

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

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Mr. G. Arseneault (Campbellton-Dalhousie, Opposition House Leader, L): Thank you. I am not leading off question period—sorry. I know that there is a lot of anticipation over there.

It is customary that the first question period of the session be extended, in this situation, for 15 minutes, so I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to extend it.

Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): I presume that we have unanimous consent. Since we will have an extra 15 minutes, that allows the other two parties to have three questions each this morning. When there are around 16, 17, or 18 minutes left on the clock, I will switch to the Green Party and then the People's Alliance. Tomorrow, we will switch and start with the People's Alliance, as we did in the previous session.

ECONOMY

Ms. Rogers (Moncton South, L): Mr. Speaker, it was very disappointing not to see more vision, strategic initiatives, and focus on the economy in yesterday's throne speech. We already saw, when the Premier was Finance Minister, that the economy does not grow with cuts. There is no wealth by stealth. New Brunswick's economic growth is and is forecasted to be low. New Brunswickers have been waiting for the Premier's economic plan, but with none and with no results to show for this year, well, I understand why what we saw in yesterday's throne speech was somewhat of a recycling of the 2018 words. Mr. Speaker, can the Premier tell this House what his economic plan is, because we know that there cannot be growth with cuts to the quality of life for vulnerable New Brunswickers.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, in relation to economic growth, first, you establish your own position so that you can stand up to people who want to invest in our province and say: We are managing our own business. Now, I know that if we take Cannabis NB as an example, there was never any plan to earn money, but a \$12-million loss on a regular basis is a bit of an issue to deal with. And we are dealing with it. When we came in, there was a deficit plan that was just never-ending and we fixed that. We had increases in WorkSafeNB rates that were just skyrocketing. Businesses were hurting because of it. We had Opportunities New Brunswick, an agency that did not have a mandate for how we would look at every region in our province and predict things like the smelter closure up north, so that we know these things are coming, we are working with communities, and we have representation.

Mr. Speaker, all that money was being spent in different areas and being thrown around in different areas, but there was no focus. I want to assure you that we have focus and we have people in the system who are building teams to work with communities, to rebuild

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communities for the future, not a short-term deposit like Bas-Caraquet building a shipyard to go and compete with our shipyard.

JOBS

Ms. Rogers (Moncton South, L): Mr. Speaker, we would like to see that focus.

As the Premier is aware, this has been a bad week in northern New Brunswick. Last week, we had the bad news that one of the region's largest employers, Glencore, was closing. That means that 450 jobs at the plant will be lost, and economists estimate that about three times as many jobs will be lost in total when you consider companies and jobs that relied on Glencore's operations.

Mr. Speaker, can the Premier update the House on what is being done by this government to bring new jobs to the region and to other areas of New Brunswick that are struggling with job losses? We still have not seen the economic plan.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): I think we identified clearly the six priorities, one of them being an economic plan to build our foundation. It was a tremendous disappointment to get the news of the smelter from Glencore. However, it has been indicating for many years that it was having trouble making ends meet and that it was having trouble being profitable. It did not foresee that it would be able to continue under the current situation. It did not see a foreseeable future for that particular industry.

As the People's Alliance Leader mentioned, Maritime Iron is a project that has been sitting out there for quite some time. Under the previous government, it was out there as well, as a potential economic powerhouse for the north. Mr. Speaker, we will decide, and we will make sure we understand whether that project is real or not. But we will not just play around with it and talk about it. We will actually understand it, and, hopefully, it will be a future outlet for the region.

I also met with the Chaleur Chamber of Commerce about two weeks ago, and I was really impressed. It had a banquet recognizing entrepreneurs in the region. The vibrancy in that region was excessive, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure we will work for a solution.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Time, Premier. I realize you are speaking about my riding, but to be fair to all members, I have to stop you after a minute.

Ms. Rogers (Moncton South, L): Mr. Speaker, I am curious whether the Premier could tell us this: Did the news of the smelter closure come as a surprise to the Premier? For example, was there any indication that this news was coming before he actually got the call from the company?

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Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Actually, Mr. Speaker, no. There was none at all, and there was none when I had the meeting in Bathurst and met with the chamber. When the awards were being presented, as I said, there was vibrancy in the community so there was no mention of it there either.

