

February 12, 2015

[Original]

Civil Service

Mr. Fitch: The other day, the Premier mentioned that he had not even met Stephen Lund, the new CEO of Opportunities New Brunswick, one of the politically motivated reorganizations of Invest NB and Economic Development. That kind of surprised me because I was of the understanding that the Premier approved all hirings and firings within the government. Is that the case?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is a sad day today because we have a lot of important issues that we need to debate here in New Brunswick. We face serious challenges, and, unfortunately, all we see from the other side is sarcasm and puns and some of them trying to be poetic and obviously failing at it.

It is incredibly important because we should be having a proper discussion and debate on the floor of the Legislature. We need to make difficult decisions when it is going to come to our finances, and we hope that the opposition members will help us and play a role by giving us their suggestions and ideas. Unfortunately, that has not been the case so far. However, this is early in the mandate of this government, so we certainly hope that the opposition will come around and be a little more constructive.

Mr. Fitch: We have given many suggestions, and, again, the government has not followed them.

I am led to believe from the answer by the Premier that he is unaware of the political hirings and firings within the government. Is that the case?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Again, the Leader of the Opposition is using the word “political” before he ends his question. It is completely off the rails when it comes to the point that he is trying to make.

We have been very, very transparent and very clear about the process of selecting the CEO of Opportunities New Brunswick. I said that we would hire the CEOs of our Crown corporations based on merit and competence. That is exactly what we did.

Stephen Lund, I believe, has the experience to grab that organization and take it to levels that we have never seen any economic development agency in the province get to. He did a phenomenal job in Nova Scotia. He is someone who has been in the industry for a very long time, and we are excited that this Saint Johner wants to come back to New Brunswick and be a part of what we are trying to create here in New Brunswick, the conditions for economic



growth and job creation. I am very excited about the fact that he was chosen based on competence and merit. He was chosen by an independent process. I was very happy to speak to him on the phone afterward, and I am very happy to see what he will do for us.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Mr. Fitch: The Premier entered government saying that he wanted to do things differently and that he wanted to run things differently. We saw the firings right away, right off the top, of political figures with high profiles.

The other point that I was trying to make is that 14 deputy ministers have left government since he took over. Some of them were political, but some of them were not—Marc Léger, Jane Garbutt, Robert Rioux... The last two were not even mentioned in the press release that was released late on a Friday afternoon just a couple of weeks ago.

I guess the question, again, comes down to this. If the Premier is unaware of these hirings and firings within his own government, the question is: Is this a clash of ideals, or is it a clash of style?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As the Leader of the Opposition well knows, I will not comment on the human resource issues of our government. However, I can tell you that we are very proud of our civil service team; we are very proud of the leadership of the civil service. Civil servants care deeply about the well-being of their province and of their regions. These people work really hard to help us as best they can to create jobs, grow the economy, get our fiscal house in order, and, of course, help families and communities throughout the province.

I am very proud of our civil service team. We will need civil servants' help when we carry out the Strategic Program Review. We have very clearly indicated that we need the ideas and suggestions of everyone in the province, which includes people who work in the civil service. So far, they have done a good job participating in the process, and I am sure they will continue to do so.

I am asking the Leader of the Opposition to understand that I cannot comment specifically on human resource files.

[*Original*]

Mr. Fitch: It is interesting that the Premier is asking for ideas and asking for suggestions. These 14 deputy ministers who have left the civil service had over 200 years of experience. You would think that people with 200 years of experience would have some good ideas. We know that some of them were involved with us and they had some good ideas, but, again, either they



were asked to leave or they left through a clash of ideals or style. The Premier will not answer that.

It is really disturbing when... The Premier is looking for ideas from people, yet we heard yesterday that Stephen Smith from the Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture was let go. This was a person who had won an open competition under the *Civil Service Act*. Why is the Premier reaching so far down into the bureaucracy to get at people who may have a political history when they could also be contributing to the ideas that could help to save this government money?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As I just said in my previous answer, I cannot comment on human resource files. I cannot comment on specific people or situations, as the Leader of the Opposition would have me do with his questioning.

What I can say is that we are very proud of the civil service. We are very proud of the leadership of the civil service, and we are very proud to be working with them. There are a lot of people who care deeply about their province, a lot of people who care deeply about their regions, and a lot of people who care deeply about the files that they administer for government. We are very happy with the civil servants and the work that they are giving us in trying to help build our economy, create jobs, get our finances in order, and, of course, help families and communities across the province.

