

December 11, 2014

[Original]

Government Funding

Mr. Fitch: It was great to have the students in the House today.

[Translation]

It is great to see the students here in the House.

[Original]

I know that they have to get back to class and are going to miss the next half hour of question period, but I am sure that it would have been positive if they could have stayed.

On page 10 of the *Speech From the Throne*, the Premier talks about the infrastructure investment fund. Projects will have to meet at least one of the criteria that have been set out, and one of those criteria is to create immediate or long-term jobs. It sounds as though just about everyone will pass on that, pass and qualify for that fund.

In the past number of years, the city of Moncton and the Mayor of Moncton have been working on a project that would create immediate and long-term jobs and improve the economy, and they are looking to the province for some funding to make that project go forward.

Again, it is a straightforward question today. I am asking the Premier: Will he fund the Moncton...

Mr. Speaker: Time, Leader.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Of course, as the Leader of the Opposition just told the House, we plan to invest more money in our infrastructure. In this regard, there is not only government infrastructure but also provincial infrastructure in general.

We want to make these investments for several reasons. As the Leader of the Opposition just said, criteria have been set out. We want to make sure that, as a province, we save money. We also want to ensure that we create jobs in the short term, stimulate the economy, and provide ourselves with the infrastructure we need to thrive in the long term, as a province. We also want to ensure that we keep people safe when they travel around the province.



That is why we want to invest more money in our infrastructure. We will rely on certain criteria to study each project. This includes the project mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition. It will also include other projects that will land on our desks.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: I appreciate all of that. The question is basically straightforward. There is a timeline with milestones that will see this project commence within the next number of months, but a significant amount of groundwork needs to be completed before it can go ahead.

Anyone who has been to the former Highfield Square area on Main Street in Moncton can see that the demolition of that building has occurred and that the site preparation has started. A substantial amount has been invested by the city of Moncton and the taxpayers of that area to make way for the Moncton metro centre, which will, again, create immediate and future jobs.

The speech from the throne talks about one criterion needing to be met for projects to be funded. This project certainly meets the criteria set out in the speech from the throne. Will the Premier admit today that it qualified? Will he commit to funding that program?

Mr. Speaker: Time, Leader.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is important for us to say that the Opposition Leader is right. We have enumerated a list of criteria that will have to be followed for us to invest in projects. Of course, we would like to think that almost any project that is going to come forward has some merits. We would like to think that New Brunswickers have the same priorities as we do, and we believe that they do. They want us to create jobs, they want us to save money in the long term, they want us to set up our infrastructure for economic growth in the long term as well, and they want us to make sure that they can travel around the province in all safety.

We believe that a lot of the projects will fulfill at least one of those criteria, as the Leader of the Opposition mentioned. Of course, we are going to look at all the projects. It is all relative as well. We cannot invest in everything. We have serious financial challenges in front of us, and we want to take every project on its merits. We want to take every project and ensure that it is the right investment with the funds that we do have. We want to create jobs, but we also want to keep our finances intact and to get them in order. That is why we will analyze each project that comes to our desks.

Mr. Fitch: It is of much concern that the Premier is not putting this as a top priority, because the whole file has been reviewed, it has been budgeted, and it could be done over a period of time, in the next number of years, within budget and without creating additional new funding. The Premier talked about borrowing another \$150 million per year. Certainly, this project would fall within that category of creating jobs now and in the long term. It remains an integral part of sustaining and furthering the economic growth in the southeastern part of New



Brunswick. At the regional service commission, all mayors signed off on that project, stating that it would be good for the area.

If the Premier is now trying to backpedal and move away from this just because it was a project that we supported when we were in government, he is making a big, big mistake. He is penalizing all of Moncton, all of the southeastern part of New Brunswick, and, literally, all of New Brunswick because of this political agenda that he has brought forward. Will the Premier put that aside...

Mr. Speaker: Time.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: On the contrary, our government puts politics aside and makes sure every project is analyzed and its merits assessed based upon the criteria that we listed.

[*Original*]

Our government is committed to putting politics aside, actually, and making these decisions based on analyzing the projects. We are talking about millions of dollars that taxpayers have given us in trust to invest strategically, with our priority of creating jobs and getting our fiscal house in order. We owe it to New Brunswickers to look at each project and to make sure we analyze it. We need to understand fully what the benefits are, what some of the potential risks are, what could be some of the downfalls, and what could be some of the advantages. That is exactly what we are doing.

