

March 19, 2015

[Original]

Jobs

Mr. Fitch: I would like to acknowledge the Premier and the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour for yesterday's announcement of the Youth Employment Fund. We understand that job placements will start in April—hopefully, early April—and we are hoping to get some more details as to how those jobs are going to be awarded.

Yesterday's announcement highlights the importance of question period and the importance of the questions that we ask and, undeniably, is proof that our questions have had a positive impact for the people of New Brunswick. Contrary to what the Premier thinks and says, over the past two days, New Brunswickers have been given new hope because we have moved forward. We received information that the One-Job Pledge will be moved forward, and, now, we have pushed the government to move forward with the Youth Employment Fund. Continuing in that air of cooperation and hoping again to remove some uncertainty within various sectors of this province, I wonder whether the Premier could tell us today...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his comments. It is obvious that we are working very hard to create jobs, because this is obviously our government's priority. Of course, we are going to continue to do what we believe will help us reach our goal of creating jobs and growing the economy. This was also the goal of the previous government, and we are certainly going to continue to do what worked well in the past in New Brunswick.

That being said, it must be borne in mind that we are in a precarious position in terms of our finances and the economy, which means the status quo is not acceptable. So, changes will have to be made, whether it be in our finances or in the way we develop the economy. That is why I am very proud of our approach, which is balanced and diversified. So, we are going to work day after day with New Brunswickers to create jobs. So far, our approach seems to be working, because 400 jobs have been created since we were sworn in.

[Original]

Forestry

Mr. Fitch: I am sorry regarding that first question. We have different clocks going here.



Again, we want to make sure that we can move forward on some of the initiatives that were started under our watch and continued by this government. One of those is, again, the forestry strategy. We know that the Premier wants to tweak, change, and put out maps with perhaps different coloured sectors. However, the basic core and the main purpose of that forestry strategy is to remove today's uncertainty—remove the uncertainty for the people of New Brunswick who are working in the forestry sector and remove the uncertainty for the people who want to make investments in the forestry sector.

Can the Premier tell us today... The core part of that whole forestry strategy is the wood allocations. Will the Premier commit today to keeping together the main part, the main plank, in that forestry plan with respect to the wood allocations? Will the Premier commit today that the wood allocations to the respective mills will continue?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The Minister of Natural Resources has been very clear over the last few weeks. He is consulting with many stakeholders and consulting with many people who want to give their ideas, suggestions, and even concerns regarding forestry in general. It is important to listen to the people of New Brunswick. We have been in office for a little over five months. Ensuring that we give everybody the opportunity to be heard is important before we present our plan.

I have made it clear, though, over the last few weeks and even months, that we will have to respect many of the contracts that have been signed. We recognize that, and the Minister of Natural Resources has also said that. However, we also recognize that many New Brunswickers have some concerns. They want to be heard, and they want to participate. We very much welcome their ideas, and we are going to do the best that we possibly can to have the best forestry strategy, which will help us to grow jobs and to ensure that we create the climate for economic growth in the province. We are going to do that with the help of New Brunswickers, with their ideas and their suggestions. We want to hear from them, and we are going to take the time to make sure that we do.

Mr. Fitch: I understand that, and I understand that the Minister of Natural Resources has been meeting with various groups and stakeholders.

There is a question that I want the Premier to clarify today. Uncertainty is the thing that kills investment in New Brunswick. We have said that, and we know that Steve Moran from Corridor Resources has said that. It is that uncertainty that just poisons the water for investments in the province. We talked about that last week, and we talked about the effects that the moratorium has had on various places. However, the thing here today is that the minister is going around and talking to various stakeholders in the forestry sector. Is he telling those stakeholders do not worry, your wood allocation is going to be safe, we are just going to tweak the edges of the forestry plan, but your wood allocation is safe?



That is what will drive investment, that is what will drive jobs, and that is what will move the economy forward. Can the Premier confirm to the stakeholders today that the wood allocations are safe?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: If we tell New Brunswickers that we are going to consult them, but that the plan is already finalized and that we have already made up our minds, that is not really consultation.

[*Original*]

We have to consult with New Brunswickers, engage with them, listen to them, and have a real discussion about how we are going to move forward on all aspects of our economy, and that certainly includes the forestry sector. The forestry sector is important to New Brunswick. We are actually the province that depends the most on forestry in the country. We are very much aware of that. The Minister of Natural Resources is aware of that. We know that it can be a good, strong component and that it has been a good, strong component of our economy for many years.