We are very grateful as well that the civil service wants to help us over the next few months with the Strategic Program Review. If we are going to get our finances in order, we need the ideas and suggestions of all New Brunswickers. That includes the civil service, and it certainly includes the people on the front lines who help us to deliver the important social programs. We look forward to working with them in the future.

Mr. Fitch: The Premier will not speak of individual individuals, but individuals who were hired through an open competition under the *Civil Service Act*... Would the Premier say he believes that the *Civil Service Act* is flawed? Are they going to change it?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As I said, I know that the Leader of the Opposition is now trying to pretend he is talking about generalities, but we all know that he is trying to mention specific situations. I cannot comment on human resource matters in general, and I certainly would not do that on the floor of the Legislature.

It is important for us to work continuously with our civil service. There will be tough decisions to be made. There will be hard choices to be made, but we believe that, with the hard work, dedication, and commitment of the civil service, we can overcome these challenges.



[Translation]

We are under no illusions; there is no doubt that difficult decisions will have to be made, and they will also affect the civil service. However, with the leadership of the people working for the province, I am confident that we can make the choices that will help us make things better in the province and that will mitigate any potential negative impact.

I am very proud of the civil service, and I am really looking forward to continuing to work with civil servants in the future.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: If the Premier will not talk about the people he has fired... How can they expect to get an independent, competent civil service if he does not believe in the *Civil Service Act*?

I have another question for the Premier. Under the right to information Act, we asked for a list of all the new hires from September 22 to the present. Now, it is well beyond the time limit for the right to information, so we are wondering: Is the Premier continuing to add names to that list and that is why he cannot give it to us? Or is it just so politically damaging that he does not want to release it?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I cannot speak specifically to the RTI mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition. I will certainly look into it if there has been a delay, and I will certainly make sure that my office and the government respond to the request for information as fast as they possibly can. However, as the Leader of the Opposition would know with his time in government, sometimes, it does take time to gather all the information. I do not know specifically the request that he is mentioning, but I will certainly look to see whether there have been any time issues there.

However, I have to say that I hope the opposition members are not going to continue down the line that they have been going down in the last weeks and months since they became the opposition. They assert things that we do not believe are really the case. They assert things, and they hope that, if they repeat them over and over again, the public will actually believe that what they are saying is true. It is unfortunate, because we have to have a proper dialogue here on the floor of the Legislature if we are going to get our province on the right track. I think that New Brunswickers expect more from their government, and that includes the elected officials in the opposition.

Mr. Fitch: It is very rich that the Premier says that we are saying things over and over in the hope that people will believe them. We speak the truth on this side, and the reason that we say things over and over and over is that there are members in his front row who continually said things that were not friendly with the facts. Again, that perception was what became some of the reality.



I wonder if the Premier can assure the civil servants and the general public today that, in his systematic firing of deputy ministers, directors, and people in the civil service, it is not just a political witch hunt and that it is not just a way of promoting results through fear of firing but that it is under the *Civil Service Act* and these revengeful firings will stop.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: After I raise the point, they go and do exactly what I just said. They assert things, trying to pretend that they are true. They assert things, trying to say that, if they repeat it and repeat it, it becomes more and more true.

I have listened to the opposition today. They talk about our having secret plans. It is incredibly unfortunate when the Minister responsible for Strategic Program Review, the whole government, and I have repeatedly clarified that there have been zero decisions made regarding Strategic Program Review. There has not been one decision made under that process. Why is that the case? It is because we want to talk to New Brunswickers. We want to get their ideas and suggestions. What are their priorities? What are their concerns? How can we work with all New Brunswickers to really tackle the challenges that are before us? Having the opposition assert things that have never been said on this side of the Legislature is not helping and is not constructive. We expect more from the opposition.

[Translation]

Social Programs

Ms. Dubé: My question is for the Minister of Social Development. I would like her to explain to the House what progress she has made regarding over \$7 million that was included in her budget specifically for the first year of development of the Home First Strategy. Since we only have a month and a half left before the end of the current fiscal year, can the minister tell us more precisely how the \$7 million was invested? How was the money used, and what progress has the minister made on this file?

