

March 18, 2015

[Original]

Jobs

Mr. Fitch: I would like to acknowledge the Premier's appointment to the Global Leaders. As the member for Miramichi Bay-Neguac was cheering so loudly from the sidelines, I would ask her and the Premier to look at the reality of what is going on here in New Brunswick. There are 41 000 New Brunswickers looking for work.

I know that 41 000 people were not necessarily on the Liberal campaign bus and cannot be hired into the civil service, but I wonder whether the Premier could clarify something for us today. Under the RTI that we put forward to the Premier and the government, it came back that the government has hired for 1 900 new positions—new hires—in the government since being elected. That number was of concern to us as we looked at the work that we had done to make sure to rightsize the civil service. Can the Premier confirm today that, based on that RTI, there have been 1 900 new hires within the civil service?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have said very clearly that our government's priority is job creation, and we will work with New Brunswickers to create a favourable environment for job creation and economic growth. It will not be easy, and it will require hard work with New Brunswickers, but we are really concentrating our efforts on this goal. We are also proud to see that, so far, since we were sworn in, the economy has created 400 jobs.

[Original]

It is a good start, but, of course, there is still much that has to be done. We look forward to working with everybody to make job creation the number one priority.

The member opposite was in government. He was a minister. He would know that, every year, there are a number of part-time, back-filled positions that are brought in for temporary assignments, so the 1 900 positions are coming from that. I think that the member opposite would know this, so, hopefully, we can talk about something that is important today, such as our efforts to create jobs and to grow the New Brunswick economy.

Mr. Fitch: We are talking about their effort and the lack of it and the way that they are looking to the civil servants to swell the ranks of civil servants by 1 900 people. I am asking for clarification. The Premier talks about being open and transparent, but he seems to be bent on avoiding clear answers to the questions. In fact, that was pointed out by one of the senior



members of the press gallery yesterday on Twitter. He said that the Premier is learning the “QP dodge”. That is how it was put. Again, the Premier is dodging the question here today.

I am just asking for clarification. Are these 1 900 part-time jobs, as he alluded to them in his answer to the first question? We want the Premier to answer. Are these full-time jobs? Are these part-time jobs? Were they hired without competition? Were they appointed? We are seeing some very, very familiar faces around Fredericton, former MLAs and whatnot. If the Premier has a plan that he has not shared with us, is swelling the ranks of the civil service part of that plan for the 5 000 jobs that he said he would create?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I answered the question quite directly. Every year, a number of part-time, back-filled positions are brought in for temporary assignment, and that is where the 1 900 people are coming from. I do not have the breakdown—I will say that. I do not have the breakdown in front of me right now, but what I can tell you is that the previous government, of which the Leader of the Opposition was a part, actually had a similar thing happen. That government actually had 2 300 jobs created within the civil service because of this aspect.

Again, one of the reasons why we do not necessarily answer the questions directly is because the questions are ridiculous, and, frankly, they are a bit of a waste of time. The member opposite would know this already. He simply just wants to try to grab a headline. He was a minister. He realizes every year that there are people who will come in to backfill on a temporary basis, mostly part-time, and that is where that number comes from. Meanwhile, we will talk about important things such as creating jobs for New Brunswickers.

Mr. Fitch: It is absolutely deplorable for the Premier to get up in question period and say that these questions are a waste of time. We are standing up for 41 000 people in New Brunswick who do not have a job. For the Premier to get up and say that it is a waste of time really goes to the character of this government and the character of what is going on across the aisle. I really, really wish that the Premier would pay close attention to the questions because they are good questions. They are questions on behalf of the 41 000 people who do not have jobs in New Brunswick.

Perhaps he had a little discussion with his mentor, who was in the House yesterday, and the mentor said: Look, you have to get dirtier, you have to get meaner, and you have to get right down and personal.

There was one highlight that we applauded the Premier on, and that was continuing the One-Job Pledge. Can the Premier tell us what his goal is? What is the number of jobs that will be created under the One-Job Pledge?

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is a bit unfortunate again. The member opposite was not asking questions about the 41 000 people who are looking for work. He is asking questions to grab a headline,



trying to twist the facts of 1 900 people who were hired on a temporary basis. He knows very well why that happens. In fact, when his government was in power, it did the exact same thing and hired more people. That is the point that we are trying to make. It is unfortunate. We do have a real fiscal challenge before us. We have an economy that has been stagnant over the last few years. These are important issues. To try to take things and get a political headline out of them is unfortunate. I believe that New Brunswickers deserve better.