We have to make sure that we balance out as many of the interests as possible and that many people can participate in the forestry sector. We have to ensure that we have a sustainable plan as well. We are not going to start commenting and committing to things on certain parts of it. We want to listen to New Brunswickers about all aspects. Once we do that, the Minister of Natural Resources, our government, and I will be happy to show our plan on forestry and how it is going to help us to create jobs. Thank you.

Mr. Fitch: I have been asking the Premier something that is very, very much at the core and that is very, very important to job creation and to investments in New Brunswick. As the minister talks to stakeholders, is he reassuring them by saying do not worry, your wood allocation is okay; we are just going to tweak the edges?

I know that the Premier has called it “our” forestry plan. It has been ours, but that is okay. He can take ownership. He can put a red cover on the plan and call it his plan. However, the core part of that plan is the wood allocation. If the wood allocation is not continued as it has been suggested before, that investment could be lost, the jobs could be lost, and the economy could slow down because of that uncertainty that is being created in the province. It was created in the gas and oil industry, and we have seen the effects—lost investment and lost jobs. Today, we want the Premier to come forward and say that the wood allocations are safe for the people who have been given those allocations.



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: When it comes to the forest industry, investments continue to be made; I can tell you that they have not stopped.

[Original]

The reason for that is the one thing that we did make very clear, which is that we are going to respect the contracts, but we are going to ensure at the same time that we have a forestry plan that is balanced, that will help us to create jobs, and that will be sustainable in the long term. The investments have continued. There has been stability in the sense that we have said we will not tear up contracts. That, unfortunately, was not always the case under the previous government.

We have made it very clear to people in the industry that we want to work with them, but we also want to listen to all New Brunswickers. We want to talk to the small woodlot owners. We want to talk to First Nations. We want to talk to the communities in which forestry is important as an industry but also as a way of life and a component of the quality of life.

We have a lot of engagement to do. The Minister of Natural Resources is working very hard. We are very confident that we will have a plan soon, one that will balance out, ensuring that quality of life and job creation will be at the forefront.

Mr. Fitch: Again, that uncertainty that the Premier has brought to the floor of the Legislature is going to affect investment here in the province. This could mean 7 800 jobs over the next three years, which would go very nicely with this elusive plan that he continues to talk about.

I will move on to another topic, but forestry and wood allocation are so important. That long-term association, that long-term commitment of wood allocation, is what drives investment. That is the investment that we have seen here in the province on our watch. We hope that it will continue on the Premier's watch. He can put a red binding on the plan, but, again, wood allocation is the key part. I hope that the Premier will move swiftly to make sure that the uncertainty is removed from the province.

Shipyards

In another area, I wonder whether the Premier could update us on any movement with regard to shipbuilding in the Caraquet area.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I appreciate the question, and I am sure the member will ask another question on that.

I do want to finish off on the forestry plan, as the member has taken up much of his questioning on that. We have to put this in context. Forestry is very, very important to our province. It is



important to our economy. It is important to the way of life of New Brunswickers as well. There is a lot of interest. There are lots of things to balance here. We are going to work very hard with the people of New Brunswick. We will do the best job we can to have a forestry plan that will ensure just that.

I have to say that the Leader of the Opposition was part of the previous government and was a minister as well. When I was Leader of the Opposition, we certainly spent much of our time with regard to the forestry strategy, criticizing the fact that it was taking too long. To put it in context, the previous government took four years. It took four years to get the forestry plan. Those members kept telling us that it was coming out next month, in the next Legislature, in the next sitting, this summer. The member understands that it can be complex. He was there. I would ask that we have the proper time, and we will get it done.

Forestry

Mr. Fitch: Again, the Premier did not answer the question on the shipbuilding industry up in Caraquet that had been worked on quite diligently with Invest NB.

Going back to the forestry sector, yes, we took four years because we wanted to get it right, and we did get it right. We talked to the stakeholders. We talked to the people who were going to make those investments. We worked together with environmentalists. We worked with the forest industry. We worked with the people of New Brunswick. We took four years, and we got it right.

All I am asking the Premier or the Minister of Natural Resources to do here today is to stand up and commit to the fact that the wood allocation is the important part and that those wood allocations, those allotments, will continue for the people who are making those investments and who are creating those jobs.