[Original]

Hon. Ms. Rogers: I would like to thank the member opposite for the question. We are proceeding on target with the plan, and moving New Brunswick forward means that we want to ensure that our seniors do get the care that they need and the quality of life that they deserve. Most nursing home infrastructure projects are well under way, those that were in the previous plan, and we are well on our way with the subsequent plan. Most projects are expected to be completed by 2016. Again, this is a high priority for us, and we work with all sectors involved in long-term care.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: While I am asking the minister to give us a breakdown of the \$7 million that had to be invested specifically in the Home First Strategy, I would like to note that this amount was not



necessarily related to building nursing homes. In fact, the budget for nursing home construction is a completely different matter.

My question is this: Can you give a breakdown of the more than \$7 million that was voted in the House when the last budget was passed for the implementation of the Home First Strategy, which was meant to help people stay healthy longer at home? So, I am not talking about infrastructure, but about senior care.

Again, I am asking the minister to tell us what she will do with the \$7 million in the budget, which will come to an end in a month and a half. Can she give us the specifics of what has been done with this money?

[Original]

Hon. Ms. Rogers: Again, we are continuing to give seniors the best care that we can, and we have been moving forward on this file. Our first priority is to keep seniors in their homes as long as possible and to give them the supports that they need in this area. We are working very closely with other partners. Again, we are investing more than \$130 million for in-home support services, and the home support program is currently serving approximately 4 400 seniors. Our government is very committed to bringing forward a long-term care Act to ensure clear and consistent expectations for seniors in nursing homes as well as for those in special care homes and those receiving home care.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: The minister just answered our question. She had over \$7 million for the first year of the Home First Strategy, yet no money was invested—zero. In fact, we did not hear any announcement. This strategic plan had been accepted by both parties in the House, and, even if the current minister was not in the House at that time, she should know that the members sitting around her had approved, accepted, and even glorified the strategic plan that had been developed with all the partners.

Perhaps the minister can confirm this: Is the \$7 million included in the \$90 million that the Minister of Finance has already saved, and is that why her government does not necessarily expect to continue with the Home First Strategy so that seniors can stay in their homes longer?

[Original]

Hon. Ms. Rogers: We are continuing with the Home First Strategy, and we are continuing, according to the plan, with caring for seniors on a continuum. We want to provide cradle-to-grave care for all the vulnerable people in our population, and we are continuing according to plan. In fact, we are thinking ahead for the next several years with regard to how we can do this work better for our seniors.



Prisoners

Mr. Northrup: Yesterday, we heard from the Minister of Public Safety that serial killer Allan Legere is less of a threat now that he is in a less secure institution but farther away. There is so much that does not make sense in this statement that I am not quite sure where to begin. I think that I would like to start by offering the minister an opportunity to change his remarks now that he has had a chance to sleep on this and to discuss it with the Minister of Tourism. Would the Minister of Public Safety like to withdraw the remarks he made yesterday regarding the transfer of this madman and murderer?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: Thank you for the question. As I stated yesterday, first of all, I want to thank the MLA for Miramichi. On this side of the floor, we work as a team. I personally want to say that he is dedicated to the members of his community and listens to their concerns.

I personally spoke with the federal minister, Minister Blaney, today. He assured me that this person has been secured in a place in Alberta, in a federal maximum prison. I want to assure the people of New Brunswick and the families of the Miramichi that they are safe, as they were yesterday and as they are today. Thank you.

Mr. Northrup: I am glad to hear that the Minister of Tourism is doing the Minister of Public Safety's job. That is the job of the Minister of Public Safety, not the Minister of Tourism, and the call should have been made many, many days ago, not this morning.

I think I can speak for all my colleagues on this side of the House when I say that—and with the Minister of Tourism and the people of the Miramichi on this issue... The member for Miramichi put it very bluntly: The people are terrified. I do not believe that this will calm down or smooth over. After 25 years, the memory of these horrible events and the fear and the panic they caused have all been brought back.

As long as Mr. Legere is alive, he should be in the most secure maximum setting possible. That is what the Mayor of Miramichi wants, that is what the council wants, and that is what the people want. We want him back in the maximum-security institution in Quebec, not in the minimum one in Alberta. Will the minister talk to the minister, to bring him back...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: Again, I want to reiterate to the House and the people of the province that this is a not a provincial issue. It is a federal issue. We have the utmost faith in Corrections Canada making its decision.

Again, I spoke personally with the federal minister, Minister Blaney, today, and he has reassured me that this transfer has taken place, that Mr. Legere is in a secure location at a federal maximum prison in Alberta, and that he will remain there.



