

May 7, 2015

[Original]

Senior Citizens

Mr. Fitch: The grab for seniors' assets continues to cause stress and unrest within communities—another community last night and another is planned for tomorrow, I believe. The Premier has been hiding behind “wait for the estimates”. Yesterday in question period, he was hiding behind Cabinet secrecy—we cannot discuss that—confidentiality, to talk about this unfair and unnecessary policy.

The point of the matter is that we know the end result of the Cabinet meeting. We know the end result of the discussion in Cabinet, and that was a policy released on Sunday and a press conference on Monday morning. The point is that, on Friday, the Minister of Social Development said “design of a policy”. The question is this: When, during the weekend, was the policy designed? When, during the weekend, was the Cabinet meeting held to approve this policy?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: If I am not mistaken, this is at least the third time I have answered this question, and it may even be more than that. Certainly, the Leader of the Opposition is aware that I am not going to talk about what is said during Cabinet meetings. He has served several times as a Cabinet minister, so he knows full well that we cannot talk about what is said during Cabinet meetings. So, I have already answered this question three, four, or five times, and the answer is still the same.

Here is what I would like to know: Why does the opposition not support our giving more money to those who need it? Seniors who have a husband or wife at home will have more money in their pockets to help them, because life is less affordable than it used to be for them. So, our policy will help the most vulnerable; why does the opposition not support it?

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: This question goes back to the management of this government. It goes back to the ability of this government to make decisions in order to look after the affairs of the province. I quote, again, from the Minister of Social Development on Friday. She said that she “didn't have the details to announce” and that details would “definitely be included in the design of a policy”. Clearly, the Premier, the minister, and the Cabinet are in damage control, because, on Friday at 2:30 p.m., that was what the minister said. Then, on Monday, the results of a Cabinet meeting, the results of a discussion, were out in the public.

I was not asking what the discussion was. I was asking: When did it occur? When did it occur? There is a stark difference between “What was discussed?” and “When did it occur?” Again, we



know that it was a busy weekend for the Premier and the minister, seeing many places throughout the province. We are just asking: When was the Cabinet meeting held, and when did the Cabinet approve the policy?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I will answer the question yet again. I think that this is four, maybe five, or maybe even six times. I cannot discuss what is discussed during our Cabinet meetings. The member opposite is well aware of this.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is certainly not a funny matter. This is serious. The Legislature is where we are supposed to have a discussion about the future of our province, where we are supposed to debate the best course for our province, and the members opposite seem to be taking numerous questions to ask us about what is discussed during Cabinet. The member opposite is trying to pretend that, if I tell him when the discussion happened, that is not talking about the discussion. Obviously, if I mention that one Cabinet decision was made, I am obviously telling him what was discussed during that Cabinet meeting. Therefore, the answer remains the same, one with which the member opposite should not be surprised. He was a minister himself.

He is right. We are going around the province quite a lot to hear from New Brunswickers, and they support our progressive principle and support our focus on job creation.

Mr. Fitch: The Premier is here doing a great job of improv because the government members know they are in trouble. They know they have made a mistake. They know they have caused a problem with the seniors. Again, it would have been much easier, way back, when the Premier was asked, to stand up and admit that he made a mistake, tell the seniors he is sorry, and reverse this policy.

From what the Premier has said here today, we can conclude that the policy was in place and the policy was approved before Friday, when the minister was out in the public telling them that there was no policy, that the details were not finalized, and that nothing had been approved. By the answers that the Premier has given us here today, we can conclude that the minister was out in the public telling them that the policy was not ready and the policy was not designed. The fact of the matter is that the policy was designed, it was approved, and it was ready to go. The government members were just telling the public something that was not, in fact, the truth.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: There is clearly no question there, and I think that is better because it has been the same question about five or six times. I am not going to discuss what was discussed during our Cabinet meetings. That is common practice. It is something that I am just not allowed to do. The member of the opposition is very much aware of that. He has been a minister under several governments.