We have said that the One-Job Pledge will continue. We are also implementing what we are calling the Youth Employment Fund. We hope that both these programs will work very hard to get young people and New Brunswickers in our province working, which is our priority as a government.

We hope that we can count on the opposition to help us create the conditions for economic growth, but, if we cannot, we certainly will be focused on it.

Mr. Fitch: Once again, the Premier is having trouble with his mental math when we talk about net jobs and net reductions in the civil service. We reduced the civil service by 2 300 when we were there, and that was net.

The point of the matter is—and again, the Premier is trying to deflect from the real issue of the day and is not answering the questions—we are looking for this elusive plan that those members keep talking about. They held up the plan that we had, minus a couple of chapters, and called it diversified, but it is less diversified than the plan we had. They have now continued the One-Job Pledge.

We are asking this of the Premier: Was growing the ranks of the civil service and continuing with the One-Job Pledge part of his plan, or is he just making this up as he goes along?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I will tell you what is part of our plan: investing strategically in our infrastructure; making sure that we create the conditions for innovation and ICT in our province; investing in start-ups throughout the province; going on trade missions to Calgary, Houston, and Senegal to promote what we have to offer here in New Brunswick; having a geographical cooperation with our partners, whether it is in New England or Atlantic Canada; creating the Jobs Board and Opportunities New Brunswick; creating the Youth Employment Fund; supporting and promoting the Energy East Pipeline project; and making sure that we have the Sisson mine go forward. The LNG terminal conversion is something that we are focused on as well, as is reducing the small business tax.

These are components of our diversified approach to ensuring that we create the right conditions. On top of that, we are going to develop a 10-year education plan with, we hope, the help of the opposition and other people around the province and a literacy strategy to make sure that we have a skilled workforce for the jobs that we are going to try to create.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.



Mr. Fitch: I will give the Premier credit that his lines are well rehearsed, but they ring very hollow in these halls.

We know that there are people who are out of work and who are looking for work. We know that a number of things that he just recited, as the backbench MLAs applauded for on cue... We know that a number of these things—the Sisson mine, the west-east pipeline, and some of the things with respect to what Invest NB and Economic Development were doing—were done under our watch and are continuing under his watch. He does not want to give credit where credit is due, and that is fine. What we want to see is more people back to work in New Brunswick.

However, the real thing that those members did when it comes to jobs and the economy was to create conditions that would turn investment and jobs away. We have seen that. We have seen it before. The Premier is not taking this seriously, but I just wondered whether he would come to the table and say this: Look, we know that there is trouble here; there are 41 000 people out of work...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am not sure the member's comments really contained a question, but I will still respond and list the things on which we are concentrating our efforts to create the right conditions for us to have a favourable environment for investment, economic growth, and job creation.

For example, we lowered taxes for small businesses. In addition, we created Opportunities New Brunswick, the New Brunswick Jobs Board, and the Youth Employment Fund. We are also working on regional cooperation, we are investing strategically in our infrastructure, and we are going to develop a skilled workforce through a literacy strategy and a long-term education plan. As you can see, we are concentrating our efforts on job creation.

[Original]

We really hope that we are going to hear more from the opposition members in terms of how we can create these conditions instead of trying to have question period become take-the-credit period. If they want to say that they invented the Sisson Mines project and the Energy East Pipeline project, they can go ahead. What we want to do is to create jobs. We will give credit to New Brunswickers, and we will work with them to make it happen.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.



Health Care Funding

Mr. Jody Carr: Last week, we heard from the Minister of Health that the reason the Chalmers renovation project was sidelined was that it was not far enough along, but we found new information today in a letter from the president of the medical staff at the Dr. Everett Chalmers Regional Hospital, Dr. Scott Robertson. The letter states that the Minister of Health and the Liberal government, in fact, received the plan last October and had \$3.9 million to spend on getting to the next stage of the Chalmers renovation. My question is this: Why did the Minister of Health, last October, say no to the plan to move forward on the next stage of renovations at the Chalmers hospital, with \$3.9 million in the budget to spend?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: We have dealt with this issue many times in the past few weeks. We were faced with decisions when it came time to put our capital budget together. We had many more requests than we had money to invest in the capital budget, and certain decisions had to be made.

One decision that was made was to postpone moving forward with the Chalmers hospital project here in Fredericton. We are not saying that it is never going to be done, but we are saying that, this year, it is not moving forward because the decision was made to move forward with a new community health centre here in Fredericton. That project was further along. There was more planning involved, and it was ready to hit the ground running. We want to make sure that that project moves forward. It is a very important project for us as a government. We are committed to opening more community health centres in the province, and this is one that will serve the people of Fredericton very well.