It did come as a surprise when I got a call from one of the officials at Glencore. I guess the only part of that is saying: How do we go to the next step there? I know officials from my government were in the community the very next day. We have been on the phone steadily with the company on where we are going next and how the employees are going to be treated. What opportunities exist? What are the reasons for this closure? That way, we can understand what the similarities are. I have already asked questions about the world market and world trade so that we know where we sit in that regard.

I guess I am encouraged that the company is willing to help look at options for us in that region. We are going to continue to work with it, but it is very committed to doing what is right for the community and for the employees. It is not just walking away. It is going to be credible.

Ms. Rogers (Moncton South, L): I would acknowledge the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. Of course, it was good to see that he himself was on the ground there right away. So I know that the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour is on the ground, helping the impacted employees. The real issue is economic development and finding ways to create new jobs in the region. I am very interested, Mr. Speaker, in learning what other departments are involved in working with these communities—besides this department, which was there the next day.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): I guess, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the visit from the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour... Also, the Minister of Environment and Local Government was there. Certainly, our member from the Shippagan area, the Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, was there as well.

With respect to the concept of what activities can be created in that area, it is not just saying that we can start something. We have seen that model before, Mr. Speaker. It was a model that was pretty consistent with the Liberal government, which would say: Well, we will just build something. When I mentioned the dry dock that was built, that sailed off to Quebec to compete with our business in Bas-Caraquet... We will just build something, Mr. Speaker, and that was a pretty sad commentary. I have seen it in many other investments. They would say: Oh, we will just build something; we will create employment.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we met with the mayor. We met with officials there. I met with the CEO of Belledune, of the port. What we are looking for is a long-term, viable business opportunity for the community. It will not be just to build something that will last as long

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as the money is there, Mr. Speaker. It is something that will bring people home and that will keep them home.

Ms. Rogers (Moncton South, L): Mr. Speaker, we are aware that these are real people in the north, with families. They have jobs that are very important for them to live healthy, viable lives, but also important for the economic growth of the area.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask this. We have a minister responsible for economic development. I wonder whether she could inform the House as to when she was informed of the Glencore decision.

Hon. Mrs. M. Wilson (Oromocto-Lincoln-Fredericton, Minister of Economic Development and Small Business, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB, PC): Thank you for the question from the member opposite. It is wonderful to be back.

Of course, I was notified right away. We were all aware immediately of what was going on, which automatically spurred us to have a strategic committee put together and to be on the ground. ONB representatives have been there. They are there again today, meeting with the mayors, chambers, and community people. This is very important, and it is very urgent. We recognize that, and we are going to do absolutely everything in our power. We will do our best to help those 420 people who have lost their jobs at such a sad time.

Also, it is important for every New Brunswick business—those businesses that have been impacted by the trickle-down effect—to know that we are there for them. We are a call away. Our doors are always open. We have recently put together a Business Navigator program. A toll-free number is in place, so if those businesses want any information at all, we can direct them and help them.

Ms. Rogers (Moncton South, L): Mr. Speaker, since we heard of this closure and those of the mills in Baker-Brook and St. Stephen, has the Minister of Economic Development and Small Business taken the time to visit those communities and sit down with business and community leaders to see what government can do to help bring new jobs to these communities? I am also curious about this: How much time has the minister spent in those areas just since the closures?

Hon. Mrs. M. Wilson (Oromocto-Lincoln-Fredericton, Minister of Economic Development and Small Business, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB, PC): As the Minister responsible for Opportunities New Brunswick... Certainly, we are making sure that all our representatives who are there to deal with these types of emergencies have been on the ground on a regular basis. They report back to me on a regular basis. We make sure that they all know we are available.

I would like to point out something that has been interesting to see over the recent months since we were last here in the House. I get comments from business owners who have been

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in my office on a regular basis about how responsive we are and how available we are. For the last four years, they have not had their phone calls returned, let alone been welcomed into the office. I want to point out that we are available, we are accessible, and we are very proud to be here to help with any opportunity in any way we can. Thank you.

