

December 17, 2014

[Original]

Government Finances

Mr. Fitch: I know that the Premier would want to get up today and clarify the remarks made by Justin Trudeau and the social license with respect to the west-east pipeline, but we cannot take the time of the Legislature to check with the Premier to see whether he agrees with all the silly things that Justin Trudeau says. We have more important issues here in the province, such as financial issues.

When we look at the financial situation today, it is with respect to the transfer payments from Ottawa. The Finance Minister is on record as saying that the \$45-million increase is not enough—we need a better deal. Can the Finance Minister please stand up in the House today and tell us why he chose not to go to Ottawa to meet with the federal Finance Minister and his counterparts to start negotiating to get a better deal for New Brunswick? Why did he choose to stay home and not to go to those meetings?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Thank you for the first question on a matter that is very important to the province. Transfer payments to the province of New Brunswick have always been a very essential and critical part of how we operate in the province. When we look at the national average increase in terms of transfer payments, we are getting 4.5% incremental revenue to transfer payments. However, the province of New Brunswick is receiving only 1.7%, and that is why we said in our platform that this is our commitment and that we want to have a better deal.

I actually reached out to the federal minister to have conversations with regard to this matter because I think it is very important for New Brunswickers. On this side of the House, we want to have a true partner in the federal government to help us out, to create more jobs, and to make life more affordable for the citizens of New Brunswick. Thank you.

Mr. Fitch: Again, the Minister of Finance and of Transportation and Infrastructure said that he made the choice not to go to Ottawa, but he reached out to the minister. He had an opportunity to meet face to face, to sit down, and to discuss the issues of the province of New Brunswick. He chose to go out and look at a pothole on the back roads of Aboujagane.

My question is this: Has the Minister of Finance thrown up his hands and given up on the plan of prosperity for New Brunswick? He has turned his back on natural resource development here in the province, and he has said that the fiscal plan for the future of the province of New Brunswick is just to continue to look for increases in the financial transfer payments from Ottawa. Is that the plan he is touting now?



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Melanson: It is important to remember that the priority of the current New Brunswick government is job creation. With the measures we will be announcing soon, through the capital budget speech, and with the measures our government has taken since being elected, we will ensure that conditions are right for job creation.

That being said, I want to remind the Leader of the Opposition that New Brunswickers have gone through a very difficult few days, because Mother Nature did not warn us of the serious inconvenience we would experience and of the damages that would be inflicted on New Brunswick roads.

As Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, I personally went to assess the damage caused by the weather in New Brunswick, and it is extremely serious. We want to make sure people's safety is the first priority when we make decisions about repairing infrastructure.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: We understand the seriousness of the damage that was done to the roads in areas of the province. We have been through that before. Do you know what? It will probably happen again. The point is that these meetings happen only on rare occasions and the minister had an option. He had the opportunity to go to Ottawa and to start negotiations to try to get a better deal. He keeps saying: We need more. He chose to go to a photo op. He chose to go to a photo op, just as some of his colleagues used to do whenever natural disasters occurred here in New Brunswick.

They used to attack the civil servants. They used to attack NB Power. They used to attack the road workers. Now, they are out there trying to say that they are going to get this fixed. The opportunity to go to Ottawa is an opportunity lost. Again, this is what happens with a small Cabinet. Your Finance Minister was trying to make the decision: Do I put on my DTI hat today, or do I put on my Finance Minister hat today? The roads are still not fixed. You had an opportunity to go to Ottawa. Why did you choose not to go to Ottawa?

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I want to remind the Leader of the Official Opposition that the transfer payments that were announced for New Brunswick and across the land were evaluated and decided while his party was in government. His government should have been negotiating and working really, really hard on behalf of New Brunswickers to try to change the level of transfer payments to the province of New Brunswick.

The Premier of New Brunswick has already spoken with the Prime Minister of Canada on this matter and many other matters. He has also met with some of his federal counterparts. I have reached out to the federal Finance Minister to have a conversation, an in-depth discussion



about understanding the needs of New Brunswick. That is why it is part of our commitment and part of our platform, and we are on it.