Mr. Jody Carr: Yes, indeed, the community health clinic project will serve the region very well. In fact, the previous government had both projects in the budget. The first week that I was in Cabinet in my last mandate, I was dealing with Moncton High School with no money in the budget. For this mandate, the Minister of Health had provided to him, when he came into office in October, the money in the budget for both the health clinic and the Chalmers renovation. He says that the project was not far enough along. However, we learned today, in a new letter from the president of the medical staff at the Chalmers, that, in fact, the regional health authority had submitted a plan last October to go forward with the spending of the \$3.9 million.

The Minister of Health and the government have an opportunity. In fact, it is not too late in this fiscal year. We are not talking about next year. We are talking about this fiscal year. This government still has three weeks to spend the \$3.9 million on the architects. The money is in the budget. You can spend and sign a contract with the architects. Mr. Premier, if this is a priority, will you sign this contract...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.



Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I think it is important to remind the member opposite that, first of all, there is nothing new in the letter, which I just received yesterday afternoon, by the way. I received it only yesterday afternoon, but there is nothing new in the letter.

I want to remind the people who are listening and the people here in the Legislature that the former Minister of Health once stood up in this House and said: Now that our fiscal affairs are in order, now that we have reestablished our fiscal house, we can go forward with this project. Well, guess what! The fiscal affairs of this House are not in order. We are still in a deficit situation as a government. We are committed to tackling that deficit. We have a plan to do so, and it is a plan that will take several years.

Decisions had to be made. This project had to be put on the sidelines for the time being. This does not mean that it will never happen, but, for the time being, we have chosen to move ahead with the community health centre here in Fredericton.

Mr. Jody Carr: This project was in the budget—the project for \$3.9 million. The Minister of Health said it was not far enough along. However, we learned today in a letter from the president of the medical staff at the Chalmers that, in fact, the region did submit a plan last October that was on the desk of the Minister of Health. That \$3.9 million was in the budget.

Furthermore, government members talk about fiscal challenges, yet they have increased the budget for infrastructure. They found more money for infrastructure than what was budgeted before. The money is there. It is not adding up.

In fact, the government members have a choice. If this is a priority, they can still sign the contract in the next three weeks to get the architects and make this project go forward. The fact is that it is not a priority for this Liberal government.

The Fredericton regional caucus is proposing a regional working group with all stakeholders, levels of government, government departments, and political parties. Will the government members sign today the \$3.9 million that they can sign? It is in the budget, and it is available to move this project forward and support...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Once again, I want to remind people of how this project came about. First of all, we had the former minister getting up and saying that our fiscal house was in order when, in fact, that was not the case. Then, because it was just before the last election, the former Finance Minister put \$4 million in the 2014-15 capital budget for this project. Of that, the government spent only \$90 000. I am not the one who has stalled this project. I have never said no to this project in this current fiscal year. It is not my fault that the project was not moved along as far as some other projects that were in the queue.

Mr. Speaker: Order.



Hon. Mr. Boudreau: When it came time to make the budget, choices had to be made. I have never said no to any project within this current fiscal year. This project was not ready to move forward. Other projects were, and that was why they were included in the capital budget. That is why Fredericton is going to get a new community health centre.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Environmental Impact Assessment

Mr. Coon: My question is for the Minister of Environment. Under Schedule A of the *Environmental Impact Assessment Regulation*, any proposal to construct a pipeline exceeding 5 km in length must be registered with the minister before it is commenced in order for the minister to determine whether or not the completion of an environmental impact assessment is required. There is no record of TransCanada Pipelines having registered its proposed 412-km pipeline, as required by provincial regulation. Can the minister explain why he has not compelled TransCanada to register its project and pay the required fee?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: We have applied for intervenor status through the National Energy Board, as the Minister of Environment will do with this type of project, which falls under federal jurisdiction. There are also probably at least another 1 800 people throughout Canada who are interested in this project and who have applied. A process is in place, and we will follow that due process, as any other government would do throughout Canada. We will make sure that New Brunswickers' water and everything else will be safe, in order to protect the environment. My job as Minister of Environment is to protect the environment. We will also make sure that we have a balanced approach, to make sure that we can get this project moving forward and create jobs in the province. Thank you.