I have to take issue, however, with what the member opposite said about our making a mistake. I am completely surprised to hear the member opposite say that giving more money to those who



have a spouse or dependent at a home and who make \$60 000 or less is a mistake. I am completely surprised.

As I said yesterday, maybe I should not be surprised because this is the opposition that also thought it was a mistake to tax the wealthier so that we could get our finances in order and help those who need help. It is also the opposition that thought it was a mistake to raise the minimum wage to help those who are working very hard and trying to make ends meet.

Mr. Fitch: The Premier is trying to change the topic and change the tenor. The mistake was when the Premier told the people: We will not touch your assets. Then, after the election, he went back on that promise. Then he would not apologize to them. He would not admit to them that he made a mistake. He would not admit to them: Yes, I told you that I would not touch your assets, but, now, I am going to go and get them.

I have asked questions that the Premier should know, and he has denied even answering those. I will give him one more opportunity to answer an easy question. Yesterday, I asked: When will the \$175 per diem, which is the highest in the federation, come into effect for the people who are residents of nursing homes right now? Will it come into effect now, or is the next person across the threshold of a nursing home going to be charged \$175 per day?

Hon. Ms. Rogers: I would be happy to answer this question because this will be part of the new policy. When it is implemented, this will come into effect.

Mr. Fitch: Again, that was the worst nonanswer that I have ever heard.

When is this policy going to be in effect? When can the seniors... What is the date—a very specific date within the calendar year? When can people expect to have to pay \$175 per day for their care in nursing homes?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have to get up because having the Legislature turned into this type of decorum is very unfortunate.

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Exactly. Exactly.

Having them laugh at the answers given... They have more questions, they can ask them, and we can have a discussion. We need to really look at ourselves in the mirror because, as a province, we face a lot of challenges. If we cannot have a proper discussion here on the floor of the Legislature about how we are going to tackle those challenges together, well, our province needs better leadership from this Legislature. We want to try to provide that, and we hope the opposition will help us.



It has been very clear. We have announced what the policy is. It is going to be implemented within this fiscal year. We have to ensure that we have all the assets and the capability of making sure that we have an analysis of the assets, which we will do. We have said that we are committed to doing this within this fiscal year. We are very excited to give those who are more vulnerable—those who need some support and who have a spouse or a dependent at home—more money in their pockets through this policy.

Day Care

Mr. Jody Carr: The Premier just told the people of our province that we need to look in a mirror. The last Premier I seem to remember who said that to the people of his province was Jim Prentice, and we saw the other night what happened to Jim Prentice when he told the people of his province to look in the mirror. We now have a Premier in New Brunswick saying the exact same thing to the people of this province, and it is very disturbing. It represents the actions of this Premier.

The Liberal government has cut the wages of government-regulated private day care operators by \$2.4 million to pay for wages for new workers and new centres to open—their future competitors. The Premier has said that this budget was going to be based on fairness. My question to the Premier is this: Do you think it is fair for private day care operators to take a wage cut of \$5 an hour in three weeks, taking them to almost minimum wage at best?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I will allow the Minister of Education to answer the questions regarding day cares. I want to take issue with what the member opposite said. If he would listen to what I am saying... Even despite the fact that he would try to say this with a respectful tone and pace, what he is saying is not respectful.

What I said was very clear. We have to look at ourselves in the mirror—the people on the floor of this Legislature. We have serious challenges out there in New Brunswick. People in our province have serious challenges, and they need a government that is serious about helping them face those challenges. They need a government that is going to focus on creating jobs. They need a government that is going to face the financial challenges that we have, but do so in a way that is fair.

What I said was that all members of this Legislature have to look themselves in the mirror and remember why they got into politics in the first place. Was it to get up and fearmonger, or was it actually to have a discussion and a debate about how we, together, are going to better our province?

