

April 8, 2015

[Original]

### Senior Citizens

**Mr. Fitch:** As the member just mentioned, this is an unacceptable attack on seniors in New Brunswick. Yesterday, the Minister of Social Development tried to clarify things in her speech on the budget and with the media. Unfortunately, it seems to be even more confusing every time the minister speaks, so I will give her an opportunity to clarify today. Yesterday, instead of using numbers—13%, or 500 people will be affected—the speaking notes were changed to say: A small percentage of New Brunswickers will be affected by the cap.

I wonder whether the minister could clarify. We will put it on a global basis. In her budget, the budget that was brought forward at the Cabinet table for the Department of Social Development, there would be an amount that would be taken from seniors' contributions in nursing homes. I wonder whether the minister could tell us, based on the calculations that she put forward, how much...

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, member.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** We will be very pleased to discuss specific figures and amounts during the consideration of estimates. Of course, these are good questions that are being put to us, and we have no problem discussing these matters. The Minister of Social Development will be very transparent regarding figures, as will all ministers of our government, during the consideration of estimates.

What I would like to reiterate today is that we tabled a budget that was not easy; it is true. Our province has some tough decisions to make, and we will all make them together. We will make them fairly, to ensure that the changes are progressive. We will protect the most vulnerable, which means we will also be asking those who can contribute a little more to do so.

These are the principles that have guided the preparation of our budget and are going to guide our government. I am very proud of the work we are doing to restore our provincial finances and create jobs for New Brunswickers.

[Original]

**Mr. Fitch:** The Premier may be asking people to pay more, but the people are saying no. The seniors are saying no to increasing their cost for care in seniors' homes. We want to understand, because there are so many numbers out there.



The minister brings forward a budget. The minister supports that budget, and the minister supports that budget based on decisions that the department and the minister have made. They bring it forward to the Cabinet table, and they make a decision to go forward.

There is a number that the Department of Social Development brought forward that is based on the change in policy with respect to seniors' assets and raising the cap. I am asking the question to the Minister of Social Development. What is the number that the ministers brought forward that is included in the budget, which we are debating on the floor, and that is increasing because of the attack on liquid assets and raising the cap?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Despite the negative tone and, certainly, the aggressive tone of the Leader of the Opposition, I think that is a fair question, and we will be glad to answer it when it comes to estimates. We will go through the numbers. We will go through everything that the budget will entail. We will be as specific as possible and go into detail. That will be the case for the Minister of Social Development, and that will be the case for all our ministers.

On the floor of the Legislature today, I would like the opposition at least to acknowledge that the principles that guided our budget and the difficult decisions that we had to make were that we were going to be transparent, we were going to be progressive, and we were going to make these decisions together. All these principles are to ensure that our decisions in the budget would be fair. I would like the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, to acknowledge for the first time on the floor of the Legislature that the changes regarding seniors will be done in a progressive way, by protecting the vulnerable and asking those who can pay a little more to do so.

**Mr. Fitch:** The only premise that the Premier has here today on how these numbers are being put forward is hiding behind the veil of the estimates. He is hiding secret numbers that he cannot give today, will not give today, or refuses to give today. It is a general question that should be answered here in question period.

There is a number, which the minister has put forward, based on the change in the policy of attacking the assets and increasing the cap. We are asking the minister. That number should be known. If it is not known, again, there has been ample time since we started this conversation. The minister has put substantial numbers on the floor of the Legislature—13%, 500 people, the total cost, and the \$113 cap going up to an average of \$255. Those are very, very specific numbers that have been given on the floor of the Legislature, so I am asking for a specific number that the minister has, should have, and should give us here today. What is the global number by which the contribution from the seniors in nursing homes is going to increase?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I have been in the seat that the member opposite is currently sitting in. I have been the Leader of the Opposition, and I have asked questions that would be similar, to get the numbers during question period. I can tell you that the then Deputy Premier and then Premier told me several times that we would have to wait for estimates. I do not think that the member opposite, who was a minister of that government, is surprised to hear that we will go into detail and give the specifics during the estimates. We have no problem with doing that. We ask that the



opposition be a bit patient, and we can go through all the numbers, not just those regarding Social Development and regarding seniors, which the member opposite is trying to get to. It will be for all our ministries. We will do that. We will be transparent. We will go into detail. Those members will have ample time to ask questions to really get into the minutiae of where the money is going and where the money is coming from.

