

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions



June 2, 2021

CONTENTS

TOURISM

Mr. LePage

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace

Mr. LePage

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace

Mr. LePage

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace

ABORTION

Ms. Thériault

Hon. Mrs. Shephard

Ms. Thériault

Hon. Mrs. Shephard

Ms. Thériault

Hon. Mrs. Shephard

AN ACT RESPECTING IMAGE-CAPTURING ENFORCEMENT SYSTEMS

Mr. K. Chiasson

Hon. Mr. Flemming

Mr. K. Chiasson

Hon. Mr. Flemming

Mr. K. Chiasson

Hon. Mr. Flemming

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. McKee

Hon. Mr. Higgs

Mr. McKee

Hon. Mr. Higgs

Mr. McKee

Hon. Mr. Higgs

GOVERNMENT REFORM

Mr. K. Arseneau

Hon. Mr. Allain

Mr. K. Arseneau

ELECTORAL REFORM

Hon. Mr. Allain

TOURISM

Mr. Melanson

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace

Mr. Melanson

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

TOURISM

Mr. LePage (Restigouche West, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Original*]

The Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture told us in this Chamber last month that she was very excited to share her department's tourism strategy. As we all know, the tourism sector has been extremely hard hit by the pandemic, so New Brunswickers were all looking forward to seeing a strategy that would relaunch the tourism sector with bold ideas and initiatives, taking advantage of the demand that has been pent up for over a year.

Unfortunately, what the minister unveiled yesterday does not hit the mark. The key piece of her plan is to extend the Explore NB program to the Atlantic Bubble. While we can debate the policy merits of sending New Brunswickers' tax dollars to other provinces, my immediate question to the minister is the following: Did she and her staff consult Public Health when determining who would be eligible for this expanded program?

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Minister responsible for Women's Equality, PC): You know, Mr. Speaker, I listened to this a week and a half ago, and I am not going to listen to it today. We made an announcement yesterday that is truly getting the attention of people across the nation. I was on CBC Prince Edward Island this morning, and the host of that show said this: I have been speaking with industry here on Prince Edward Island, and clearly, New Brunswick is here to play this year.

We are here to play. We have an excellent strategy going forward. Yes, we have opened our staycation offerings to our Atlantic neighbours. We are incredibly proud of that. We want to see our New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador people return to us. Our doors are wide open to them. We are incredibly proud of that program. I will not make excuses, and I will not apologize for that.

Mr. LePage (Restigouche West, L): It is not a game. It is not a game, and you should listen to New Brunswickers.

[*Translation*]

Public Health has clearly indicated that the Témiscouata and Avignon regions in Quebec are part of the first phase of the plan to reopen the province, which is set to begin on June 7 depending on our vaccination rates and our number of cases and hospitalizations being low.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

That being said, can the minister explain why people in Avignon and Témiscouata are not included in the Explore NB Travel Incentive Program? I am particularly interested in knowing the reason behind this decision, given that, as you know, Mr. Speaker, in terms of tourism markets, Quebec is important for New Brunswick.

Why would the Higgs government not want to entice travelers from one of the largest markets, even if it is only part of that market? It would certainly send a good message to our Quebec neighbours who would come to New Brunswick.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): Members, I will remind everyone that we are to wear our masks properly throughout question period and throughout the day.

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Minister responsible for Women's Equality, PC): Mr. Speaker, a year ago, we established a relationship that was unique to our region, something that was led by the Premiers of the Atlantic Provinces, and it is our Atlantic Bubble. It has very much been the focus of our tourism strategy and the return to New Brunswick.

We do have a very close relationship with people in Quebec—absolutely. Quebec and Ontario visitors are important to us, no doubt about it, as are those from Maine. Maine also borders on New Brunswick.

Our Atlantic Bubble is something we are incredibly proud of. It is a relationship that has been built over this pandemic, and it is one that we are honouring with our Explore NB program.

[*Translation*]

Mr. LePage (Restigouche West, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[*Original*]

We were told that Avignon and Témiscouata would be part of the next bubble. Now they are not part of the Explore NB program. Why, minister?