It is a bit more, I have to say, than the members opposite did. We cannot forget that the letter of offer by the previous government was given literally 11 hours before the writ for the last campaign was dropped. It seemed as though they had one criterion in their deliberations, and it was the campaign.

Our criteria are to get our fiscal house in order and to create jobs.

Mr. Fitch: The Premier has already said that he is not going to balance the budget this year. He has already said that it is going to be next year before any of the measures that the government is going to take through its program review are going to take effect, because it disbanded the team that we had put in place to look at those standards and cost-saving measures.

Again, the Premier is saying that he wants to create jobs in the economy, yet he is saying no to this project. It is really disturbing that he is not coming out and supporting this project, because it will create jobs, it will move the economy forward, and it will be positive. Again, he is just hiding behind some rhetoric.



There is a timeline that the city of Moncton had that would lead to this December. This December, it expected to award the contracts to the successful bidders, and that would depend on federal-provincial funding. The MP from the Greater Moncton area has said that the federal money is in place. The provincial money needs to be there. Do not...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition is trying to insinuate that we said no to this project, which is not the case. In fact, we are analyzing the project, like all the others that will come to our desks, and we have said this several times.

It is important to invest strategically, because we are facing very serious financial challenges. We are committed to getting public finances in order, and we will do so. I want to tell you that job creation will be our number one priority.

[*Original*]

We are going to invest in things that will create jobs and help us get our finances in order. However, I have to say that I find it ironic that the opposition members have spent a lot of time over the past few months criticizing our wanting to invest in infrastructure to create jobs, stimulate the economy, and ensure that New Brunswickers are safe across the province, but now, because it is in his backyard, the Leader of the Opposition is very much okay with our investing in infrastructure.

This is not based on politics. It is based on creating jobs and ensuring that we get our economy rolling in this province.

Mr. Fitch: The Premier said that he is reviewing this file. Is he reviewing the file and doing the work on it himself, or has he hired a consultant to do it? When will that work be done, and when will the decision be made?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Except for insinuating the part about the consultations, that is probably the most productive question we have gotten from the Leader of the Opposition, so I welcome it. We are analyzing it, like everything else. I hope that the members opposite can understand. When we came into government, we finally had to make the forestry deals public, we had to clean up the mess of the drug plan, and we had to get a proactive economic development agency in place. We had to ensure that we helped small businesses.

We want to ensure that we have a real consultative approach regarding the things that we are doing. We want to make sure that we have criteria, when it comes to our infrastructure, that are not politically slanted. They are based on how they will create jobs and help the future of our province.



Those are the things that we have been up to in the past few weeks and months. You can be certain that every project and certainly one of this magnitude... We are looking at it and analyzing it, and we are going to make the decision based on the criteria that were enumerated by the Leader of the Opposition. If it helps us to create jobs and grow the economy while keeping our finances under control, it is something we will look at.

Mr. Fitch: I certainly hope that the Premier has not put this project in jeopardy because of the deadlines, timelines, and milestones that had to be met. If he cannot announce the funding today, perhaps I could ask the local MLA, in whose backyard and riding it is, whether she, the member for Moncton South, supports this project.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As the Leader of the Opposition knows, our government is working together. The minister to whom he refers is someone who, obviously, supports our approach of ensuring that we are strategic and that we are looking through the criteria, the lens that we have established to invest in infrastructure. Of course, those on this side of the Legislature hold the priorities that we have as a government close to their hearts. We want to create jobs. We want to get our finances in order, and we want to help families that are struggling.

[Translation]

Therefore, we are working hard together to ensure that we are in a position to grow the economy, create jobs, provide further assistance to families, and get public finances in order. So, once again, every project that will be submitted to the government will be considered based upon its merits. The same goes for the multicultural complex in Moncton. As the member for Shediac Bay-Dieppe, I understand that this is an important project for the region, but, as Premier, I know that my government must analyze the whole project and take the time to make sure investing is done strategically.