Meanwhile, I ask that the Leader of the Opposition recognize that the changes to senior care are going to be progressive, protecting the most vulnerable and asking those who can pay a bit more to do so.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, Premier.

**Mr. Fitch:** I was in Cabinet, and I know that, when you bring a budget forward, you need to know your numbers because a good Premier will ask you: Where did you get these numbers? How did you come up with these numbers? If you do not have those answers, then you are not a very good minister.

I might remind the Premier again that, when he was here, he continued to say: I will do government differently. I will do government differently. If he is accusing us of hiding behind the estimates when we were in government, he is doing things exactly the same, and we expected more.

The 500 people whom the minister talked about earlier in the week... If those 500 people had known that they were going to be attacked, their assets were going to be attacked, they might have voted differently. Those 500 people—500 families—could have made a significant difference in the election, and we would be on that side and protecting the assets of the seniors in New Brunswick.

Does the Premier remember that, when he was in opposition, he told the seniors that he would not attack the liquid assets?

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, member.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** When we get to the crux of it, it is all about the Leader of the Opposition and wanting to be on this side of the Legislature. Well, the people of New Brunswick have spoken. They have given us a chance to govern and to try to make a difference, and that is exactly what we are going to do. In four years, or three and a half years, I should say, we will go back to the people of New Brunswick and ask them for a renewed mandate, and they will be the ultimate judges. We recognize that, and all we can do is to concentrate day after day to do the best job that we possibly can to balance our books, get our economy going, and help families that are struggling across the province. That is exactly what we are doing.

I would like to take a moment to remind the member opposite of what we have done to help families that are struggling. We have introduced a tax credit for seniors to renovate their homes,



to stay in their homes longer. We have helped women by making sure that we have a gender-based analysis in our decisions in government. We have invested in a new mental health centre of excellence, and we also raised the minimum wage, helping the most vulnerable of our province.

**Mr. Fitch:** Those members talk about the seniors' tax credit for their homes. It is a number that has been put on this floor, and it is \$250 000. If they know that number, why do they not know how much money they are going to take from the seniors who are in the nursing homes right now? It is not the 500 that they talked about, the 500 families that are there now. It is the future generations, the ones that are coming.

I used to be a financial planner, and some of my former clients are calling me, saying: The government is going to go after my money. What can I do? How can I make sure that the government does not get my hard-earned money that I have worked for all my life?

I have asked the Premier: Does he remember being in front of CARP? Does he remember being in front of the Coalition for Seniors and Nursing Home Residents' Rights, saying: We will not attack your liquid assets? Does he remember that time, when he was Leader of the Opposition? I might ask again: When he does his consultation, is the minister going to invite the coalition and CARP to those meetings?

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Since the Leader of the Opposition's preamble contained about 13 questions, I will do my best to reassure him and tell him that we have to do what is right to restore public finances progressively and responsibly. We want to ask seniors who can afford it to pay a little more, but, at the same time, we also want to protect the most vulnerable. We have been very clear about this. These are the principles that guided the decisions made during the budget process, and the same principles will again guide us when we have to make more decisions as a government.

*[Original]*

Again, I would ask the member opposite at least to acknowledge that and to acknowledge that we have said repeatedly that this will be progressive, that the most vulnerable will be protected, and that those who can afford it will pay a bit more. I understood the first time they asked the question, but after 40 times, will the member at least acknowledge that it will be a progressive change that will protect the most vulnerable?