In terms of securing pensions, we can look at some of the areas around the province. That investment, that wood allocation, has created the opportunity to move forward, to protect pensions, and to protect jobs. Will the Premier commit to the wood allocation here today?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I feel as though we have two conversations going on at the same time here. I will try to address both in one minute.

Certainly, we have made it very clear that the contracts that have been signed will be respected within the forestry sector. Obviously, that has created stability. The investments have continued because of that. We have also made it very clear that there are some New Brunswickers who have real concerns and preoccupations when it comes to the forestry plan as it is, which was prepared by the previous government.

That is why the Minister of Natural Resources is working very hard to listen to their ideas, their thoughts, and some of the things that we should do as a government to improve that strategy



and that plan. We are going to do just that. We would ask the opposition to understand that it will take a little time, but that it will come soon.

On the other question...

[*Translation*]

The NB Naval Center project is very important, because it can contribute to the economy in northern regions and throughout the province. Of course, we are going to support the project, as we have done in the past. An announcement on it will be made soon.

New Brunswick Drug Plan

Ms. Dubé: Recently, it was brought to our attention that the government and the Department of Health now require people in the province who are enrolled in the New Brunswick Drug Plan to reapply. To retain their coverage, these people had to apply before March 16; otherwise they risked being without coverage after March 31, so as of April 1.

Therefore, if vulnerable people who need their drugs request prescription renewals on April 1 without having re-enrolled in the plan, they will not necessarily be entitled to their drugs, which could put their lives in danger.

My question for the Minister of Health is this: Why endanger vulnerable people for strictly administrative reasons?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I thank the opposition member for her question. First of all, I would remind her that, when the previous government established the New Brunswick Drug Plan, it had said the plan would serve the 150 000 New Brunswickers who did not have access to drug coverage. The reality is that, in the first year of the program, only about 2 400 people enrolled, so we certainly had to make some changes to resolve the situation.

It is true that, since enrollment in the program was voluntary in the first year and supposed to be mandatory in the second year, and since we removed the mandatory component from the program, we have had to ask enrolled people to re-enroll. It had to be done for this first transition year, so to speak, but it will not have to be done again.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Dubé: People had virtually no advance notice about re-enrollment. There are vulnerable people at risk. There are families who take care of these vulnerable people who might be out of



the province, there are people who are hospitalized, and so on. Let me read you a letter in the other language that is very telling:

[Original]

*To ensure there is no disruption in your coverage, you must complete the enclosed re-enrollment form and send by mail or fax **no later than March 16, 2015.***

If your re-enrollment form is not received by March 16, 2015, your coverage will be suspended on March 31, 2015. No further prescription drug claims will be paid after that date.

[Translation]

Honourable minister, you are endangering people. Some people are out of the province, some do not know what is going on, and some are not necessarily aware of the changes. The time frame is very, very short. So, you are endangering people who will need their drugs and will not have coverage as of April 1.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I appreciate the question. It is certainly not this government's intention to endanger anyone. We had to issue these letters to make sure that, during the transition period, we know who wants to stay in the plan and who does not. Also, we established new premiums that are based on income, so we had to ask people to confirm their income. This only has to be done once. In the coming years, it will not have to be done.

I am certainly prepared to be as flexible as possible to make sure that nobody falls between the cracks of this plan. If the member knows of specific cases, I am certainly willing to look at them. It is absolutely not our intention to penalize anyone. We simply have to go through this process to realign the program, since we took out the component that made enrollment in the plan mandatory; this had been put in place by the previous government. We certainly do not want to endanger anyone.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.



[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: I appreciate the minister's openness. However, what he is telling us is that, for strictly administrative reasons—even if that was not his intention—he will be endangering people. Will it be too late on April 1, April 2, or April 3? If people go to the pharmacy to renew their prescriptions, will the pharmacist be obliged to refuse because they might not have enough money on them to buy what they need?

The time frame was definitely too short, as people were not given reasonable notice. So here is my question to the minister: Will you extend the deadline to make sure that the people who were members of the plan and those who take care of them have adequate time to get everything in order so that they can be covered? Since people were given very little notice, you are putting them at risk. Will the minister announce a later date to give people a chance to get through the process and so that people are covered?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Again, I appreciate the member's questions. The last thing that we want to do is to put anybody in jeopardy. Approximately 1 850 letters had to be sent out as a result of the policy changes that took place. I would remind the people listening that part of those policy changes that took place was that we put in place two new categories of premiums for low-income New Brunswickers.