This also gives me the opportunity to stand and to thank the first responders in our province, as past governments have not done. I want to thank them very much for doing their job. Thank you.

Mr. Northrup: I stand here today, very proud of the RCMP and the municipal police, who were under my watch in the last year or so. I took that part of my job very, very seriously, and I have the greatest respect for the RCMP and for the municipal police in this great province of New Brunswick.

The people of the Miramichi have already been hurt by the news of this transfer. They should, at least, take whatever comfort they can get from knowing that their government and their elected representatives are doing everything—and I mean everything—within their power to get this outrageous decision overturned and this murderer back into the most secure maximum custody that is possible, and that is back in Quebec.

I believe that it is the responsibility of the Minister of Public Safety of New Brunswick to take the lead. Take the lead and support this whole House to send a message that this is just not acceptable. Will he make that commitment today to this House and to the great people of the mighty Miramichi?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: Again, I want to reassure the people of Miramichi. I feel their compassion. I was a young police officer at the time, back in the late eighties. I, too, was a part of this process of locating the person in question. Again, I want to reassure the people of Miramichi and all the families of New Brunswick that they are safe. This person is in a federal maximum institution, and he will remain there. I want to reassure the people of this province that they can remain safe in their work and their play.

I do not know why the member opposite continues to add fuel to this fire and to make fear in the province. We are a safe province. We have a low crime rate. As Minister of Public Safety, I will continue to work with the members on this. Communication, I think, is the biggest part of what we do so that we all can work and play safely in this province.

Health Care Funding

Mr. B. Macdonald: My question is for the Minister of Health. As a former Minister of Finance, the minister well understands the difference between capital and operations budgets. I am wondering whether the minister could update the House today on the capital estimates allocated to the Fredericton region for the next few years and, in particular, whether he can tell us what money is being spent to upgrade our obsolescent health care infrastructure. Most particularly, what money is going to improve the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital here in the Fredericton region?



Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I thank the member for his question. Obviously, the Department of Health's capital estimates were released before Christmas. It should not be a surprise to anyone. It has been well publicized.

The government has decided to move forward with a new community health centre located here in Fredericton. This is something that has been in the works for some time. This is a project that is being worked on collaboratively between the Horizon Health Network and UNB—the nursing program here in Fredericton. They are situated in temporary locations now. That is a project that we did announce for Fredericton.

As for the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital, there is no money specifically for that project in this year's budget. It is not to say that that project is completely off the radar, but, as everybody knows, we are facing tough, difficult times. We were faced with more requests than we had money to invest this year in the capital budget, and certain decisions had to be made.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Mr. B. Macdonald: Thank you, Mr., Speaker. I appreciate that the minister is having a tough time. Last year, a \$200-million investment in projects was announced in the capital budget. The minister was here for that. I am sure he participated in that debate and, in fact, probably voted on it. The CEO of the Horizon Health Network says he is now shocked that that money seems to have vanished under this Gallant government.

That \$200 million is a lot of money to vanish. In fact, that money could repave Hanwell Road 2 000 times, which is every day for five and a half years. Most importantly, that money, that \$200 million, was earmarked for the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital here in Fredericton. I would like to hear the minister tell this House where that money has gone now.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I pointed out what was in the budget and, unfortunately, what was not for this year.

I also remember that when the former government made the announcement, the former Minister of Health actually stood in this House, just over there, and, in the same line, said: Now that our fiscal house is in order, we can go ahead with this project. Unfortunately, our fiscal house is not in order. We are still in a deficit situation, and we have been for quite some time. That means that tough decisions need to be made.

When we, as a government—not just within health care, but as a government—were looking, there was approximately \$87 million more in asks than we had money to invest, and certain choices had to be made. There were certain projects that were further along in terms of planning and design than the Chalmers was, so that project has been put on the sidelines for now. That certainly does not mean that it will never happen.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.



Mr. B. Macdonald: Notwithstanding the fact that investments have been made in Campbellton, Moncton, and Bathurst over the last few years, I would like to know what the government's top priority is here in the Fredericton region. Is it a new courthouse, or is it a hospital? I would like the minister to be clear with this House and with the people of New Brunswick and admit that this project has, in fact, been cancelled. It has been totally sidelined. Where has this \$200 million gone? It must have been reallocated somewhere, so I would like the minister to tell us where he put the \$200 million that was supposed to go to health care in the capital region.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: First of all, I would remind the member opposite, the entire House, and all of New Brunswick that this government's priority for Fredericton and for the entire province is job creation. My colleague has brought forward a pretty impressive capital budget that is going to provide lots of opportunity for many communities across the province.