Mr. Coon: The pipeline that TransCanada proposes to build will cross over rivers and streams in this province 280 times. It will pass through hundreds of private properties and terminate in a large tank farm in the vicinity of the community of Red Head. New Brunswickers are worried that the pipeline might leak bitumen into our rivers and streams, spill bitumen into people's fields, and woodlots, and emit hazardous air pollutants from the tank farm at the terminus near Red Head. Why is the minister not insisting that the pipeline proposal be subjected to an environmental impact assessment by his department, as the government of Quebec is requiring in that province?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: We are doing our due diligence. We have many people working on this project to make sure that all our environment, including our rivers, streams, and waterways, will be protected. We will not let anything happen to our environment under this process. This is my commitment to New Brunswickers. It is our government's commitment to New Brunswickers. We will make sure that we will do it through due process and in a timely manner. Thank you.

Mr. Coon: The due process is to subject it to our own environmental assessment process. The natural gas pipeline built by Emera from Saint John to the U.S. border was a much smaller



project, carrying a cleaner product with far fewer river and stream crossings. It was subjected to a review by both the NEB and our own Department of Environment, which imposed some 20 conditions on its approval.

After Stephen Harper gutted the federal environmental assessment process and much of Canada's environmental protection legislation, what could possibly give the minister the confidence that the National Energy Board is going to give a tinker's damn about what we hold dear in New Brunswick? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: As I said, with the intervenor status with the Department of Environment, along with many stakeholders throughout New Brunswick, there is going to be an extensive consultation process. We are going to make sure that all the rules and regulations that are in place to protect our environment, rivers, streams, and waterways will be utmost and foremost in our process. Many people are working on this project. Many consultation processes have been held with landowners, stakeholders, municipalities, and our local service districts.

We want to do this properly, we will do it properly, and we have a very extensive project moving forward that is going to create jobs in the province. We want to make sure that, first and foremost, our environment is protected and that, at the same time, jobs are created in the province. Thank you.

Forestry

Mr. Savoie: We have a government that has been in power for almost six months, and, so far, on the forestry file, nothing has been done. We have said in this House on many occasions that this is creating a lot of uncertainty in this very important sector that employs over 22 000 people in the province.

The Premier has said time and again that jobs are his government's number one priority. Those members have said: The opposition is focused only on fracking. I have been standing up in the House and asking questions and wondering when we are going to get certainty on this forestry strategy.

My question is for the minister today.

[*Translation*]

Here is my question: What exactly are the changes the government is going to make? Is the wood allocation part of these changes?

Hon. Mr. Landry: Thank you for the question. You say we have done nothing in the last six months, which is not true. I am not going to say that I work my fingers to the bone, but that is almost true, because we are meeting with group after group. The more meetings we have, the more groups want to meet with us.



As we have always said, there are opportunities for changes to the New Brunswick Strategy for Crown Lands Forest Management; they may or may not be major changes. I will say to the member opposite that, at this time, we have not completed the consultations. Once the consultations are completed, we will produce the final plan our government has decided on. I will be pleased to present it then in the House.

[*Original*]

Mr. Savoie: On this side of the House, there is a little bit of confusion due to the fact that, in the past, the minister has said: We probably will not change anything; our hands are tied; the deal is what it is; we cannot do anything about it; we are just not going to do anything on this file; we are going to stall things.

The government has not done much. I understand that it has done its consultation, and I respect the minister's efforts in that regard. However, the Premier is in the media today saying that there are going to be changes. Therefore, that is exactly why I am asking the question: What exact changes are they going to make?

We have a Premier who, to use his own words today, has said that New Brunswick has a stagnant economy. He has said that New Brunswickers deserve better. He has said that jobs are the number one priority. Through the strategy, the principals are saying: We are going to create 7 800 jobs in the next three years. This is right up the alley of what the Premier is looking for.

What we are looking for is this: Is wood allocation part of the changes that they are going to make?

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Landry: To set the record straight, I would point out that I said from the outset that we were probably not going to take legal action against the big companies regarding the New Brunswick Strategy for Crown Lands Forest Management.

Members will recall that it took the previous government four years to develop the New Brunswick Strategy for Crown Lands Forest Management as it exists today. If the work had been as well done as the opposition members claim, I would not be forced today to consult everyone in the province to see exactly what they want.

I said there were people who were in favour of the strategy, but there are people who are sitting on the fence, who do not know whether they are for or against and weigh the pros and cons. Also, there are people who are totally opposed to the strategy.