Vitalité Health Network

Ms. Dubé: With respect to the file about the Ebola virus and Vitalité Health Network, we learned at the end of November that the Minister of Health was accusing the network and its health professionals of not being prepared to treat patients who could have this virus and of putting peoples' health at risk. However, on October 31, the Department of Health issued a news release designating two hospitals in the province, including Dr. Georges-L.-Dumont Hospital of Vitalité Health Network, as prepared to serve people.

Furthermore, we learned that physicians and health professionals say they are well prepared to serve people. We also know that the Premier was aware of the fact that the Minister of Health would send a letter containing such statements to Vitalité Health Network.

My question for the Premier is this: With the information that you have now, are you prepared today to restore the reputation of health professionals, our physicians, as well as that of Vitalité Health Network?



Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I believe the opposition member knows the answer to this question. For four or five days now, she has been rising in the House and finding different ways to ask the same question. She wants to talk about a letter that is of a confidential and personal nature.

Yet, the opposition member has already been a minister twice under two former Premiers. She has already been on this side of the House, so she is familiar with the Standing Rules and knows that we cannot say more on this question than what has already been said in the House and in public.

Ms. Dubé: I am asking the Premier again to stand up and restore the reputation of health professionals, and nothing less, because it is necessary. Here we have a minister who makes public accusations against health professionals. This letter was published in all the newspapers on several occasions, so it is in the public domain. Moreover, we know that it is public information, because a news release from the Department of Health was published at least a month earlier. In this news release, the department states that health professionals are prepared and that one of the Vitalité Health Network hospitals, Dr. Georges-L.-Dumont, is designated and prepared to serve the people of New Brunswick.

Mr. Premier, we are asking you to restore the reputations of the Dr. Georges-L.-Dumont Hospital and all health professionals in the Vitalité Health Network, who are working very hard...

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: This is the same question, so the answer will be the same. The member can read it in yesterday's Hansard.

Ms. Dubé: This answer speaks volumes. The Premier said several times that he wanted to do politics differently. How many times have we heard the Premier, when his party was in opposition, say in the House that physicians are the experts and they are the ones able to provide services? He said that they should be listened to and cooperated with.

Today, I am asking the same person, the current Premier, to rise in the House to apologize and acknowledge that physicians and health professionals have done their jobs and are prepared. He should say that his government is wrong.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Even if the member across the way screams the question at us, it does not change the answer.



Women's Participation

Mr. Coon: My question is for the Premier in his capacity as Minister responsible for Women's Equality. As we all know, women are severely underrepresented in this Legislative Assembly and in most decision-making bodies in society. The speech from the throne commits to taking steps to ensure that the voices of women are heard on policy-making bodies, a commitment I support. Will the Premier give consideration to providing the Voices of New Brunswick Women Working Group a mandate and appropriate resources to engage in the policy-making process in New Brunswick?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I thank the member opposite for his very good question. I agree with him that women are underrepresented here in the House. Women are also underrepresented in Parliament and even as mayors in New Brunswick. This is an issue that, unfortunately, arises in various levels of government, and we have to work together to fix it.

[*Original*]

I think it is a very good question. Yes, indeed, we are very committed to trying to find ways to increase women's ability to be in positions of influence. Being in the Legislature is certainly one of them. I, as Leader of the Liberal Party and certainly as Premier, am willing to listen to any ideas and suggestions that will help us to accomplish that here in the Legislature and, hopefully, even outside these walls. When it comes to the forum specifically, yes, we want to have it properly funded and we want to have it independent. We believe that that is important and that it can play an important role in feeding some of the suggestions on how we can better the lives of women.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Coon: While the Premier's commitment to appoint more women to agencies, boards, and commissions is a positive step, I would like to know how he intends to bring this about. Can the Premier outline the process by which more women will be appointed to agencies, boards, and commissions?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: To have done with the previous question, I want to add that, if possible, it is important that the Voices of New Brunswick Women Consensus-Building Forum be independent and well funded.



[Original]

It needs to be able to be funded and to be independent and to be able to do the research that it needs to do to find out what the status of women is in the province and to find out where there are gaps and how we can fill them. That is why this is important to us.

I just want to make one last point, and I will try to get to the specific question. This is important, not only because it is the right thing to do and it is going to help women in the province, but also because it is going to deliver better results for us. It is proven that when women are involved in organizations, those organizations deliver better results. That is one of the reasons we want to do it. It is also for our economy.