Ms. Rogers (Moncton South, L): Mr. Speaker, the minister did not answer the question, and I am going to assume from that that she, the Minister of Economic Development and Small Business, was not in these communities after she learned of the closures. Can the Minister of Economic Development and Small Business inform the House as to what work her office has been doing over the past year specifically to stimulate growth in the private sector, for job growth in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mrs. M. Wilson (Oromocto-Lincoln-Fredericton, Minister of Economic Development and Small Business, Minister responsible for Opportunities NB, PC): Thank you for that very important question. I do appreciate it. I would like to state that small businesses in New Brunswick know that we have their backs. Finally, they have a government that is listening and is accessible.

What is very interesting is that when I do have numerous business meetings with small business owners across this province, what they are not asking for is money. They are asking for a hand up—not a handout—how can we help them navigate the system. So we put that in place with a toll-free number. We are a call away anytime they need us to direct them, and it is one person whom they will be talking to. We are also reducing regulation in this province, to the tune of \$12 million, with a target date of March 31, 2021. We are reducing regulatory burden, the road blocks that they have constantly. That has been their biggest problem over the years. So we are going to do our best to make sure that we help them do whatever they need. Thank you.

Ms. Rogers (Moncton South, L): Well, Mr. Speaker, a toll-free number is one thing, but it is certainly not an economic growth plan. As well, you know, the minister was talking about things that she has been hearing from companies with regard to what would help them. We are hearing things as well, things such as the minister being political in meetings, saying, for example, that she hoped Scheer would get in so that we could have some better success—in her job as minister.

Do you know what? I am going to turn to some other programs here. I know that the northern fund was cut this year. The fund is supposed to be used to help existing businesses make strategic investments that will lead to job creation. I think we have seen one investment that utilizes this fund, port of Belledune, but has this fund been used for anything else...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Time, minister. Time, member—sorry.

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Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, the members opposite will use or continue to use the words “what cut this is” or “what cut that is”, and none of this bears any fruition to what is actually happening. When we talk about businesses that have failed or we talk about the discussion around the previous federal election... Mr. Speaker, why did the flakeboard business go down? It cited the high cost of living and surviving here in New Brunswick. It cited the increased cost of gas supply to its plant and noted that its market was in the United States.

Mr. Speaker, what are we seeing with our softwood lumber deal? We have been trying to push that through, but we have not had any help from the federal government to make that happen. Why did Baker-Brook close? Why is there a shift under concern in Plaster Rock? Why is there concern at other mills in the province? It is because they are paying a 20% tariff. Where did that come from, Mr. Speaker?

Let's think about how these things have not been reacted to so that when the conversation about a step change... We need a step change all right, a recognition that we are a 90% export province, and we need that felt in Ottawa, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. G. Arseneault (Campbellton-Dalhousie, Opposition House Leader, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the economy in the northern part of the province was hit hard recently following the Glencore closure announcement. Families and workers in the area are the priority. At least, they should be the priority. That being said, there is also another priority, namely the economy. People must be put back to work. For a year, one business has been working on a potential project that could help create good jobs in the area. Can the Premier inform the House of any progress made on the Maritime Iron file? Thank you.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Yes, I actually can because we spent a lot of time understanding that project and what its validity is. I have offered to go. There was a suggestion that it is POSCO in Korea that is behind it. We have asked for details around the business case because... Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? When we get ready to work with a company to invest in that region, we want to make sure that it is not for four years and not for five years and that it is not just showing up and leaving, with the position that, oh, well, if the money runs out, it is gone. We want an investment for the future and for the long term.

We are working with other companies in that same regard because, unlike the previous government, we do believe that the secret to success in our region is private-sector investment, private-sector ownership, and private-sector commitment to the region. That is why we are working with the local community as well.

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With Maritime Iron, we have analyzed... There are meetings going on—there is even another one this week—in relation to working with all members of that. How real is this project? Does it have traction? And whom do we have to put in the room at the same time to put it over the top? I agree with the member, it could be a game changer for the region.

Mr. G. Arseneault (Campbellton-Dalhousie, Opposition House Leader, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Premier for the answer. I would also like to question the Premier with regard to the environmental process that is involved with this. Has that started? Where is it at? In fact, we read in the paper this week that there was a delay in the provincial government forwarding it. I am just wondering whether the Premier could make sure that from now on—this is an urgent matter—the Maritime Iron file will be treated with urgency and we remove some of these barriers and do that process work quickly.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you for the question. It was last year, maybe the same day that I was sworn in last year, that I met with Dominic LeBlanc and asked him about the environmental side of this project. He said that he could see it treated federally in the very same way as the LNG plant is being treated in British Columbia. He said that it is treated as a global initiative and, as such, the environmental impact is reduced globally. In this case, with Maritime Iron, as we discussed it, it would not be a New Brunswick benefit. It would have increased emissions in New Brunswick despite the reduction in coal usage, but with the smelter down now, it maybe balances out as our overall picture. But he felt that it could be treated globally.