Following up on public health measures in the next phases of reopening, we know that visitors from Quebec and beyond will be permitted, beginning July 1, to come to New Brunswick without isolating as long as they have received one vaccine dose. Competition for tourism dollars has never been fiercer. Tourism operators deserve the department's best efforts.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

To the minister: Are there any plans to expand the Explore NB program further? If not, can she give this House concrete examples of how the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture will ensure that New Brunswick tourism operators in all parts of the province can have a fighting chance of attracting visitors from these markets?

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Minister responsible for Women's Equality, PC): Mr. Speaker, I can promise you... If the member opposite had listened to the press conference yesterday, he would have heard the President of TIANB saying that the association absolutely believes that tourism operators have a fighting chance because it is those people—the tourism industry in New Brunswick—who have helped us to draft the plan for going forward. One of the pieces was this dream that we had a few months ago to allow those visitors from within our Atlantic Bubble to also receive that rebate from Explore NB.

Mr. Speaker, the industry has asked for all kinds of things. It has asked for help with training. Just this week, we have announced new training in schools, new curriculum for training for that industry. The industry is not...

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

[*Translation*]

ABORTION

Ms. Thériault (Caraquet, L): Mr. Speaker, by refusing to fund abortion services in clinics, this Conservative government is in violation of the *Canada Health Act*. The federal government is threatening to withhold health care funding. The Court of Queen's Bench of New Brunswick has just ruled that the Canadian Civil Liberties Association can sue New Brunswick over abortion. We are facing another lawsuit. This is totally wasting money, time, energy, and resources for ideological reasons.

Here is my question for the Minister responsible for Women's Equality: As a woman and a minister, do you really think there is adequate access to abortion services throughout New Brunswick? Do you approve of your leader's stubbornness in adopting a stance that goes against the Act? Thank you.

[*Original*]

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. As this works through the system that it is intended to work through, I need to reemphasize that the regional health authorities are tasked with delivering health care services in this province. Should they deem that more or less of any particular service is required, they will make that decision. Thank you.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

Ms. Thériault (Caraquet, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the Conservative government saddles the health networks with the whole thing, as it has always done, instead of stepping up to the plate, doing its job, and assuming its responsibilities. The justice in charge of the file characterized the position of the province as unreasonable. This is what she said:

[*Original*]

The position taken by the Province in the face of clear jurisprudence to the contrary was unreasonable.

[*Translation*]

I again quote the justice:

[*Original*]

With all due respect to the position of the Province, it is without merit and given the jurisprudence directly on point, surprising.

[*Translation*]

This time, my question is for the minister and member for Fredericton North. Here is my question: As a woman and a minister, do you really think there is adequate access to abortion services throughout New Brunswick? Do you approve of your leader's stubbornness in adopting a stance that goes against the Act? Thank you.

[*Original*]

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Health, PC): Mr. Speaker, our position has always been—and we have been very public about it—that the RHAs are responsible for delivering the health care services in this province and for deeming whether or not they are appropriate. That is their responsibility. They will deliver the services as they see the need.

Ms. Thériault (Caraquet, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, it is not their responsibility. It is your responsibility, minister.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, all groups are saying that access to abortion is not sufficient in New Brunswick. The government cannot even produce concrete data, because we do not know

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

how many women have abortions outside the province, for example. Access is not adequate in New Brunswick. The government saddles the health networks with the whole thing. The government shirks its responsibility and, once again, we find ourselves faced with a lawsuit. This is totally wasting money, time, energy, and resources for ideological reasons.

Given that this government boasts about getting women elected, perhaps they should be allowed to speak. So, here is my question for the minister and member for Saint John Harbour: As a woman and a minister, do you really think there is adequate access to abortion services in New Brunswick and do you share your leader's stubbornness?

[Original]

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

Hon. Mrs. Shephard (Saint John Lancaster, Minister of Health, PC): We have elected more women than the opposition party. While I appreciate that the member opposite chooses to use some anecdotes and some language that is probably a little more challenging than normal, I would like to say that we have been very clear about the services for health care. The RHAs are responsible for delivering those services. They know what resources they have, they know how to implement them, and they have been given the job to implement services that they see are needed. It lies with the RHAs.