Mr. Fitch: Once again, the government's actions do not line up with the words that its members say. We want the same criteria that we were judged on to be the criteria on which they are judged. They talk about net jobs, and then they talk about jobs created. It is the same thing here. They talk about why we did not get a better deal, yet they are neglecting to do the same thing with their own opportunity that was missed in the past weeks.

Again, those meetings are important because you get to talk to colleagues right across Canada. You get to talk face to face with the federal Finance Minister. This is where the Minister of Finance and of Transportation and Infrastructure made a choice, and that choice does not line up with his actions, where he continued to criticize us about making a better deal. He did not take the opportunity. At the first opportunity that he had to go to the federal government to try to work out a deal, he chose to stay home. He chose to stay home to get his picture in the paper, and that is like the members from other areas when they were in opposition. Why did he not go to Ottawa?

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I think it must be pointed out that the Premier of New Brunswick has already spoken to the Prime Minister, Mr. Harper.

It is also important to point out that I have already informed the federal Minister of Finance that I wanted to speak with him to explain the situation in New Brunswick. According to information we have received, the level of federal transfer payments for New Brunswick was decided on and analyzed when the former government was in office.

I think it is important to point out that the purpose of the meeting of finance ministers this week was to explain what federal transfer payments will be. Government members chose to stay in New Brunswick to finish planning their capital budget. I think the investments that we are going to make, and that we will announce today, will be essential to job creation and will help keep people here in New Brunswick.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Fitch: Once again, the words of the minister do not line up with his actions. His government is pushing away an opportunity to move forward on natural resource development in New Brunswick. Its members are putting on a moratorium, as they have said.



He admits today that the Premier's ability to negotiate with Ottawa has failed. As he said, the transfer payments are not what he wants. He reminds me of the story of Oliver Twist, when he goes to the headmaster and says: "Please, sir, I want some more". This is what these government members do. They are great on clichés and clips, but, when it comes to getting the job done, they fail. They said that they would do better. They will not. They cannot because they do not have the ability to do so. Will the minister admit that he would rather look at potholes as opposed to going to get a better deal for New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: One thing that I will admit, on behalf of our government, is that our members are focused. We are focused on creating the right conditions for job creation for New Brunswick and New Brunswickers. We have a plan. We have a plan to put in place the right conditions to allow the private sector to invest, to export, and to create jobs in our province. We will also be a partner with the private sector, and we will be investing strategically in our capital investment program. We will see more sustainable long-term economic growth, and that will bring us some predictable revenue streams so that we can balance the books, make life more affordable for New Brunswick families, and have a sustainable situation for our province.

[Translation]

Health Care System

Ms. Dubé: This morning, we met with the Pharmacists' Association. In 2012, when I was Minister of Health, a working committee was established with the Department of Health and this association to determine to what extent health professionals should be involved in the health care system, and the work has continued with my successor. My question for the Minister of Health is this: Does this committee still exist? If so, have you held meetings with the committee since taking office?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I thank the member for the question. One thing is certain: In our government's campaign platform, one of the commitments, which falls within my purview as Minister of Health, is actually to work with pharmacists in the province to expand their responsibilities and broaden their role in health care here in New Brunswick. I can tell you that, of all health professionals, it is this association that I have most often met with since I became Minister of Health. So, needless to say, we are having discussions. Actually, we met yesterday, and the association informed me of its priority files for the coming months. As for me, I made a commitment to the association to discuss its priorities as soon as possible.

Ms. Dubé: It is interesting to see the Minister of Health rise in the House to talk about health. By the way, my question is clear, and I know you just met the association yesterday, and that it was the first time since you were appointed Minister of Health. However, my question is really meant to find out whether the working committee, which was set up to include officials from the department and the association to promote the profession, scope of practice, and



responsibilities of these health network professionals in the health care system, is still in place. If not, do you intend to reactivate it?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: To answer the question from the member opposite, to my knowledge, the committee has not met since the election. However, as I mentioned, I have met with representatives of the association a few times, at their request. So, we have discussed the priorities of this association, and I have committed, as recently as yesterday, and even again this morning, during the breakfast held by this association for all members, to get back to them as quickly as possible with answers about priority matters. However, as I mentioned, we are also committed to working with the Pharmacists' Association to ensure we can expand the role played by these professionals in the provincial health care system.