Mr. Jody Carr: What I heard was that he said we had to look at ourselves in a mirror as a province. To me, it sounded as though he was telling the people of New Brunswick to look at themselves in the mirror. I would say that what we want is for you to listen to the people of New Brunswick and to help the children of New Brunswick. You can blame the opposition. Every time the Liberal



government members get into trouble, they blame the opposition. They cannot take responsibility for their mistakes on seniors or for their mistakes on children.

At best, private day care operators make \$38 000 per year if they are not reinvesting back in their businesses, which many do. This \$5-per-hour cut puts operators at \$20 000 per year to manage staff and to educate our young children. There is no other group of people in New Brunswick that has taken this type of wage rollback, except for maybe Cabinet. Cabinet has taken a \$5 000 pay cut, yet you are asking day care operators to take a \$10 000 pay cut on a much smaller salary.

Mr. Premier, you said your budget would be fair. How can you explain that this is fair to the day care operators of New Brunswick?

Mr. Speaker: I would remind members once again that you are to address others through the Chair. You just said “Mr. Premier”. I have been very clear on that for a number of months now.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The member opposite will, I hope, acknowledge if he misunderstood what I said. I have clarified it. We have to look at ourselves in a mirror as legislators.

I would like the member opposite to get up and explain a few things. If he is going to say that we made mistakes, I would like him to get up on his feet and tell us that taxing the wealthiest to help those who are most vulnerable and who need support was a mistake. I would like him to get up and say that giving more money to those seniors who have \$60 000 or less in income, with a spouse or dependent at home—more money in their pockets—is a mistake. I would love to have the member opposite get up and tell me that raising the minimum wage for those who are working and trying to make ends meet was a mistake. I would certainly love to have the member opposite, who criticizes our pay cuts, take a pay cut of his own.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Jody Carr: Again, when the Liberals get into trouble, they blame the opposition. That is not leadership. It is cruel, and it is wrong. They blame day care operators—private business owners who are operating their businesses, who have to pay for the government’s \$2-billion election promises. It is wrong.

The Premier also said, when he was putting forward this budget and cutting Cabinet’s pay, that he would not ask the people of New Brunswick to do more than what he was prepared to do. Now, he is asking day care operators—260 of them, who have worked in good faith with the provincial government to meet the standards and requirements of the government-regulated early learning and child care sector—to cut twice the amount of the Cabinet ministers’ cut from a far lower yearly salary. That is \$10 000 a year. Mr. Premier, you have broken your word. Through the Speaker, I would say: Do you think that this is fair?



Mr. Speaker: Please, member. Please be seated.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I will tell you what is wrong. What is wrong is that the member opposite gets up with his canned notes, reads from his paper, and does not explain to the people of New Brunswick why he and his colleagues do not support our increasing the minimum wage and do not support our helping those seniors who make \$60 000 or less per year and have a spouse or dependent so that they have more money in their pockets. He and his colleagues are against the fact that we are going to tax the wealthiest to help and support those who need it the most.

I ask the opposition members—as we have asked numerous times—to come up with their ideas on where we should get the money to save the finances of this province. If they have some ideas, we are more than willing to hear them. They will answer that the former Minister of Finance had ideas in the government, but they still will not even confirm that they will support them if we put those ideas forward.

I ask the member opposite to get up on his feet, put his page down, and explain to the people of New Brunswick why he is against the minimum wage, taxing the wealthiest, and helping seniors who need it the most.

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: When opposition members do the math, they can certainly see that the government increased minimum wage by 30¢ an hour, but, as for day cares, the government took back \$5 an hour; therefore, this is not an increase.

When we had a meeting last weekend in Saint-Léonard, we heard that the minister would review the situation. Of course, the minister was very, very clear that he would not reconsider his decision, he would maintain his reform, and he would keep the \$2.4 million to redistribute it; therefore, this is a real loss for private day cares.

The minister also told day care operators that he would get back to them this week, after reviewing the numbers. Now that the minister has said clearly in the media that he would not reconsider his decision, can I ask him what we can expect, since day care operators might have expected a positive answer this week?