When we look at this and say that the iron ore is coming from Quebec and being treated in Belledune and then going to the U.S. gulf for the steel, that is a lot better than going to Korea and coming back. We feel that can be done. The environmental permit has not been submitted to the federal government yet because of all the other details around the business case. Is it real? Is it something that we can submit with confidence? We will pursue it.

OPPORTUNITIES NEW BRUNSWICK

Mr. G. Arseneault (Campbellton-Dalhousie, Opposition House Leader, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, economic development plans are important not only for the north but also for all New Brunswick.

The Premier mentioned Opportunities New Brunswick in his reply earlier. I want to question the Premier with regard to that issue. The throne speech of last year, 2018, said that the government would review the mandate of Opportunities New Brunswick. We have another throne speech this year, and we are going to review the mandate of Opportunities New Brunswick.

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Maybe the minister could answer this, because it is her file. She could tell us what has been done with the review of 2018. Can she table that and tell us what happened, or has nothing been done? Are you reviewing the review? Is that what the mandate is this time around, in the new throne speech? I do not know.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): All I will put out there is that by year-end there will be a new mandate out for Opportunities New Brunswick that will reflect the business interests and commitment of working with communities and how that is going to be done. It will reflect an obligation and an ownership of ONB in deriving economic results across this province, and it will reflect a measurement tool that ensures that happens. We are also asking ONB, when it invests, to have a return on the investment because we want to see the benefits to New Brunswick as we pursue that.

I think ONB needs to take ownership for every region. It has people in every region, but either they do not necessarily have the capability or the wherewithal in order to be able to work with the community in real terms. It is a big organization, and I think we can expect real results. The biggest opportunity, as I said from the beginning—I did not change the name, and I do not care what it is called—is that we have to get the right people there who are going to drive results and it has to sustain the next government. Whenever the next government comes along, we have to have a system that we agree on and that can continue to work for New Brunswick.

[*Translation*]

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mrs. F. Landry (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Original*]

The small community of Baker-Brook in Haut-Madawaska has been hit hard lately with the closure of the Irving sawmill, meaning the loss of 65 jobs, over \$100 000 in property taxes, and around \$1 million in economic spinoffs in the community. A wood allocation of 165 000 m² on Crown lands was attached to that mill.

At public accounts a few weeks ago, it was clearly stated that the Minister of Energy and Natural Resource Development can decide where the Baker-Brook allocation will go. I understand that the allocation is now with the Irvings, but if a proponent came up with a proposal to the Irvings to operate the sawmill in Baker-Brook, would he or she get the wood allocation?

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Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): I am the Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, just to offer a correction. It is a pleasure to stand here in the House again and answer some questions.

As it relates to the allocation of any wood fibre, it is important to remember that allocation resides with the Crown. It resides with the Minister of Natural Resources, and it resides with the department, which is committed to making sure that it gets the best value for the dollar.

In the case of Baker-Brook, we have started to reach out and have conversations. You can rest assured that in this process, we are going to determine everything that took place, a vision for where we are going. Also, in keeping with the theme of everything that we have done since taking government a year ago, we will examine and find the house that best suits this allocation to deliver results, to deliver jobs, and to deliver continued economic viability as it relates to the wood fibre connected to that allocation. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. F. Landry (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent publication by the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council shows projected economic growth for Atlantic Canada. New Brunswick ranks last in these growth predictions, far behind the other Maritime Provinces. Can the Premier explain to the House why we are doing so much worse than our neighbours in terms of projected economic growth?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Likely having a renewed government every four years has played quite a role because there is this tremendous invention of policy and saying: Oh, well, we will just throw money at this, we will raise taxes on others, we will discourage private-sector investment, and the government will just pay its way out. Well, Mr. Speaker, it takes a while to build a foundation. It takes a while to build a skill set within the system to focus on the different initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, I want to reference a business opportunity that has been created up in the Bouctouche area. It is a farmer from India who is actually growing apples. He is planting 1 000 acres and plans to be the number one exporter of apples in Canada by 2025. Do you know what is unique about that investment, Mr. Speaker? It has had no public-sector money. In fact, that farmer was told that he could not do that here in New Brunswick. He



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said: This is one of the best places that I have in the world to grow apples. So, Mr. Speaker, he is going to be exporting to India, to Europe, and to Asia.