AN ACT RESPECTING IMAGE-CAPTURING ENFORCEMENT SYSTEMS

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice and Public Safety has introduced a bill that would allow municipalities to set up red-light cameras for the purpose of capturing motor vehicle infractions and issuing tickets. Now, he says that this is about public safety, not revenue generation. If that is the case, why would the minister not agree to an amendment that would have municipalities warn motorists of the existence of these cameras?

Hon. Mr. Flemming (Rothesay, Minister of Justice and Public Safety, Attorney General, PC): I have had some strange questions in my time here. Why do we not have the police tell people when they are going to raid for drugs? Why do we not tell people in advance? Why do we not tell people when we are going to put the radar on a particular street? Let's post it—radar on this street between nine o'clock and eleven o'clock on Tuesday mornings. It does not make a lick of sense.

To the people who complain about this law, I suggest the following: First, drive the speed limit; second, stop at red lights; and third, do not pass school buses when the lights are flashing. Mr. Speaker, if you have a problem with this law, I suggest that you obey the law.

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Mr. Speaker, we need to better understand the objective behind this bill. Is it to nab unsuspecting motorists who may have violated a

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

traffic law, or is it to discourage people from doing so in the first place? The minister is going to have to choose to approach this either as the Minister of Justice or as the Minister of Public Safety, unless he thinks that he can defy the odds and succeed at sucking and blowing at the same time. Which is it, minister? Which is it, minister? Do you want to hand out fines, or do you want to improve safety on our roads?

Hon. Mr. Flemming (Rothesay, Minister of Justice and Public Safety, Attorney General, PC): I am quite happy to do both. If you do not like the fine, drive the speed limit. If you do not like the fine, stop at a red light. If you do not like a fine, do not go roaring down my street over the speed limit when people are out for a walk with their children. Obey the law. I think that obeying the law and being Justice Minister are pretty goldarn consistent where I come from.

Mr. K. Chiasson (Tracadie-Sheila, L): Mr. Speaker, I think that the minister of multiple hats is going about it the wrong way. What we are proposing is to put signs at the entrances to the municipalities. They would act as deterrents, so motorists would be more likely to obey traffic laws. These signs, along with an awareness campaign, could be very beneficial in improving road safety. This is being done in other provinces across the country, Mr. Speaker.

If the objective is to reduce accidents, then I would ask the minister whether he is willing to reconsider his position. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Flemming (Rothesay, Minister of Justice and Public Safety, Attorney General, PC): Every once in a while, issues come up that really define what it is to be a Progressive Conservative or a Liberal. Soft on crime? Put up a sign: The city of Fredericton is against stealing. The city of Fredericton is against speeding. The city of Fredericton thinks that people who come to Fredericton should obey the law.

You want to state the obvious. You want to put signs up, warning people when they do not have to obey the law, so that very small group of people is given a pass. Those people can roar down streets when others are pushing their children in strollers and when children are getting off school buses, and you want to give them a pass and give them a warning. I will tell you that it is the strangest thing I have seen in this place in a long time.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, the other side seems to think that this is a laughing matter. Studies have shown that signs at intersections to show that there are cameras have reduced collisions significantly, so it is no laughing matter.

Yesterday, the Premier asked us whether we had any new material on labour negotiations. He seems to think that by ignoring the problem, it will go away. Well, CUPE New Brunswick represents over 28 000 workers, and it has given the Premier an ultimatum of 100 days,

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

starting on May 30, to settle these agreements. The government seems hard on its increase of 3% over four years, which is not bargaining in good faith. Since many of these contracts expired four years ago, we have seen increases of almost 2% per year in inflation alone.

Mr. Speaker, why does the Premier seem content to risk a general strike in New Brunswick in three months' time?

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot say how disappointed I was to see a letter the day after we had opened up with good news in our province on how we are moving forward like no other province in the country and on what a great momentum we have as a province in terms of recovery. We then got a letter and an ultimatum that said to do this or that or they will do this or that.

You know, that is not the spirit with which we got through the COVID-19 pandemic and with which we are continuing to have success in that area—the spirit of cooperation and understanding, which we each can have to take part. I have reiterated that over and over and over again, Mr. Speaker, because it is a new day in New Brunswick.

We are reinventing New Brunswick, and that includes how we negotiate, how we manage, and how we deliver services to every citizen in this province. We need the CUPE membership to be part of it. Mr. Speaker, I have said right here that I believe the citizens within the CUPE membership want to be a part of it. I believe that the leadership has a different view, so we just have to get both on the same page. Let's rebuild New Brunswick together.

