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Daily sitting 32

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

*10 o'clock a.m.*

Prayers.

Pursuant to Standing Rule 45, Mr. D'Amours rose to request an emergency debate concerning the costs placed on NB Power and rate payers by the provincial government. Mr. Speaker took the matter under advisement.

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The following Bill was introduced and read a first time:

By Mr. D'Amours,

*Bill 32, An Act to Amend the Residential Property Tax Relief Act.*

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Mr. Legacy gave Notice of Motion 52 that on Thursday, May 9, 2024, he would move the following resolution, seconded by Mr. LePage:

WHEREAS the Orphan Site Program originally began in 1990 under the Environmental Trust Fund before being terminated in 2009 with no clear justification;

WHEREAS the Auditor General's 2022 audit clearly demonstrated that the Department of Environment and Local Government does not effectively administer the contaminated sites management process, despite the risk of contaminated sites to human health and the environment;

WHEREAS the province has a backlog of over 1000 contaminated sites (some of them orphan), dating back up to 35 years and with three quarters of them over 10 years old;

WHEREAS, as of March 31, 2022, a liability for contaminated sites of \$50.8 million was recorded in New Brunswick's public accounts;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of New Brunswick to reinstate the funding for the remediation of orphan and abandoned sites through the Environmental Trust Fund following a review of its criteria and funding mechanism.

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Mr. LePage gave Notice of Motion 53 that on Thursday, May 9, 2024, he would move the following resolution, seconded by Ms. Thériault:

WHEREAS experts are predicting more severe and frequent storms in the future due to climate change and have expressed concern regarding erosion, especially in areas along New Brunswick's northeastern and southeastern coasts;

WHEREAS communities across the province have voiced their worry regarding the deteriorating state or absence of infrastructure that protects them from erosion;

WHEREAS coastal erosion has left many New Brunswickers on the brink of losing their homes;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of New Brunswick to invest and support communities to prevent and deal with the impacts caused by erosion along the coasts.

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Mr. M. LeBlanc gave Notice of Motion 54 that on Thursday, May 9, 2024, he would move the following resolution, seconded by Mr. K. Chiasson:

WHEREAS the New Brunswick Insurance Board continues to grant new requests from auto insurance companies to use credit scores to set rates for drivers in the province despite the Attorney General openly questioning the fairness of the practice;

WHEREAS more drivers per capita in New Brunswick have poor credit compared to the rest of the country;

WHEREAS New Brunswickers are struggling with steep increases in the cost of living, including car insurance rates;

WHEREAS New Brunswick's Consumer Advocate for Insurance stressed the need for government intervention to stop this practice, similar to other jurisdictions such as Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of New Brunswick to ban the use of credit scores in setting insurance rates.

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Ms. Landry gave Notice of Motion 55 that on Thursday, May 9, 2024, she would move the following resolution, seconded by Mr. M. LeBlanc:

WHEREAS one third of New Brunswickers have a disability, 8.3% higher than the national average;

WHEREAS the current government of New Brunswick has failed to deliver on accessibility in the province;

WHEREAS the current and proposed pieces of legislation around an Accessibility Act leave an important gap of time in the coverage needed by people needing accessibility measures;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of New Brunswick to implement the construction adjustments needed and proposed in the accessibility committee report in the 2024 designs and plans for renovation and construction of provincial buildings.

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Mr. M. LeBlanc gave Notice of Motion 56 that on Thursday, May 9, 2024, he would move the following resolution, seconded by Mr. LePage:

WHEREAS the effective functioning of labour relations is crucial for fostering prosperity and well-being among workers and employers in New Brunswick;

WHEREAS recent legislative actions, such as Bill 23 in 2022 and Bill 17 last fall, have strained the relationship between the government and the labor movement, resulting in heightened tensions and diminished trust;

WHEREAS there exist opportunities for enhancing labour relations practices within the province to foster greater cooperation and collaboration among employers, employees, and their representatives;

WHEREAS the current framework provided by the *Public Service Labour Relations Act* and the *Industrial Relations Act* could be refined through collaborative efforts to address concerns and promote mutual understanding, thereby fostering increased job satisfaction, productivity, and economic growth in New Brunswick;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that this Legislative Assembly urge the government of New Brunswick to take proactive measures aimed at improving labour relations in the province and to establish a committee, comprised of government officials and labour representatives, tasked with conducting a thorough examination of the current state of labour relations and proposing actionable steps to enhance cooperation and dialogue between the government and labour stakeholders.

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Mr. Coon gave Notice of Motion 57 that on Thursday, April 4, 2024, he would move the following resolution, seconded by Ms. Mitton:

WHEREAS the Standing Committee on Economic Policy does not have the mandate to call for expert witnesses during the debates of bills referred to the committee, limiting its ability to properly scrutinize proposed legislation;

WHEREAS an agreement was struck to allow witnesses to appear at the Standing Committee on Economic Policy to present on Bill 114, *Child and Youth Well-Being Act*, and led to eight legislative amendments to strengthen the bill;

WHEREAS allowing the Standing Committee on Economic Policy to access expert witnesses during the study of bills at committee would enhance its capacity to assess the potential impacts, implications, and effectiveness of proposed legislation;

WHEREAS the House can authorize a legislative committee to call for expert witnesses;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that, notwithstanding the Standing Rules and established mandates of committees, the Legislative Assembly authorize the Standing Committee on Economic Policy to invite expert witnesses during the debates of bills referred to the committee.