For low-income New Brunswickers to be eligible for that program, they have to apply and have to confirm their income levels. There is no ill intent. Of the 1 850 letters that were sent, 1 472 have already had a response. I commit to the member today that I will look into the balance to make sure that nobody falls between the cracks and that everybody has the coverage...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

First Nations

Mr. Coon: The Premier met with the chiefs from the Wolastoqey and Mi'kmaq First Nations yesterday. As we know, neither the Wolastoqey, the Mi'kmaq, nor the Passamaquoddy ceded or surrendered land to the Crown. The legal bases for the government's relationship with First Nations are our Peace and Friendship Treaties and a growing mountain of Supreme Court decisions. The most recent is the *Tsilhqot'in* decision from B.C. Can the Premier inform this House about the action items and timelines that emerged from his meeting yesterday?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I thank the member for Fredericton South for the question. Yesterday, we had a great meeting with the chiefs of all the First Nations communities and with some of the proxies for two chiefs who were not able to make it themselves. The Minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs and I were in attendance, with a caucus member and some of our staff.



We thought it was a very good discussion. They certainly raised some of the concerns that they have. They raised concerns about some of the things that they would like to see happen in their communities to help them raise the Human Development Index in their regions and communities. We certainly listened. We took all their ideas, and we are certainly going to take them to heart and do the best that we possibly can to implement them.

First Nations are an important part of the community in New Brunswick. We need to work with them. We need to partner with them to find ways to grow our economy, to get our finances in order, and, of course, to help families that are struggling.

It was a very productive meeting from our perspective, and I certainly hope the chiefs thought it was productive from their perspective as well.

Mr. Coon: I do not think I heard any action items in that answer.

The unanimous Supreme Court ruling in 2014 recognized the title of the Tsilhqot'in First Nation to a large area of traditional land outside its reserve, but clarified that, even before a title is recognized by the courts, the province must consult about the uses of that land and must accommodate First Nations' interests. Whether the proposal is to change the way logging occurs or to dig an open pit mine or to bury a pipeline, what process does the Premier intend to initiate to ensure that this government can effectively consult and accommodate First Nations to the standards set by the *Tsilhqot'in* decision?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: That is a very good question, and we are indeed going to take action to follow up on this meeting.

[*Original*]

It was a great meeting in which we did have action items, such as ensuring that we build a strong relationship and open dialogue with the First Nations across the province. I made it very clear to them that we may not always agree, but that it is always important that we have the chance to talk to each other and to understand mutually where we are coming from, why we are doing what we are doing, and why we prioritize what we prioritize.

Specifically, in 30 seconds, the duty to consult is very important to our government. It is something that, legally, we have to do, but it is something that, morally, we should be doing as well. We are actually taking on a process that is much more formal and across-the-board, to ensure that we are aware of when the duty to consult is triggered. With any activity within the government, we are going to be requiring that more civil servants be trained on what the duty to consult is, and we are going to ensure that they see earlier on when it is triggered so that we can be more proactive in the conversation with First Nations.



Mr. Coon: As MLAs, we swore an oath of allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, so, as part of our job, we all have a responsibility to uphold the honour of the Crown in our relations with the Wolastoqey, the Mi'kmaq, and the Passamaquoddy. I have a suggestion to help the Premier move forward with building our relationship with the First Nations. My question is this: Will the Premier establish an all-party standing committee of the Legislature to ensure the honour of the Crown is upheld in every dimension of government's relationship with First Nations in this province?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We are open to any ideas that can help us improve our relationship with the First Nations in this province.

[*Original*]

With that said, we are doing many things to ensure that we have a better relationship. We are opening dialogues, obviously, through informal meetings with the minister and I, as often as possible. We have also asked the civil service to play a more comprehensive role when it comes to understanding the duty to consult, when it is triggered and what needs to happen to accommodate it.

On top of that, we think it is important that all members of our caucus and all members of the government understand First Nations communities and their cultures. That is why one of the action items from our meeting is that we are going to have a bit of a buddy system, if you will. Members of our caucus will speak to First Nations communities. They will have an open dialogue, visit them, and attend some of their events to understand fully their challenges and opportunities and to understand their culture to see how we, as a government, can help. We look forward to that.