[Translation]

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, L): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, CUPE represents 28 000 workers in New Brunswick. These are essential people who have been up to the task throughout the pandemic. On May 30, they gave the Premier a 100-day ultimatum to reach collective agreements.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to know this: The Premier talks about doing things differently, but what is he going to do to reach these collective agreements? He is offering 3% over four years, but that will not be enough to solve the problem. What is he going to do to avoid a general strike within the next three months, since that would jeopardize services provided to New Brunswickers? This is a very serious question, and I want a clear answer. What is he going to do to avoid a general strike within the next three months?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that over the next several months, there will be a lot of

Oral Questions

meaningful discussions about how we can work with the membership of CUPE to improve the lives of people in every corner of this province. So, yes, there will be a lot of discussions on that.

Do I have a magic solution, Mr. Speaker? No, no, I do not. But I am sure that there are a lot of people who would say, you know, you can make these changes. We talked about the workplace. We talked about the environment. We talked about safety in the workplace. We talked about the work schedule. You know, when I hear that they are working a 24-hour shift in the Dumont, I think that it should not even be conceivable because there is no way that any individual, especially a health care worker, should be required to work a 24-hour shift. That is not acceptable.

The goal is to find equity within the system, balance within the system, so we can maintain services and enhance services and do it in a way that every New Brunswicker actually succeeds in that manner or feels the difference. I am looking forward to CUPE being part of that solution, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Mr. McKee (Moncton Centre, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about health care. Almost every day, there are media reports on the closure of services or overburdened emergency rooms because of the nursing shortage. Addressing this reality should be the Premier's priority, yet he has not concluded the collective agreement with the nurses of our province.

Given the statistics showing that our nurses are underpaid compared to nurses in other provinces and that we have a retention problem, does the Premier not see the crisis looming? He talks about doing things differently, but, for him, that means cuts and closures, Mr. Speaker. When will he recognize the need to pay our nurses a competitive wage?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Higgs (Quispamsis, Premier, Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs, PC): Mr. Speaker, there you have it. It seems as if the only answer that the opposition members ever provide is, oh, well, pay more money, and it will all get better. Yes, we have to be equitable in our wages and competitive within the Atlantic Region—I agree. But as the President of the Nurses' Union says, I have been talking about health care changes for 20 years because this crisis has been coming. It is not new, so fixing the salaries is only one part of this whole process, Mr. Speaker.

To think that, all of a sudden, we are going to be flooded with people because we are going to have salary parity with Nova Scotia or Newfoundland... Mr. Speaker, it is not as simple as that. Every province has a problem with getting health care workers, with getting people. We see it across the province in every sector but particularly in health care. It is not an easy

Oral Questions

solution. It is a solution that demands a requirement to look at the next 10, 20, or 30 years. It is not a solution about fixing for today. It is fixing for tomorrow, and that has been our goal from the very beginning.

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT REFORM

Mr. K. Arseneau (Kent North, G): Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, the status quo, in terms of local governments, is neither beneficial, desirable, nor democratic for the people of the province. A number of questions remain unanswered, and a number of consultations remain necessary, to ensure the system is equitable, is consistent with the spirit of Equal Opportunity, and strengthens the democratic role of our communities.

Our local governments will have to play a more significant role in our local economies, the environment, arts and culture, social programs, and so on. However, the provincial government must be prepared to share powers and resources.

Given the importance of this reform, and with the green phase on the horizon, my question is for the Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform. Does the minister commit to holding in-person meetings this fall to ensure that everyone in the province has an accessible chance to express themselves?

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member opposite for his question. This is certainly important. Local governance reform is, after all, a community endeavour. We want to make sure that we work with associations, municipal representatives, and people in rural areas. We will certainly do what the member mentioned.

We will certainly commit to holding consultations. We have had more than 100 meetings to date, and we are certainly going to have other public meetings. Last week, four meetings took place virtually. There were six thematic sessions. There are 12 meetings to come with the various regional service commissions.

So, I certainly commit to holding public consultations in August and September, and in person, if possible. That will certainly depend on COVID-19, but, as far as I am concerned, I am always open to meeting New Brunswickers. They certainly have the right solutions for our province.