Mr. Speaker—could not do that here in New Brunswick. Well, do you know what we are developing within the system? We are developing can-do in New Brunswick, Mr. Speaker, because it is not about throwing money. It is about building resources and...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Time, Premier.

[Translation]

Mrs. F. Landry (Madawaska Les Lacs-Edmundston, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was not a single word in the throne speech about businesses in northern New Brunswick—not a single word.

[Original]

The Premier has promised to energize the private sector, and he referenced that in a recent news story. My questions to the Premier are these: Do you think that you have energized the private sector? Why is that not translating into economic growth?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, let's think back here just a little bit. When we came in a year ago, \$1 billion more was being spent to run government—\$1 billion more, Mr. Speaker. So, what private-sector energy came out of that? We saw businesses closing and leaving. We saw our growth stay the same, Mr. Speaker. It is not a flip of the switch. We cannot tax people more. Is that the solution? Because it does not last.

The philosophy is of building capability in the system. When I used the reference of the apple farmer, it is like: What can we do in New Brunswick? What other initiatives or opportunities do we have everywhere in this province? You know, Mr. Speaker, I do not have to talk about one region or another. I have to talk about New Brunswick as a whole and how we lift every community up, because that is our goal. We will continue to focus on that, all throughout this province.

We do know that since the 2008 recession, millions of dollars have been spent. I have asked the question: What has been different in the north? We have lost 20% of the population, Mr. Speaker, to the southern region. I want that population to shift back into these communities, and we can do it through building resilience and capability in those communities.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The weather has turned cold, and winter has come early again this year. Families, seniors, and small business owners need help to add insulation, get draft-proofing done, and upgrade old, leaky windows or their heating systems so that they can afford their heating bills. Yet, NB Power has told the EUB that it intends to cut in half its spending on energy efficiency programs. This means 60% less in energy savings for people who really could have benefited from a break on their heating costs.

In fact, in a national report card on energy efficiency programming released yesterday by Efficiency Canada, it ranked New Brunswick eighth out of 10 provinces in helping its citizens to cut energy costs. Mr. Speaker, we live in a province where so many could greatly benefit from effective, comprehensive energy efficiency programs, yet they are being cut back.

My question is to the Premier. What does he intend to do in the face of NB Power backing away from its commitment to deliver effective energy saving programs?

Hon. Mr. Holland (Albert, Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Development, PC): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the opportunity to stand and talk about the question. We hear about the rankings throughout the country. We are in a situation where we do have quite affordable power rates here in New Brunswick, but the efficiency suffers because of the fact that we use electricity in the form of a baseboard heater, to almost 80% throughout the province. That is why when we talk about moving into a different mindset, a different direction, we are talking about working within areas such as new construction and with second property owners to create avenues where we can deliver electricity in a much more efficient way.

When we look at operating the utility, we want to be able to find out how we can take every dollar... There might be dollars that have been spent that were not delivering the best value.

Despite the fact that there might be less money in a particular area, if it is being directed in a proper fashion that is going to help folks overcome current circumstances and situations into the future, then, overall, we are going to be better as a result of it. It is a process that takes time, and as a result...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Time, minister.

Mr. Coon (Fredericton South, Leader, G): Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotia supports an independent, arm's-length energy efficiency agency called EfficiencyOne. It offers 24 different energy-saving programs to Nova Scotians, and these have saved citizens of that

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province \$230 million on their annual energy costs and have actually cut the province's carbon footprint by over 1 million tonnes—and that is annually. For low-income Nova Scotians, EfficiencyOne's energy-saving programs have reduced heating costs by up to 50% for low-income homeowners. EfficiencyOne has a mandate to inform, motivate, and incite Nova Scotians to use less energy, spend less on energy, and keep more of their hard-earned money for other priorities for their families or businesses. Perhaps this is how we should deliver energy savings to New Brunswickers.