*[Translation]*

**Ms. Dubé:** We are still not getting answers this morning, but nevertheless I will try again. What we know so far is this: The government has caused panic among seniors. Furthermore, we know there is a lot of anguish and uncertainty among seniors in the province, and it is not the opposition that is saying this, but seniors' advocates. We know the government will now check



seniors' bank accounts. We also know the maximum of \$113, the cap that seniors used to pay, has been removed, so the contribution made by some seniors may double.

It is now known that a financial assessment will be carried out for all seniors who are waiting to go into a nursing home. Therefore, all of this leads me to put the following question to the minister: How many more employees will her department have to hire to check seniors' bank accounts?

*[Original]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Despite the fact that they are hollering on the other side, we think this matter is very serious, and we take this matter very seriously. We understand that asking people to pay a bit more or to get a bit less is not easy. It is not something we enjoy doing, but it is something we need to do. We want to get our finances in order so that we can pay for health care, pay for education, and help the most vulnerable, moving forward as a government.

Instead of the opposition getting up and maybe giving us some suggestions as to how we could accomplish this together and instead of the MLA for Saint John East getting up and saying that he is happy with our investment in the barge terminal in Saint John yesterday, maybe we could have the member for Moncton Southwest talk about the tax credit we are giving for seniors. Maybe the former Minister of Finance, who, I think, failed at his job, in his speech a week ago, could have given some suggestions on how we could balance the books instead of simply criticizing us. We face serious challenges. We need all New Brunswickers to participate in finding a solution, and that includes the opposition.

*[Translation]*

**Ms. Dubé:** That is another unanswered question. It is now known that the government will check seniors' bank accounts to decide how much they have to contribute, and it could be over \$200 a day. So this is very serious, and members of the opposition take the matter very seriously. It is this government that caused panic when it tabled the budget; we are not the ones who did that, because we are just advocates for seniors.

It is not known how many people the Department of Social Development will need to hire to check bank accounts. The minister mentioned in the House that the new measure should affect about 13% of seniors currently living in nursing homes, but there are seniors in hospitals and in their homes who are waiting to get into a nursing home. Can she tell us if the rate of 13% truly represents the number of seniors in nursing homes who will be affected by the change in the Liberal policy?





[Original]

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Ms. Rogers:** The 13% that was referred to was the number of people who are currently... First of all, everyone who currently goes into a nursing home receives government subsidization. The 13% represents the percentage of people in nursing homes who may be in a position to pay more. That means that 87% of the population does not even have enough income to pay the current daily cap. We are subsidizing a huge number of New Brunswickers in nursing homes. These are the people who need to have our support, and we will continue to support them.

[Translation]

**Ms. Dubé:** The minister just said that we must support people. The best support seniors need is for the government to leave their business and bank accounts alone. This is exactly what we are asking and what seniors in the province are asking.

We know the bank accounts of more than 13% of seniors will have to be checked. Some seniors are currently waiting at home to go into a nursing home. We know the Department of Social Development had a \$7-million fund to help seniors stay in their homes longer, but we also know this fund is gone.

The Minister of Health knows seniors are waiting in hospitals to get into nursing homes. We know these people will have to be financially assessed and reassessed because some of them have been waiting for quite some time. My question for the minister is this: Are you going to let seniors keep their liquid assets? We know this will not be the case. We know the minister will have to do a financial reassessment in order to alleviate congestion in hospitals and thereby help the Department of Health. Will the minister admit that she will need to hire a lot of people to assess seniors?

[Original]

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, member.

**Hon. Ms. Rogers:** Of course, there were a lot of questions buried in here. I will try to get at some answers to make our message more clear.

First of all, we agree with the members opposite very much. Our seniors have worked very hard their whole lives. We do owe our seniors a great deal of dignity and respect, and we will continue to honour this commitment.

