. Now, I know we are always told that it is just drama and fiction in the House, but, for me, it is real. If you want solutions, come see me, and we will find some. We have proved that we can do it. We will continue to do this, and we will readjust as necessary. We will continue to do so for New Brunswickers. This is not about putting on a show here in the House.

So opposition members can come see us anytime—we would be pleased. The important thing is to get positive results for New Brunswickers.

Tourism

Ms. Thériault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The throne speech promised a new tourism strategy, but then we saw a 40% budget cut in the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture. Furthermore, the travel guides were cancelled, and some visitor information centres had to close.

My question is for the Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture. Is this the new strategy? If so, it is a bad one.

Hon. Mr. Gauvin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am so pleased to be asked this question. Last year, at the opening of the New Brunswick Aquarium and Marine Centre in Shippagan, with



everything in place that is here this year, the centre welcomed 70 people. This year, at its opening, with everything in place that was there last year, the centre welcomed 1 000 people.

I urge the member to check my numbers with the New Brunswick Aquarium and Marine Centre. The only difference is this: Members of the new team in place decided to roll up their sleeves. Do you know what? They got results. The new strategy is to get teams involved. All the people I talk to in the province tell me this: People must get involved in attracting visitors to New Brunswick, and, as a result, we will have tourists all summer. We are off to a good start everywhere in New Brunswick. Thank you very much.