In an article today in the *Daily Gleaner*, the Premier said that he is interested in learning more about energy efficiency. I am glad to hear that. Will the Premier be willing to accompany me on a visit to EfficiencyOne in Halifax so we can learn together how the Nova Scotia government has been so effective in reducing heating costs for Nova Scotians?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having a road trip with the Leader of the Green Party is certainly something I would look forward to.

In relation to EfficiencyOne and in relation to the report, I just learned of that report yesterday so I do not know all the details in relation to how we were ranked in that. But I do think back to the days of Efficiency NB when we used to have that separate portfolio. I remember asking questions about the grants that were given out and how it worked. You know, there was not one actual, real analysis of the gains made. They were theoretical gains. In other words, we will put this much in, and we are going to save this much, but there was not any follow-up to see whether it actually did anything. So, I do not know whether EfficiencyOne is actually getting real results through energy consumption reductions or whether it is basically all theoretical.

I also knew at the time—I saw—that we were giving grants to people and businesses, Mr. Speaker, that were saving serious amounts of money, but nothing came back to government. So, for any program that we come into, especially a program dealing with businesses, if they save money on energy efficiency, we should get our money back. So it would be a different program that we would put in place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ABORTION

Ms. Mitton (Memramcook-Tantramar, G): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent news that Clinic 554, a community-based health care clinic in Fredericton, could be closing due to financial difficulties is unacceptable. These difficulties are the result of a regulation under the *Medical Services Payment Act*, which restricts funding for abortions provided outside of hospitals. This regulation is in violation of the *Canada Health Act*, which states that abortions are a medically necessary procedure.



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Twenty-five years ago, the federal government ruled that provinces must fund—fully fund—medically necessary procedures. New Brunswick is the only province in Canada that is not funding an abortion clinic within its borders. In May, the Minister of Health said that he would investigate the situation and get back to me. He has had six months to do so. Will the Minister of Health remove the restrictive Schedule 2 of Regulation 84-20 of the *Medical Services Payment Act* to ensure that abortions are covered in the community, in clinics such as Clinic 554?

Hon. Mr. Flemming (Rothesay, Minister of Health, PC): Well, Mr. Speaker, I have heard a lot about this violation of the *Canada Health Act*, and I am fairly familiar with the Act. I have read it. My predecessor, the member for Kent South, as well as previous members of the Gallant government reviewed the same thing that I did.

I wonder whether the member would be kind enough to tell me, for my personal edification, the section and subsection of the *Canada Health Act* where we are in violation. I ask the question quite sincerely. Very often, people say: You are in violation of the *Canada Health Act*. The *Canada Health Act* is a big statute. I have read it. It has a number of issues that are not on health care. It is a funding statute. I hear this a lot, and I wonder whether you can tell me the specifics of the Act that this government and previous governments have been...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Time, minister.

TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Leader, PA): Mr. Speaker, Rod Cumberland is a former instructor at the Maritime College of Forest Technology who had seven years under his belt before being terminated for what appear to be frivolous and unfounded reasons. Mr. Cumberland is an expert on forestry and forest habitat, with over 22 years as a deer biologist with the Department of Natural Resources. The Canadian Association of University Teachers and the Association of University of New Brunswick Teachers have both launched formal complaints in regard to his firing.

My question is for the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. Will the minister commit to an independent review relating to Mr. Cumberland's termination from the Maritime College of Forest Technology?

Hon. Mr. Holder (Portland-Simonds, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, PC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. What I can tell you is that the colleges—the publicly funded colleges in this province—are independent. They have their own boards of directors and boards of governors that govern them. Quite frankly, every time there is a human resource issue at one of those colleges, government cannot go in and investigate. There are processes in place. I would also argue that there is the Human

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Rights Commission. There is the Ombud. There are other avenues that people can take in this instance, but it is not the role of the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour to conduct independent investigations.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Leader, PA): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I fully respect the arm's-length approach to internal HR issues within the college, this case breaks the mold, and it reeks of industry bias. Also, considering that all of us, as taxpayers, fund that college to the tune of \$2.1 million, why does the minister not deem it necessary to have an independent review of Mr. Cumberland's termination?