Ms. Dubé: I am happy to hear that you met with this association just yesterday, for the first time, and again this morning, during the breakfast. A lot of work was done when we were in government, under the leadership of David Alward, with regard to this association. We enhanced the role of pharmacists, and I could share a list of initiatives with the minister. So, it is important that this working committee be able to continue to look at all the roles these professionals could play in the health care system.

The minister tells us that he has only met with the association yesterday and this morning, and we know that its collective agreement has expired, so what are you waiting for? If you are only beginning to hold meetings, is a new collective agreement a possibility?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I thought everything was going well, but, regarding the last question, I will ask the member to check her facts. I said I had met representatives from this association yesterday and this morning, but that I had met them before.

The collective agreement the member is talking about has not expired; it is still in effect until the end of March or April, so we have time to discuss it.

In our campaign platform, we also committed to creating a steering committee bringing together all front-line health professionals. This committee will be able to have discussions and advise me, as minister, as well as our government, to make progress on files that are important because they affect the public and front-line health professionals.

So, we will continue our work with this association and with all other health professionals.

[Original]

Climate Change

Mr. Coon: My question is for the Premier. The extreme weather that we have been experiencing is a reminder that our existing infrastructure was not designed to withstand the impacts of climate change, but climate change is what we have, and it is speeding up. During



the last rainstorm, raw sewage poured into the Petitcodiac River because the treatment system was not designed to handle more than 25 mm of intense rain. On a single road, Route 933 outside Shediac, a \$1-million hole opened up as a result of the intense rainstorm.

Can the Premier assure us that increased infrastructure spending is not only about creating jobs, but that spending will be focused on infrastructure that is designed to ensure that climate change will never put our safety, our health, or our environment at risk?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I am very pleased with the question put to me.

It must be understood that, in New Brunswick, some of our infrastructure was built some time ago. Throughout the years, the level of investment in the maintenance of this infrastructure has not been adequate. This is why we will announce a capital budget today. We are going to make sure that, when investments are made, they are made according to current standards and not older ones. We must think about ensuring roads are better able to withstand the severe storms Mother Nature throws at us, which are so unpredictable.

It must also be noted that initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will be included in the capital budget we will table today, and I am very happy about this. So, I greatly appreciate the question from the Leader of the Green Party.

[*Original*]

Mr. Coon: New Brunswick's own 2014 climate action plan says that Fredericton and Moncton have had more extreme rainfall events in the past decade than in any other decade on record. The report says that, as climate change accelerates, we can expect even more intense weather across all parts of New Brunswick, with more frequent flooding, soil erosion, and water contamination, not to mention frequent and expensive washouts on our roads and the destruction of bridges. This is creating real hardship for New Brunswickers.

Can the Premier guarantee that the engineers hired to design the new infrastructure have been educated on the impacts of climate change and will specify appropriate construction measures to protect New Brunswickers from harm in the future? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Again, the initiative that we will be announcing today in the capital budget actually follows what the honourable member has mentioned. It is very, very critical that we build infrastructure that—with today's standards, in terms of how we build our infrastructure—can withstand as much as possible some of these big and unpredictable storms that we face.

I hope that the third party leader has a conversation with the opposition members because they seem to be opposing this infrastructure initiative that we announced during the campaign and that we will be explaining in more detail today. New Brunswickers expect to have safe,



strong, and solid infrastructure that they can use and avoid some of the hardship that the honourable member just mentioned. That is why we are going ahead with this initiative, and details will follow today.

Mr. Coon: The growing damage caused by rapid climate change is beginning to cost the public purse a lot of money at a time when we are faced with a significant deficit and a large debt. The cost of the repairs needed following the storms of 2014 is well past \$50 million, by my calculations. This far exceeds the revenue of \$30 million that will be raised next year by rolling back the property tax cuts on business. How does the Premier plan to accommodate the rapidly growing cost of climate change in next year's provincial budget?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Obviously, all of what I said earlier would still be applicable to answer the question. Certainly, climate change is something that we are taking seriously. That is why you will hear in the capital budget that we will have a specific initiative. We will use our assets to do an energy retrofit program so that we can have more efficient buildings and reduce carbon emissions in the province.