As for health care, as for the Fredericton region, I answered the member's question directly. We are investing in a community health centre here in Fredericton. The Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital project is being put aside for now.

What was made was an announcement. There was no \$200 million parked in an envelope or in a drawer somewhere to be used for this particular project. There had been an announcement, and there had been some preliminary work done, just as there was preliminary work done on other projects around the province. Some of those other projects were further along than this one was.

Human Resources

Mr. Steeves: I want to thank the Minister of Social Development for changing one of her executive assistants. We all remember that her first assistant, Ian Pelkey, was named in a patronage email sent to Myer Rabin regarding friends of the Liberal Party getting government work created by a \$1-billion patronage paving program. We understand that this gentleman is no longer employed by the minister and that he has, in effect, taken the fall for the Liberals getting caught at their own game.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I really do not know what the question was. When it comes to issues related to human resources, we do not make any comments anywhere, whether it is on the floor of the Legislature or through the media. I will ask the member to ask a specific question so that we can have a discussion about solutions—about how we can bring this province forward, create jobs, get our fiscal house in order, and help families.

Mr. Steeves: I will certainly ask a direct question: Who hired Mr. Pelkey? Who vetted Mr. Pelkey?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: It is really unfortunate. We have some very significant challenges in this province. I listen to the opposition throughout question period, and it is unfortunate.



We should have a suggestion period on the floor of the Legislature. We should have a suggestion period when we would have opposition members, who should be playing their role in a very constructive manner... We should help New Brunswickers and New Brunswick to create even more jobs than we have today, to get our fiscal house in order, and to get rid of the structural deficit. In the long term, this will help families, because life needs to be more affordable in this province.

Please allow me, Mr. Speaker, to offer the opposition member a chance to offer us suggestions on how we can move this province forward.

Mr. Steeves: My goodness. Mr. Speaker, maybe the government members can stop yelling this time.

We would love to move this province forward, but we have a hard time believing some things that are coming out of the government members' mouths. The Liberal axe is coming down, and patronage is alive and well. We will be talking about it later on this afternoon. Are we to expect any more cuts, any more patronage cuts, or any more firings of deputy ministers today?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Again, the economic situation in New Brunswick, which was a disaster under the former government, has to be considered. The financial situation in New Brunswick must also be considered, because we have an average annual deficit of \$400 million. So, we need to resolve the most important issues. On our side of the House, we have been elected and mandated by New Brunswickers to provide ideas and solutions.

That is why my colleague, the Minister responsible for Strategic Program Review, is consulting and engaging the public in order to identify solutions. I strongly encourage the members of the official opposition to please put forward ideas, even during question period. They could then suggest ideas and solutions for the province, too.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister. Time. The time for question period has expired. The Minister of Health would like the opportunity to address a question that was taken under advisement yesterday.

Public Consultation

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: As you mentioned, Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I was asked about the cost of our public engagement process as it relates to the Strategic Program Review. Our engagement exercise is obviously a very collaborative approach since we are using the World Café format. It includes 19 stops across the province—14 for the general public and 5 for stakeholder groups. This is probably one of the most inclusive consultations we have seen in some time, and I would



argue that it is worth every penny. The total budget, including advertising and the video produced to aid the discussion at each stop, is approximately \$94 000, or approximately \$5 000 per stop.

Mr. Fitch: I appreciate the minister getting back to us on that so quickly. Again, there was much ado made at the first of the week about saving \$75 000, and we can now see where that money went. However, thank you for the information. It is \$95 000 for the tour, and that is where some money is being spent in the province. I know that some of our other colleagues are going to attend, and I am sure they are happy to participate.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: For some quick comparisons, we looked at the last three tours that were done by the former government. The number of stops varied, but, if you compare the number of stops in each tour... The former government's tour in 2012 cost \$5 300 per stop; in 2013, it was \$7 000 per stop; and, in 2014, it was \$7 200 per stop. In our case, it is \$5 000 per location but many more locations. I encourage the opposition members to participate. Unfortunately, so far, they have not done so.