We have a budget based on principles of fairness, of equity, of transparency, and of engagement to New Brunswickers. We want our policies to be evidence-based as well. A lot of fear is being promoted right now about policies that are not even developed yet. We are setting up



stakeholder and senior group consultation meetings. They will be part of the solution for answers to these questions.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

### Atcon

**Mr. B. Macdonald:** The Premier has defended his Atcon ministers with two flawed points. First of all, he wants to use the Jedi mind trick. He wants us to believe that there is nothing new with Atcon and that we should all move along. The reality is that the Auditor General has found that the minister, whom the Premier has now made the Minister of Health, acted outside the regulations, outside the law, and that Cabinet approved it. Second, the Premier has said that the people reelected them. That is half true. The people reelected those members as MLAs, but it is the Premier who has put them in Cabinet. He knows full well what they did with Atcon, and he has rewarded them and put them in his Cabinet. Will the Premier now stand in this House, give the people of New Brunswick some justice, and remove those Atcon ministers from power?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** It seems as though it is a slow day for the opposition. We have discussed this for about five years. We discussed this again as recently as a couple of weeks ago. I have made it very clear that there has been no new information provided by the Auditor General. As a government, we are going to make sure that we learn from mistakes of past governments. We will ensure that we fulfill and implement as many of the recommendations given to us by the Auditor General on how to develop the economy in an accountable and transparent way...

We have made it very clear that growing the economy and creating jobs is our priority. We want to get results, and we want to be transparent. We also want to be held accountable, and I am sure that we will be. That is why we are going to continue to focus, day after day, on initiatives that we know will help us create jobs, help us create the conditions for businesses to create jobs, and help us with our economic growth strategy. We are going to invest strategically in our infrastructure and create the Youth Employment Fund to help our young people get the skills they need. We are also going to have a literacy strategy and an educational plan. We are helping small businesses by reducing their taxes. We will continue to support...

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, Premier.

**Mr. B. Macdonald:** What the Premier keeps missing is that it is new, that the Auditor General has finally confirmed what we have been saying for a long time—that his ministers acted outside the regulations. That is new. The people understand that if you take \$70 of someone else's money and give it to your friend, then you are in trouble.

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable member, please address the chair.

**Mr. B. Macdonald:** What this Premier fails to understand is that if you take \$70 million of the people's money and give it to your Liberal friends...



**Mr. Speaker:** Member, please address the chair.

**Mr. B. Macdonald:** What the people understand is that if you take \$70 million of the people's money and give it to your Liberal friends, then the Premier rewards you and he puts you in Cabinet. He gives you more pay, a driver, and extra pension. The people understand that this is wrong.

I want the Premier now to acknowledge the decisions he has made. What he has made, he can unmake. He has put these people in Cabinet, and I want him to take responsibility for that here and now, give the people of New Brunswick some justice, and remove those people from power and put some other people in there.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** All the ministers on this side of the Legislature are now asking: Who has a driver? I can assure you that no one does. In fact, our Cabinet members took a pay cut to show...

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** ...how important it is for us to get our finances in order and for everybody to participate, including elected officials.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Leader of the Official Opposition will come to order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I was very, very happy when I saw that our Cabinet would be the leaders that they are and take a pay cut of 10% on the portion that they are paid as ministers.

On top of that, I would like to acknowledge the question, but I would also like to say that we have talked about this for about five years. It has been in the public domain. The Conflict of Interest Commissioner has looked into this matter. The Auditor General has looked into this matter extensively. While in opposition, we supported having the Auditor General look into this matter further so that we can be as transparent and accountable as possible. We have received the recommendations of the Auditor General. We will do the best we can to implement all of them. If we cannot, we will explain why we cannot implement some of them. We are going to continue to grow our economy in a responsible way.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, Premier.

**Mr. B. Macdonald:** The Premier always reverts to process on this question, but we know that it is not the process that is flawed—it is the people. We know the process. The process was that the government took a recommendation to Cabinet. There were recommendations from the officials,





but the government overruled those and went with the decision of the minister, and Cabinet approved that.

My question for the Premier is this. Once again, will he be transparent? He claims transparency, but the reality is that his ministers could have told us long ago what happened at Atcon. However, it needed the Auditor General to come forward and give us that report. Will this Premier now take responsibility for the decisions he made to appoint those same ministers to his Cabinet?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Indeed, our government focuses a lot of its energy on being as transparent and accountable as possible. It is important to change the way politics are done, and we are trying to do so day after day.