Specifically, there will be details to come on exactly how we will ensure that we have more women appointed to ABCs. We can tell you that there is the political will on this side of the Legislature to make sure that is always in the back of our minds when we are making appointments.

[Translation]

Mr. Coon: I know the Premier is satisfied with the idea of having a small Cabinet and that he is committed to promoting women's equality. I think this is why he took on the role of Minister responsible for Women's Equality himself. However, in the near future, it seems obvious that this role will be assigned to a woman. My question for the Premier is this: When will a woman be appointed Minister responsible for Women's Equality?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I certainly agree with the content of the previous questions and with the importance of ensuring that we fund this properly and also that we ensure that the forum is independent and that we have a voice for women. I certainly also believe that we have a role to play in appointing more women to agencies, boards, and commissions. That is one way that we have to contribute to ensuring that women are in positions of influence within our society, within government, and within New Brunswick.

However, I may disagree a little bit. I think it is a good sign—and I would like to think it is helpful—that the Minister responsible for Women's Equality is I myself, in the Premier's Office. Obviously, we can have more resources coming from the Premier's Office, which I think is a good thing. Obviously, it also allows the ministers who are women in our Cabinet to bring their perspectives to Cabinet and to their portfolios. It also encourages me, as Premier, to try to do that as well. Although I will not be able to do it as well as they could, I am sure, I do believe that it contributes to helping the status of women in our province.



Inquiries

Mr. Wetmore: I am pleased to say today that I agree with the Premier wholeheartedly on a matter. I would like to read from an editorial printed in the *Daily Gleaner* during the election campaign regarding the laying and dropping of charges against the member for Carleton-Victoria. It reads as follows:

Mr. Labonté says there will be a review of the... charges being laid. But that's not good enough for Liberal Leader Brian Gallant. He wants an independent review, not one done by the Crown prosecutor's office, and we agree.

"I believe they should not be doing it internally. They should not be evaluating themselves," Gallant said. "These serious questions should be answered by someone who is completely independent."

My question is for the Premier. Are you going to undertake a completely independent inquiry that you demanded during the recent election campaign?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: First, I want to thank the member of the opposition for his question, because it gives me the opportunity to address a very important topic. Yesterday, with my colleague the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour and the member for Hampton, I had the opportunity to talk about the importance of human rights. Within the concept of human rights, there is one very important aspect, which is equal justice for all. In this regard, we talked yesterday about the importance of principles. Well, there is a practical application of these principles.

[Original]

I will say this in English. One of the important tenets that will make sure that we do respect that equality is the fact that the public prosecutions office operates independently. Independent of what? Independent of the political arm of government, and that is very, very important. I have no doubt that the office of public prosecutions exercises a function...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Wetmore: The question was not answered. I would like to quote a media article published on September 15, where the Premier was quoted as follows:

"Obviously, this has something to do with the judicial system. It's something within the judicial system of New Brunswick that seems to have not worked properly, so I believe they should not be doing it internally. They should not be evaluating themselves," Gallant said. "We would like to see someone independent do this."



Gallant is essentially questioning the independence of the attorney general's office on the file.

"I think that's what everyone is asking themselves, and we believe because what has transpired that these serious questions should be answered by someone who is completely independent," Gallant said.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wetmore: Mr. Premier, as a lawyer, can you give me a reason why you would not appoint an independent committee?

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: The member opposite seems to like to make some quotes, so I will do the same. As of last September, when this affair became public... I take comfort in the fact that the then Attorney General said that he was "'absolutely certain' the decisions around the charges were made independently from government". That seems quite clear.

He also said this: "If he wants to, as director of prosecutions, independently review certain things, that is his business, that's his prerogative... It's not for government to do." And I completely agree.

Mr. Wetmore: We are here to talk about what the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Gallant, said at the time. I would like to read from a Liberal Party news release from September 14, entitled "Gallant calls on Alward to address 'unanswered questions' in Andrew Harvey affair". The questions put forth by the Liberal Party are as follows:

Were he (Alward), the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Natural Resources, or any of his other ministers briefed on the charges, and if so when?

What is the official policy for the Office of the Attorney General to follow to take these types of charges to court, and was it followed in this case?

If an independent review of the charges was going to take place, why did it only take place after the charges went to court, rather than before?