Certainly, it is very important that we do focus on using asset management principles in making our decisions on how to allocate these tax dollars, which are very precious to taxpayers because these are their dollars. In a few hours or minutes, we will be able to explain the capital budget in detail, and I hope the honourable member will be pleased with this initiative.

Hiring

Mr. Steeves: On Friday, I was asking questions of the Minister of Social Development. Three times, I was directed to speak to Dan Murphy. I will quote them. The first was: "They can call Dan Murphy, who is the Executive Director of the NBLA". The second was: "If they have some concerns with the Liberal Party, they can go and talk to the executive director, Dan Murphy." The third time, it was: "I am sure that Dan Murphy, Executive Director of the NBLA, would be happy to sit down with the member opposite".

My question today is this: Is the minister aware of whether this is the same Dan Murphy who is listed as having a government position in the Office of Government Members as Director of Research? Is the Liberal government using taxpayers' dollars to fund a paycheque for the Executive Director of the New Brunswick Liberal Association?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Given the question that the member opposite is asking our government, I really have to ask him why he would think the Minister of Social Development should be answering that. I would really like him to explain why he would be singling her out. I would really like that explanation. Last time, when we had this questioning—I do appreciate now, at least, there are some funds that are the people's money in the question—we made it very clear that we want to talk about government initiatives here and that we want the opposition to hold us to account.



We have made it very public that Dan Murphy is the Executive Director—interim Executive Director, in fairness—of the Liberal Party, and he is doing a very good job. As has been the case in the past for many parties, he has another role as well, and he is taking that role very seriously. Again, I would direct the member opposite to direct specific questions about the Liberal Party to Dan Murphy. I would also ask him why in the world he would think that the Minister of Social Development should be answering these questions.

Mr. Steeves: The question, when I started out, was about the Social Development Minister's executive assistant. Anyway, we will move on from that.

Putting an end to patronage was something that this government was going to do differently. We heard that a number of times—putting an end to patronage to ensure that the most qualified candidates are chosen to work in provincial-level roles.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government END POLITICAL PATRONAGE by:

.....
b) Ensuring provincial government positions are filled through a competitive process wherein the most qualified candidate is hired.

That is from *Changing our political culture*, and that is a reference. Now, of course, Dan Murphy was not the Executive Director of the Liberal Party when this policy was crafted. The Executive Director at that time was Ellen Creighton. Does the Premier know where Ellen Creighton might be working these days?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I would really appreciate it if the member opposite would refrain from using sarcasm in his questions. We have a very important role to play here in the House. The opposition also has an important role to play, namely making sure the government is accountable. Sarcasm is of no use to ensure the government is accountable for files that are important to New Brunswickers.

Of course, I know where the person you are talking about works; she works in the Office of the Premier.

I would also like to point something out to the members opposite. Indeed, we have far fewer deputy ministers who are political appointees than the former government. In fact, only the Chief of Staff in the Office of the Premier, Greg Byrne, is affiliated with the Liberal Party. Unlike what was happening under the previous government, all the other deputy ministers come from the civil service.



[Original]

Mr. Steeves: I am sorry for the sarcasm. Sometimes, it is all we have left. I am sorry.

Having “Executive Director of the New Brunswick Liberal Association” on one’s résumé certainly seems to help a person to be the most qualified candidate for the job. This government was going to do things differently. I would like to know when we will start to see that. The Premier stated that people working on his campaign should not necessarily expect to get a job. Here is a question that should trigger a very short answer: Can the Premier give us a list of all the people who worked on his campaign who did not get a job?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We want to change the political culture here in our province, and, quite frankly, we will need help from the opposition. Opposition members are asking us questions that are not constructive at all; they are dripping with sarcasm, which does not help advance important issues for New Brunswickers, such as creating jobs, growing the economy, getting our fiscal house in order, and providing assistance to families.