Hon. Mr. Holder (Portland-Simonds, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, PC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, when I have conversations with faculty members in any arm's-length college or university, I often hear the argument that we cannot interfere with academic freedom. And part of that is that arm's-length approach. For us to get involved in those independent investigations, those human resource issues inside those independent colleges, would be a step in the wrong direction, we believe. There are other avenues available to individuals that they can use through the law and through the system.

Mr. Austin (Fredericton-Grand Lake, Leader, PA): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I will finalize with one question: Does the minister himself see an issue with the termination and how it went down? Again, I agree wholeheartedly that it is not up to Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour to investigate every human resource issue. But when you get to such a high-profile, high-level issue as we see with Mr. Cumberland's termination and given the fact that industry seems to be running rampant when it comes to squashing any opposing views as it relates to the college...

We live in a society today where opposing views are not always welcomed by the powers that be. I think it is really important, for the integrity of the college and for students to feel confident in the learning environment of the college, that something be done. I will ask this again: Does the minister have some reservations with the termination of Mr. Cumberland?

Hon. Mr. Holder (Portland-Simonds, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, PC): Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate this once again. First of all, it would be inappropriate for a minister of the Crown to speak publicly on the floor of this House about a human resource issue, so with all due respect, I am not going to do that, Mr. Speaker. I have indicated that there are all kinds of avenues. In fact, legal avenues could be one kind. I have just been made aware as of this morning that the individual we are speaking about has taken legal action, so I think it would be inappropriate for us to speak any further on that.

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ECONOMY

Mr. Harvey (Carleton-Victoria, L): Mr. Speaker, I know the Premier is mesmerized by numbers, and I will give him a few numbers now from the independent Atlantic Provinces Economic Council. It did projections for all four Atlantic Provinces, Mr. Speaker. New Brunswick is expected to record the weakest growth of all the provinces in Atlantic Canada in 2019–20. Prince Edward Island is at 3% for 2019 and will be at 2.8% next year. Newfoundland and Labrador is at 2.7% and 2.4%. Nova Scotia is at 2.2% and 2.4%. New Brunswick is at 1% growth in 2019, under the helm of this government, and in the next year, it will be 1.4%. It is shameful, Mr. Speaker. These are real numbers from an independent analysis.

Last year, when the Premier did his capital budget, the Dominion Bond Rating agency said: These cuts will have a negative impact on the provincial economy in 2019. True, Mr. Speaker. Will this Premier respond?

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, the bond-rating agencies also did not downgrade us, did they? They also kept our interest rates low, did they not, Mr. Speaker? They also commended us on our prudent behaviour in managing taxpayer dollars, Mr. Speaker. What does that mean to investors? It means that we are becoming a place to invest, Mr. Speaker, and that is a goal.

Now, what we do know is that the previous government spent \$1 billion more, Mr. Speaker. Now, where did all that investment go? Was it, as I mentioned before, to build and compete with us via a shipyard? Was it on the Knowledge Park, Mr. Speaker, where it spent \$37 million on a building with no tenants—no tenants but our own? Was that its investment, Mr. Speaker? Was it a case of just building and throwing money at things? Mr. Speaker, that was the previous government's economic policy. It had no sustainable future because it was bankrupting every citizen in this province.

We do have a different method, and it will take time to build, Mr. Speaker, because it will not be built on the backs of every citizen in this province.

Mr. Harvey (Carleton-Victoria, L): Mr. Speaker, the Premier made reference to the \$1 billion. That is all the government members can talk about, but they are still spending that \$1 billion that was raised in tax revenue. The only reason they could balance their budget was because of the increased tax revenue through transfers from the federal government, Mr. Speaker. Let the truth be known.

Mr. Speaker, in just one short year—one short year—at the helm, this government has a new handle: the triple-C government. There is a triple-C community near my riding, Mr.