[*Original*]

We are very happy with our record of being transparent. We have been transparent with the film tax credit, with the Drug Plan, and with the forestry plan of the past government. We have been very transparent with the mandate letters that each minister received. We have modernized the Legislature to be more accountable and to be more transparent. We have hired CEOs of Crown corporations on merit, something we did not see under the previous government. We have also ensured that we asked the Auditor General ourselves...

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** ...with the previous government...

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Gagetown-Petitcodiac will come to order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** ...to look into this matter further to make sure that we have all the information we need to have somebody look into the matter extensively, which the Auditor General did. I appreciate the fact that she did. We will certainly take her recommendations moving forward and implement as many as we possibly can so that we can grow our economy in a responsible way.

**Mr. Holder:** The Auditor General has indicated that a forensic audit will answer many more questions that New Brunswickers have with respect to the Atcon file and that shameful chapter in our economic history here in New Brunswick. The Premier says that we do not have any new information, but, as the member for Fredericton West-Hanwell indicated, we certainly do. We know now that the Bank of Nova Scotia was put ahead of the taxpayers of New Brunswick. How did this happen? Why did this happen? A forensic audit could answer that question. Will the Premier not commit to it today?



[Translation]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I want to repeat a quote from the Auditor General that I have already read in the House:

[Original]

*the New Brunswick taxpayers have already paid far too much in this situation. Any exercise beyond what we've done is going to cost a lot of money, if you get involved in a forensic investigation or putting people under oath. Judge Ryan's work, conflict of interest commissioner, that inquiry cost many millions of dollars.*

Because of the fact that there is no new information in the Auditor General's report, because of the fact that we have been talking about this for five years, because of the fact that we supported the Auditor General looking into this matter further while we were in opposition, because of the fact that the Conflict of Interest Commissioner has looked into this matter, and because of the fact that we have gone through two elections since this matter came to light...

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Rothesay will come to order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** ...we will continue to focus on what is important right now, and that is implementing the recommendations of the Auditor General to the best of our ability and growing our economy in a responsible manner.

**Mr. Holder:** The Premier can say all he wants that there is no new information. We know that there is new information. The Bank of Nova Scotia was put ahead of the taxpayers. All we are asking the Premier to do is to clear the air here. The Premier has talked numerous times today about openness and transparency. All we are asking is this: In light of the fact that a bank was put ahead of the taxpayers of New Brunswick, we need to know why. We need to know how that happened. That is new information, and it is a question that has not been answered. Will the Premier not commit today to clearing the air and having an independent forensic audit?

[Translation]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I have already answered this question several times, so I am going to take the time to ask the opposition to come to the House from time to time with suggestions and ideas as to ways to grow the economy, restore our public finances, and provide more help to families. We have been in the House for a few months, and we have not yet received suggestions from opposition members, who instead offer political positions.

[Original]

Why do they not talk about some of the initiatives that we could work on together? These include the smallest Cabinet since 1965, centralization of back offices, reductions in the salaries of



Cabinet, the Strategic Program Review, the literacy strategy, the lowering of the small business tax, Opportunities New Brunswick, the Jobs Board, the Youth Employment Fund, regional cooperation with Nova Scotia and others, promotion and support of the Energy East Pipeline project and the LNG terminal, and making sure that we invest strategically in our infrastructure. Why do they not suggest how to help?

**Mr. Holder:** That in no way answered the question. It is not the deed or the act sometimes, but the cover-up. All we are asking the Premier to do is to clear the air—clear the air. There are members of his government who were part of the government that made that decision. All we are asking for is to clear the air, to have a forensic audit. The government is going from one crisis to the next. Let's do something right. We would love to congratulate the members opposite on the fact that this is their six-month anniversary, but, quite frankly, there is nothing happy about this anniversary. All we are asking is that the Premier clear the air and have a forensic audit so that we can answer these unanswered questions.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** As I said in my previous answer, we have answered this question numerous times. We have made it very clear that we are not covering anything up. It is very much the contrary. We are being very transparent.