[Original]

Meanwhile, while the opposition is focused on sarcasm, trying to talk about things that pertain to the nature of the Liberal Party and not the nature of the government, we are going to focus on job creation. We are going to focus on growing the economy. We are going to focus on ensuring that we get our finances in order. We are going to ensure that we help families in our province who are struggling.

Legislative Reform

Mr. Jody Carr: Often, the Premier speaks of being transparent, open, and collaborative, but, increasingly, his actions do not line up with his words. When it comes to the process of making rule changes for this House, it is anything but that. The 31 rule changes, his members say, were dictated by the Premier’s Office. Can the Premier explain how these changes can be made without input and collaboration from the opposition or outside experts? The process goes completely against your own words, Mr. Premier. Can you explain why this is the case?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: I want to thank the member opposite for a very important question. We have been very clear in our platform. We are committed to modernizing the Legislature. We are committed to being more transparent and more open. I want to remind the member opposite that this process started over a decade ago, in 2003, with the Commission on Legislative Democracy, which was put in place by former Premier Bernard Lord. I know that the member opposite who just asked the question was a member of that team. In fact, the previous government of Mr. Alward, of which many of the members opposite were a part, continued



with that process and made many changes, which we cooperated with at that time. We are continuing with the process, and it is our intention to move forward with these changes.

Mr. Jody Carr: The member opposite said very clearly—and I would agree with him about being clear—that the opposition cooperated. The government collaborated with the opposition when the former Premier was in office. When former Premier Bernard Lord was in office, there was collaboration.

Since the Premier is so open to being open and transparent and since he has written these rules from his office, 31 rule changes... The difference in this case is that the process to get to these changes has been everything but open, transparent, and collaborative. It is a flawed process. If you are serious, which we are, about modernizing the rules and the process in this House—if you are truly serious, Mr. Premier—put your words into action. Make sure that you have a collaborative process with the opposition and others in this province to do better and to make these improvements better. Why are you refusing to be open, transparent, and collaborative, since that is what you say you are?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: We have been very open and transparent. In fact, I am going to read from the platform on which we were elected, under the heading A More Effective Legislature: “Many of the practices in our legislature are out of date. We need to modernize the rules”.

In our platform, we list many of the things that are part of these changes. We have a very clear mandate to move forward with these changes. We have worked collaboratively. We met with the parliamentary leader for the opposition prior to the committee structure being put in place. We had a meeting with the Standing Committee on Procedure, where the committee had a consensus that we move forward. We are following the process that is in place in order to do so, and we will continue to do so. We will continue to work collaboratively with the members of the opposition. It is unfortunate that they do not want to work with us.

Mr. Speaker: Final question.

Mr. Jody Carr: It is astonishing. The Premier of this province may want to rule the government with an iron fist, but what he needs to learn and what this government needs to learn is that they do not have the right to rule the people’s House with an iron fist, with absolute power. We have to make sure that the government is aware that not only did this process of collaboration on the workings of this House start a decade ago... It was over 200 years ago, and this House is built on collaboration.

When the members opposite present 31 rule changes that were dictated by the Premier’s Office, and he refused to answer about... They go to a committee, and there is less than an hour in that committee. The report has not been made by consensus. The opposition wants true collaboration. If you are serious about improving the rules and the operation of this House, the Premier will take leadership and not hide behind his member opposite. Will you remove the report and have true, serious collaboration so that we can have the best rules possible?



Hon. Mr. Fraser: What the member across the way is talking about is very confusing. He talks about the committee not having enough time, but one of the changes to the rules is to allow more time for the opposition in committee. There are mixed messages coming from across.

We have been very clear. We are willing to collaborate and cooperate with the official opposition.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Fraser: We have been very open and transparent. It is part of our platform. We have a clear mandate. If those members are not aware of what happened on election day... They are sitting on the opposite side for a reason.

We are in government now, and we are going to take action. We are going to ensure that the Legislature is modernized, that it is more open and transparent, and that we are going to be able to work more collaboratively and more efficiently in a more respectful manner. It is unfortunate that the members opposite do not want to take that same route. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: During question period, there was an incident in which a member's name was used. I would caution all Members of the Legislative Assembly to call their fellow members by their ridings as opposed to their names. Thank you, members.