Mr. K. Arseneau (Kent North, G): That is excellent. Thank you very much to the minister because, as he knows, in our rural areas, not everyone has access to the consultations conducted through the Internet as much as they would like. There are a lot of people who would like to express themselves. What I am hearing in my community is that the status

Oral Questions

quo is unacceptable. People want to move on, but they want to make sure that their voices will be heard. So I am very pleased to hear that from the minister's mouth.

[Original]

ELECTORAL REFORM

My second question, Mr. Speaker, is, again, about municipal election campaigns in New Brunswick, which is like the Wild West. There are no rules for who can donate, how much can be contributed, and what must be disclosed about donations. That is in contrast with provincial campaigns, where corporate donations were banned four years ago. My question is this: When will the Minister of Local Government ban municipal corporation donations, increase transparency, and end the Wild West of municipal political financing in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Allain (Moncton East, Minister of Local Government and Local Governance Reform, PC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Campaign financing, as the member for Shediac—Beaubassin—Cap-Pelé indicated in his member's statement, is definitely on the radar. It is a file that people have been discussing throughout the consultation process. We definitely want to see transparency, and the status quo is probably not an option.

I know about the frustration of some people who were candidates in the last municipal election. Financing is definitely complex, but it is an issue that we are working on in the department. The previous Liberal government had worked on a plan, but it did not formalize that plan. So let's hope that we can build on that plan and move forward with strong campaign financing rules for municipalities in the government reform or in our white paper this fall.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Original]

TOURISM

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought there was a question from another party.

In 2019, tourism was an industry worth approximately \$1.5-billion in New Brunswick. The pandemic significantly hurt that industry. The tourism operators have been struggling and hoping that the provincial government, based on specific initiatives for them to be able to grow and to see a postpandemic strategy, would take part.

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

Yesterday, we heard about a very unique, specific initiative. I would remind the Minister of Tourism that about 70% of all tourists coming from outside New Brunswick are from Ontario, Quebec, and the New England states, not from the Atlantic Bubble. What is she going to do to attract those tourists back to New Brunswick after the pandemic?

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Minister responsible for Women's Equality, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that our announcement of our plan for the Atlantic Bubble opening is just one step of a larger tourism campaign that has been developed with the industry. Yesterday, the President of TIANB said that she had never seen a closer relationship and more consultation with a government than she is seeing right now.

We are starting with Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland as our Atlantic Bubble partners—absolutely. We know that, starting in June, we are going to be asking people in Ontario and Quebec where they want to come next. That is when we will be advertising there because we know that they cannot come here yet. They are incredibly important, absolutely, to our tourism industry. We do not know...

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Melanson (Dieppe, Interim Opposition Leader, L): Mr. Speaker, according to Public Health guidelines and phases to return to normalcy on June 7—which is next week—people from Bonaventure, Avignon, and Témiscouata could come to New Brunswick if they have received the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. So, from next week on, why would these potential tourists not be able to come to New Brunswick and benefit from the program?

Beyond that, on July 1, according to Public Health guidelines, all Canadians will actually be able to come to New Brunswick if they have already received the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. The initiative announced yesterday will not significantly increase the number of tourists that would enable tourism operators to benefit from the period following the pandemic. Could the minister please provide us with mid- and long-term initiatives?

[*Original*]

Hon. Ms. Scott-Wallace (Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, Minister of Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Minister responsible for Women's Equality, PC): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the member opposite is suggesting that we should take one small piece of Quebec that borders with us. The people there are incredibly important to us. We do have markets throughout Quebec and Ontario, and those folks absolutely cannot wait to get back to New Brunswick. There is no question about it. We have reached out to them throughout this spring. We had a postcard campaign, and we sent them recipes from New Brunswick. We asked them where they want to go first when they return to New Brunswick. I will tell you that they are

Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

Oral Questions

anxious to get back. We are talking to these people. Our tourism industry talks to these people.

With the Atlantic Bubble and with this incentive that has been expanded to our Atlantic Bubble, we have to remember that our Atlantic Provinces do consist of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. That is just a fact, and those provinces are where this program reaches. That is not to say that we are not going to have further conversations.

Mr. Speaker (Hon. Mr. Oliver): The time for question period has ended.