Am I to understand that the Premier will not appoint an independent inquiry? This is what the Premier said at the time. This is what we would like answered. Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: Yesterday, in the House, we heard the opposition talk about the important principles of democracy. We have seen the opposition rise and talk about principles. Now, in



this case, we are talking about a fundamental principle of our democracy, and I find it sad that the opposition does not seem to want to respect it.

I repeat: The office of the Public Prosecution Branch of New Brunswick must act independently to ensure equal justice for all. As Attorney General, I intend to ensure that this principle is respected.

[Original]

Forestry

Mr. Savoie: It is certainly a pleasure to be here asking questions of the Minister of Natural Resources. He is certainly a member that I have a lot of respect for.

We know that, under the last Liberal government, the forestry industry became a sunset industry because it did not receive much-needed support from the Liberal government of the day. It could not compete on the world stage. Under the previous government, the forestry strategy was created, enabling mills and industry to compete on the world stage. They made record investments—private sector investments—because they could count on a reliable wood supply. This, in turn, created hundreds of jobs.

My question to the minister is this: Considering that the forestry industry is now able to create good-paying private sector jobs, does the minister support the forestry strategy?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Landry: I thank my colleague opposite for his question and congratulate him on his recent election. There are several questions to answer here.

When the previous government, in desperate times, put forward the forestry plan, the opposition did not necessarily agree with it, because we could never figure out what it was based on.

Yesterday, I was pleased to rise in the House and table the full forestry plan, which is something the previous government was never willing to do. However, one thing is certain: Our goal is to create jobs, and we are now in a better position to know what is in this plan. As I told journalists yesterday, in six or eight weeks, we will tell you what we are planning to do with this plan.

[Original]

Mr. Savoie: I will take that as not yet being the answer that I was looking for.

In the past week, we have seen major mills close down in Quebec, and a mill in Maine also closed down. The forestry industry is still fragile, but, again, thanks to our forestry strategy, we



have record investments by companies here in New Brunswick. By reviewing or revisiting the forestry strategy, the government is now creating uncertainty for the companies that have made investments of hundreds of millions of dollars. The government has been in power for two months, which is plenty of time to revisit this strategy.

My question is this: When will you be finished the review? When will you stop the uncertainty you have created and let New Brunswickers know that the 22 000 people who rely on the forestry sector can continue to go to work, pay taxes, and ultimately support this government by growing revenues through job creation, which is something that this government touts as its number one priority?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Landry: Our government's priority remains unchanged: It is creating jobs, but not at any price.

When I look at what is going on in Quebec with the forest industry, I find it quite unfortunate. I do not know why the opposition is so anxious to get all the details, when I told them they would get them in a few weeks. It must be borne in mind that it took the former government four years to unveil its forestry plan.

At this time, I do not think we have anything to learn from the members of the previous government. In addition, I would like to ask the opposition to give us time to do our work properly. Companies are aware of our position, since I have already met with them. In any case, we will see what we can do to either improve the plan or leave it as is. I can tell you that, in six or eight weeks, the opposition will receive an answer.

[*Original*]

Mr. Savoie: We know that those documents that were tabled yesterday... I appreciate the minister doing that, but they would have come out anyway over the normal course of business that these agreements normally take.

We also know that the strategy saved Twin Rivers and the mill in Chaleur. There have been investments in Chipman, Doaktown, Sussex, and Saint John, yet, in today's newspaper, the minister is quoted as saying that there is a lot the government members do not like about the plan. It sounds as though they already know what they want to change. There is a lot that they do not like. That is the way they feel about shale gas, and the result of that is that they want to put a moratorium on shale gas. We are hearing the same thing about the forestry strategy.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order, member.



Mr. Savoie: This is my question to the minister: Is the government planning a moratorium on the forestry industry as it wants to do with shale gas? If not, when will we know what the government wants to change?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Landry: I am pleased to rise for a third time to say just about the same thing. However, with regard to the forest industry, what we did not like about the previous government is that negotiations took place behind closed doors and we were never able to find out what was said. A couple of days after the announcement, corporations came forward and said they would invest roughly \$500 million. Have there been negotiations without anyone knowing about it? This is what we did not like when we were in opposition.

As for shale gas, I think the previous government had said at some point that it did not want to have a referendum, because the election would be its referendum. So, I can tell you that we have seen the results of this referendum, and that is why these people are in opposition.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: The time for question period has expired.