I would like to remind the member opposite that we actually joined the past government, when we were in opposition, in asking the Auditor General to look into this matter extensively. The Auditor General's report that just came out was based on a unanimous motion by this Legislature when we were in opposition, and we supported it. We made it very clear that we wanted to get out as much information as possible. We wanted to have an extensive look at the matter, and that is exactly what happened. I thank the Auditor General for her work. We are going to ensure that her recommendations are looked at, taken seriously, and implemented as far as possible.

We will continue to focus on job creation, making sure that we are accountable when it comes to job creation and making sure that we are transparent when it comes to job creation. Unlike the previous government, we will make sure we deliver results when it comes to job creation.

## Health Care System

**Mr. Jody Carr:** Six weeks is the time that a senior who is waiting for a nursing home must wait to get a financial and health assessment at the Chalmers hospital. Six weeks is a long time.

Horizon Health Network CEO John McGarry cried out for help from the government on Twitter over the weekend, looking for the government to provide some leadership and help, but waiting for a financial assessment is just getting worse. We saw that the \$77 million from Atcon could have gone toward the Chalmers hospital upgrades, but that has been shelved.

My question for the Minister of Social Development is this: How many financial assessors is the Department of Social Development hiring? How much longer will seniors have to wait due to this



policy change by the Minister of Social Development to dig deeper into seniors' accounts to pay for senior care?

**Hon. Mr. Boudreau:** I think the preamble talked more about health care than it did about Social Development.

I want to assure this House, the members opposite, and those listening that our government takes this situation very seriously. This is not a situation that has occurred overnight. This is a situation that has been years in the making. This is a situation that the former government never dealt with for the four years it was in government.

However, I can assure the member opposite and this House that, as part of the Strategic Program Review, there is a specific project looking at long-term care and the ALC bed situation. My department and the department of my colleague the Minister of Social Development are actively working together. We are reaching out to stakeholders as well. Just last week, we met with stakeholders on this issue. It is something that we are taking very seriously and that we will be addressing as a result of the Strategic Program Review. Thank you.

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

I have a request from the Minister of Environment and Local Government to answer a question that was previously asked by the Leader of the Third Party.

## Herbicides

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** In response to questions asked by the member for Fredericton South that were taken under advisement, I would like to report to the House today.

With regard to the member's question, Health Canada is the leading authority in determining the safety of pest control products. All registered pest control products used in New Brunswick have undergone a comprehensive evaluation by Health Canada. Glyphosate is currently under routine reevaluation by Health Canada. The Department of Environment and Local Government is closely following this process and will follow the recommendations of Health Canada. Thank you.

**Mr. Coon:** I do not think most New Brunswickers want to rely on Stephen Harper to make a decision to protect their health from herbicide spraying.

In New Brunswick, the *Pesticides Control Act* gives the minister particular powers specifically to protect the health and environment of New Brunswickers. Under the Act, the minister has the power to reject permit applications to spray herbicides or any pesticides aurally. He should use that authority. The *Pesticides Control Act* gives the Health Minister the ability to recommend that the Environment Minister take such action to protect the public health in this province. That includes addressing cosmetic pesticides or the use of this herbicide for cosmetic purposes.



When the minister's party was in power before, it took very positive action, without worrying about what the federal government was doing, to ban the use of 2,4-D for cosmetic purposes, and it is no longer used over our forests. It should take that action now for glyphosate.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, member.

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** I agree with some of the comments from the member opposite, specifically those with regard to the federal government. However, I will say that we are going to follow the recommendations in this specific case. As minister, I am aware, and the department is well aware, of the issue with the chemical. We have done some good things in the past, and we will continue to move forward with these processes. We will leave them to do their job, and, when we see what the outcomes are, we will take it from there. Thank you.