Adoption

Mr. Steeves: Unsealing adoption records is an extremely personal matter for the individuals involved. Last year, the previous Progressive Conservative government held public consultations to listen and to gather input from New Brunswickers regarding proposed changes. The Department of Social Development evaluated the information and took the interests of all parties into consideration. The legislation was ready to move ahead, and there really should be a new law in place by now.

My question is for the Minister of Social Development. Given that the public consultation and evaluation by the department is complete and in recognition that this is an extremely important and personal matter, will the minister explain why this government has not moved ahead with the legislation?



Hon. Ms. Rogers: I would like to thank the member opposite for the question. Indeed, it is a very important personal matter. The Department of Social Development is in the midst of engaging in conversations and discussions about opening sealed adoption records so that we can give adult adoptees and biological parents access to identifying information if certain criteria are met. However, the government realizes that this is a very fine balancing act. It is a balancing act between the right to privacy and the right to access the information. We are engaged in discussions on this, and we are very interested in this file. Thank you.

Mr. Steeves: I appreciate the government members' need for discussion and consultation. They have done a lot of it over the past five or six months, and I think it should continue. However, do you know what? Sooner or later, there has to be some movement as well. Sooner or later, a decision has to be made. Sooner or later, they actually have to take a stand. I hear it from my 92-year-old mother, who has a fair bit of life experience and wisdom. She asks: When is the Premier going to answer a question? When is he going to do something?

When is the government going to do something about this? We already mentioned that the Department of Social Development evaluated the information and took the interests of all parties into consideration. The Department of Social Development did this. All right? It is ready to go. I am asking the minister, once again today... Actually, I am imploring the minister once again today to move the legislation forward without delay. Can she rise and at least give us a target date for the legislation?

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Ms. Rogers: Again, it is not a situation of stalling. It is not a situation of cancelling. It is not a situation of blocking. It is a situation where we want to make sure we engage New Brunswickers in this very complex and very personal issue.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Ms. Rogers: Again, we have to find the right balance, with the right criteria engaged in the policy. Thank you.

Mr. Steeves: I would like to know what you are doing to engage more than what Social Development already did. We did it last year. The Department of Social Development evaluated the information, took the interests of all parties into consideration, and wrote legislation.

Do you know what? I watch TV. Last night, in particular, I was thinking about this when I saw one of those advertisements for <www.ancestry.ca>. I thought that this had to be heartbreaking for these people. They do not know where they come from. They do not know



the health concerns that may be passed on genetically by their biological parents. People want this. They spoke to us last year. The work has been done. The legislation has been done. It has probably been translated already. There is really nothing to do but to bring it to the House and to let us act on it. Once again, I ask the Minister of Social Development to rise and to at least set a deadline for when this legislation will be made into law.

Hon. Ms. Rogers: The issue here, really, is about the identifying personal information, which we have to be very careful about. We have been looking at what other provinces have done with this. We are very engaged in the research that is needed in order to change policies. We want evidence-based policies. We want New Brunswickers engaged in the solutions. Again, this is very personal and very complex. In fact, we have found that New Brunswick is in the middle of the pack when it comes to who has opened sealed adoption records and who has not.

WorkSafeNB

Mr. Oliver: Once again, I would like to understand what is going on with WorkSafe NB. Last Friday, the minister informed us that the government members have been preoccupied with what they are hearing about injured workers. The minister mentioned establishing better fairness between the workers in the system. I know that the minister is aware that there is now a completely independent appeals process, which was developed for those injured workers during our mandate. That process will come into effect on April 1—two weeks from now.

The pressing issue that we have before us is the functioning of the WorkSafe NB board. On Friday, the minister said that there would be some decisions made in the near future. Will the minister advise the House today as to whether she has a more definite date to offer than the “near future” and what those decisions may be?

Hon. Mrs. Landry: We are very, very aware of what is happening with the WorkSafe NB file. We are also preoccupied by what we are hearing and reading. We are listening to New Brunswickers on this file.

[Translation]

As you know, WorkSafe NB is a Crown corporation at arm’s length from the government. It is governed by a board of directors that has not met, as we all know, since last October, and I think that the opposition is aware of the situation. We have acted, and we are going to arrange consultations in the spring with regard to benefits for injured workers. We are also going to review everything related to the way the board is set up, including its mandate and legal counsel.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister. The time for question period has expired.