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Speaker, but the triple-C government is cuts, cancellations, and closures. How many jobs, both direct and indirect, were lost with this government's decision in 2018 to cancel existing infrastructure projects such as the Centennial Building, the courthouse here in Fredericton, and the Perth-Andover road reconstruction project? I could go on and on about schools and hospital investments and cuts to the infrastructure budget last year, Mr. Speaker. How many jobs were lost in the province by this government?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Do you know what that just emphasized, Mr. Speaker? It emphasized what I was just saying. Every particular investment was taxpayers' dollars, with no long-term economic sustainability attached to any single one of them—not one of them. The only goal was to build more. The courthouse is an economic generator, Mr. Speaker. What about Cannabis NB? It had record losses, but we never intended to make money anyway, did we, Mr. Speaker? That was never in the previous government's DNA. Well, Mr. Speaker, it is ironic, and it is really amazing to see the member stand up and talk about the only way for economic growth. The only vision the previous government ever had was just to dump taxpayers' dollars into the mix and build something that would just say: We are keeping people busy.

Mr. Speaker, we will keep people busy because we will be bringing people home to invest in our province. They will see us acting like prudent adults, Mr. Speaker. That is our goal.

Mr. Harvey (Carleton-Victoria, L): Well, Mr. Speaker, that is rich coming from the Premier who is balancing his budget on the backs of the federal government. Hopefully, he will have a better relationship with the federal government now that he is off his buddy Andrew Scheer and they are not together anymore. It is kind of amazing, Mr. Speaker, how long they are going to leave Mr. Scheer there until they throw him under the bus—literally.

It is shameful for the Premier to get up the next day after the federal government is reelected in Ottawa and speak about how he is going to work with the federal government on a carbon-pricing plan for New Brunswick. Then the next day or soon after, he meets with his buddy Dougie Ford. He goes out West, and now he is intervening in court cases. Maybe if he wants to cancel something, he should cancel the law agreements in the court challenges in those provinces, Mr. Speaker.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that the failed Finance Minister from 2010 to 2014 does a better job with the community of Belledune than he did with Juniper. When the mill closed in 2012, this government did nothing for the people of Juniper. There was no investment. I hope that you do...

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Time, member.

Members should also know that we have ruled “the failed Minister of Finance” as not proper language in the House.



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Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would expect nothing less than dredging up whatever hyperbole from the past. The members opposite just would not be different. They cannot help themselves, Mr. Speaker.

With regard to the whole idea of balancing the budget with the transfers, I have indicated that our transfers are important. But do you know what, Mr. Speaker? The previous government could not do it. The previous government could not do it. Those members could not balance the budget no matter how much money flowed in because they could not flow in more than they could flow out. There were record amounts of money flowing out because they just could not help themselves.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about Cannabis NB's 20 stores. Do you know how many were proposed by Opportunities New Brunswick and the Cannabis NB organization? It was 13. So where did the other 7 come from, Mr. Speaker? The member opposite had to have one. Several others had to have one. They all wanted to be losing money in their own communities, one after another. That was their goal, a distribution model based on taxpayers' dollars. And we did not want to earn money anyway. We do not care because we will just tax people more. There is a different philosophy, and there is a new sheriff in town, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

TOURISM

Mr. J. LeBlanc (Shediac—Beaubassin—Cap-Pelé, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We managed to balance the books—with a \$67-million budget surplus.

We feel very strongly that tourism represents a real opportunity for job creation in New Brunswick, especially in rural areas and in the northern part of the province.

Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia are our two main competitors in terms of tourism revenue. Due to the budgetary cuts in tourism, both these provinces are now investing nearly twice as much money as we do in tourism marketing.

According to the minister, what will the result be if our main competitors invest twice as much in tourism and develop this market?

Hon. Mr. Gauvin (Shippagan-Lamèque-Miscou, Deputy Premier, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Minister responsible for La Francophonie, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for the question, and I hope everyone will have a good fall session. I am very happy to rise in the House today to talk about the tourist season, which has been outstanding. As much as I like to take credit for this or would like to give



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credit to the opposition or to ourselves, we must give credit where credit is due. The success of the tourist season, so far, rests on the shoulders of business operators.

I talked with tourism operators throughout the summer, and they told us that the tourism industry is not just about investments; it is about day-to-day work. I did the work. You do not pray in April and then go to confession in October. People have to work every day, and that is what tourism operators did.

I am going to give you two examples of good things that we did. We made a change at Parlee Beach, which resulted in 67 000 more people. We made a change at the New Brunswick Aquarium and Marine Centre, in Shippagan, and we had a 21% increase in the number of tourists.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Guitard): Question period is over.