The actions I take now, I take with pleasure whenever I get a chance, because, as the member opposite knows and can see, members are sitting right now. We are spending our time sitting in the House.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Savoie: Our government took four years to get this strategy in place. That is absolutely true. The minister opposite is exactly right. There was a lot of consultation and a lot of work was done to get that strategy to where it was. However, that still does not change the fact that, now that the members opposite are in government, they have a responsibility to make decisions. They have a responsibility to lead and to make sure that they are creating jobs in the short term and the long term. This strategy has been credited with creating jobs and positively impacting the GDP of the province. This is something that we, as a province, are greatly in need of.

We lost 2 200 jobs last month, and I know the Premier is not happy about that. I know he wants to create jobs. Here, we have a strategy that has the potential to do that, but the members opposite are putting everything in a holding pattern. Over \$500 million of private sector investment is being held up because they will not make a decision.

This House wants to know, and the people of New Brunswick want to know. Are the changes that this government is going to make to the forestry strategy going to change...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Landry: If I understand correctly, what the member opposite is trying to say is that some projects were suspended because we are consulting the people of the province; that is absolutely untrue. I have not met with any company that has not continued to make the investments that needed to be made to create the jobs promised by our Premier. As a government, we said that we were going to create these jobs. We do not plan to do what the member is talking about.

I repeat for the third time that we are consulting the people. We said we would consult the people, and the leader of the third party, the Green Party, did table a bill in the House asking us to review the Strategy for Crown Lands Forest Management and even to go back and review the 1982 forestry plan, which likely will not happen. That being said, we are still prepared to listen to requests from the member of the third party. We want to know what his proposed solutions are, but I am sure he will tell us soon, when we debate his bill in the House.

I am going to repeat what I said. The Strategy for Crown Lands Forest Management...



[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Tourism

Mr. Wetmore: Yesterday, during question period, the Tourism Minister stated that he has had many meetings with the Executive Director of the Tourism Industry Association of New Brunswick (TIANB). His exact words, as recorded in Hansard, were: “In fact, I have had many meetings with the Executive Director and the President of TIANB.”

I also took note of the Premier’s remarks yesterday, and I am happy to report that he will not need to bring in any schedulers, as I have made a right to information request for the appointment calendar of the Tourism Minister. With that knowledge in mind, would the Tourism Minister care to expand on his answer from yesterday that he has had many meetings with the Executive Director of TIANB? I would like to understand what the minister means by “many”. Can he give us a numerical figure?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: It is a great opportunity to stand up to talk about my department, a department that is going to play an integral role in our focus on creating jobs and growing the economy. The Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture can play an integral role in that. We work as a team in my department, and my team has reached out many times. In fact, just in the past few days, we have reached out to the people at TIANB, who are strategic partners of ours in the tourism sector.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Fraser: We are going to move our economy forward and create jobs, and we are going to move our tourism sector forward. We have to work together—and that includes the member opposite—in a positive, collaborative way and not come in here and make accusations and create innuendo and create a negative image of our province and our sector, with our partners.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Fraser: We have to work in a positive, collaborative way, and I am going to continue to do that with all the stakeholders in the tourism sector, the heritage sector, and the cultural sector. It is too bad you would not join the party.

Mr. Wetmore: This government has been developing a culture of secrecy and exclusion. All three groups that represent our municipalities are demanding that the Premier and his



ministers meet with them to explain what is going on with this government, if, indeed, this government knows what is going on. I have to wonder most days. You can hardly pick up a paper without seeing one stakeholder group or another complaining that this government does not consult.

Yesterday, I tried to draw an answer from the Tourism Minister about the planned fall meeting with TIANB to discuss the sign policy that our Progressive Conservative government developed in full consultation with TIANB. Will the Tourism Minister answer my question today? Is this meeting scheduled? If so, when and where is it?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is very unfortunate that the time of the Legislature and of the people is being used to ask about meetings—how many meetings there were, who was invited to the meetings, when they got there, and whether they accepted the requests on their BlackBerry devices. It is getting a bit excessive.

I have to go to the comment by the member opposite about our government and the accountability and transparency we have been showing. One thing that is very clear is that our government is very, very transparent and we are very engaged with the people of New Brunswick. We have shown very transparently what happened under the previous government regarding the New Brunswick film tax credit, regarding the drug plan, regarding the forestry plan, and regarding Larry's Gulch.

Regarding our mandate letters, we have made them public so that the people of New Brunswick will know what their government is up to and what it is doing to help them create jobs. We have been very transparent about modernizing the Legislature. We have hired the CEOs of Crown corporations based on merit. We have actually been consulting with New Brunswickers and will continue to do that.

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