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Mr. Arseneault, Opposition House Leader, gave notice that on Thursday, March 28, 2024, Opposition Members' Business would be considered in the following order: Motion 7 and 5.

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Hon. Mr. G. Savoie, Government House Leader, announced that it was the intention of government that Bills 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30 be called for second reading until 2 p.m.; following which the House would take into consideration Motion 41 until 4 p.m.; following which the House would resume the adjourned debate on the Budget.

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The Order being read for second reading of Bill 21, *An Act to Amend the New Brunswick Income Tax Act*, a debate arose thereon.

At 12 p.m., the House recessed. At 1 p.m., the House resumed.

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Mr. Speaker delivered the following ruling:

#### STATEMENT BY SPEAKER

Honourable Members,

The Member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre has asked leave to introduce a motion for an emergency debate to discuss the costs placed on NB Power and rate payers by the provincial government.

I received notice from the Member this morning before 8 a.m. satisfying the two hours' notice requirement.

The issue of costs placed on NB Power and the financial pressures facing New Brunswickers is certainly a matter of importance to Members of this House. However, when considering whether to set aside the business of the House to consider the proposed motion, I am guided by Standing Rules 45 and 46 which require the consideration of the following: the probability of the matter being brought before the House within a reasonable time by other means; and whether the matter proposed for discussion relates to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration.

In my opinion, the matter proposed for discussion does not satisfy the requirements of the Standing Rules.

The NB Power rate increase in question has been known to Members and the public. There was an opportunity for the Member to give notice of motion last week to debate the issue tomorrow during Opposition Members' Business, but that was not done.

As well, with respect to urgency, one aspect of this matter has already been discussed by the House. On November 2, 2023, during the current session, the House debated Motion 11, which proposed the removal of a portion of the HST from residential electricity bills.

Accordingly, based on these reasons, the matter will not go forward at this time.

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Debate resumed on the motion that Bill 21, *An Act to Amend the New Brunswick Income Tax Act*, be now read a second time.

And the debate being ended, and the question being put that Bill 21 be now read a second time, it was resolved in the affirmative.

Accordingly, Bill 21, *An Act to Amend the New Brunswick Income Tax Act*, was read a second time and ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Economic Policy, as designated by the Government House Leader.

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The Order being read for second reading of Bill 22, *An Act to Amend the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act*, a debate arose thereon.

And the debate being ended, and the question being put that Bill 22 be now read a second time, it was resolved in the affirmative.

Accordingly, Bill 22, *An Act to Amend the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act*, was read a second time and ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Economic Policy, as designated by the Government House Leader.

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The Order being read for second reading of Bill 23, *An Act Respecting Renewable Gas and Hydrogen*, a debate arose thereon.

And after some time, Mr. Speaker interrupted proceedings and announced that the time allotted for second reading had expired.

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Pursuant to Notice of Motion 41, Hon. Mr. Holland moved, seconded by the Honourable the Premier:

WHEREAS New Brunswickers and all Canadians are struggling with affordability as a result of Liberal inflation;

WHEREAS the Parliamentary Budget Officer stated, “When both fiscal and economic impacts of the federal fuel charge are considered, we estimate that most households will see a net loss, paying more in fuel charges and GST than they will receive in Climate Action Incentive payments”;

WHEREAS it is estimated that a family of four will have to pay \$700 more for groceries in 2024 because of the inflationary carbon tax;

WHEREAS the federal government plans to again hike the carbon tax on April 1 by a punishing 23%;

WHEREAS the province has a Climate Change Action plan that is about real action and not symbolic gestures;

WHEREAS New Brunswick is leading the country in terms of greenhouse gas emissions reductions, having reduced emissions by 39% since 2005, and has made a further commitment to achieve net-zero by 2050;

WHEREAS the Governor of the Bank of Canada has indicated that the elimination of the Liberal carbon tax would have a significant beneficial impact on inflation;

WHEREAS 70% of provincial Premiers are asking the federal government to pause the planned April 1 increase;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick urge Prime Minister Trudeau, Dominic LeBlanc, and the government of Canada to abolish the federal carbon tax forthwith.

And the question being put, a debate ensued.

And after some time, Ms. Conroy, the Deputy Speaker, took the chair as Acting Speaker.

Mr. Arseneau rose on a point of order and submitted that Mr. M. LeBlanc made certain allegations that were not true. Madam Deputy Speaker ruled the point not well taken.

Mr. M. LeBlanc rose on a point of order and submitted that Mr. Arseneau used unparliamentary language when he relinquished the floor following his point of order. Madam Deputy Speaker advised the House that the words in question were inaudible to the Chair.

And after some time, Mr. Speaker resumed the chair.

And after some further time, Mr. Speaker interrupted proceedings and announced that the time allotted for Motion 41 had expired.

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The Order of the Day for resuming the adjourned debate on the motion (Motion 33),

That this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, having been read,

The debate was resumed.

And the debate continuing, after some time it was on motion of Hon. Mr. G. Savoie, on behalf of the Honourable the Premier, adjourned over.

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And then, 6 p.m., the House adjourned.