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I thank the member for her question. I must admit that we really need some clarification here, since comments are being taken out of context. Therefore, I am going to clarify certain points.

Yes, we had a discussion, and when I was asked whether I had promised to go back to the drawing board and change my position, I said no. However, I said this: I am willing to listen to what day care operators have to say to me. They have committed to providing me with details over the next few days, which they say are confirmed numbers. So, I said I would be more than happy to get the numbers and, after getting them, I would be pleased to sit down with them again. I am



still waiting for these numbers, and I am still willing to sit down with the people I met with last week.

Ms. Dubé: In future, when people meet with the minister, I think it would be good for them to know that they have to bring a recording device. The group was very clear, and there were journalists there. This is what the group from Saint-Léonard said—the member for the Grand Falls area was also there — it was very, very clear that the group felt they had been listened to, and the minister was supposed to come back with good news. It is now apparent that the minister will clearly not reconsider his position. He might be open to dialogue and sharing some numbers, but he is maintaining his position.

Once again, people are talking to us. You have heard the people, and you have read the emails from parents; they are upset. The day care owners, who are mostly women, are upset. It is very emotional. These people have been telling us: We will have to close our doors or increase our fees for parents. The parents are telling us: We cannot pay more. So I am once again asking the minister: What can we expect now?

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: A number of things can be expected. The fact that I have committed to doing this can be expected: As soon as I get the confirmed numbers from the day care operators, we will sit down together. What can be expected is that more than \$400 000 will be added to this program, and more than \$3.5 million will be added to early childhood development, bringing the total to more than \$76 million. So, it can be expected that a lot of hard work will continue to be done in the early childhood sector.

Transparency can also be expected, since our government has never hidden its absolute intention to recruit and retain new employees in day cares, which are a vital part of the early childhood sector.

We have undertaken a clear agenda, which we will continue to work on and of which we are proud.

Ms. Dubé: Here is what we know: The government raised minimum wage by 30¢ an hour but took \$5 an hour out of these women's pockets. That is huge. We also know now that the minister will not reconsider his position.

What can we expect? I can summarize: Day cares will have to close, which will reduce the number of day care spaces that are available in our regions. We can also expect that day cares, if they do not close, will have to increase their fees, and therefore parents will not be able to afford day cares that provide defined programs and training. What we expect from the province is that our children get the best service possible. We can probably expect that parents will have no other choice, because of this reform, but to look to day cares that work under the table.

Once again, I am asking the minister: Are you going to reconsider your decision regarding this \$2.4-million cut? Are you going to actually give back to parents and grandparents the hope that



their children will get the best service possible?

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: Once again, the opposition is saying scary things to fearmonger in this province. Opposition members are making many statements without providing the data to support what they are saying. They are making many statements to scare people, just as they do to seniors in the health care sector.

I find it regrettable that opposition members just stick to criticizing and fearmongering in this province. We have chosen to put forward a clear plan to help seniors, to help young children, and to help in education. We will continue to build a strong province, so that New Brunswickers stay here, and to build a strong economy together.

[Original]

Government Funding

Mr. Stewart: Last Friday, we learned that Trevali Mining has been given \$300 000 by this government in an attempt to take credit for jobs planned four years ago by the company. Of course, improper use of taxpayer dollars on this mine is nothing new, as the Caribou mine is known as the Minister of Energy and Mines' own personal Atcon in the north. In 2007, when he was Minister of Natural Resources, he provided the mine owners with a \$15-million loan guarantee. In 2008, he gave them another \$3 million, bringing the total to \$18 million. As seems to happen with anything that the Atcon Six touch, the mine's owner was in bankruptcy a year later.

My question is: Why did the Minister of Energy and Mines give government assistance to Trevali Mining last Friday for jobs the company has planned to hire on its own since the day it took over the mine?

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: I find it quite unfortunate, when there are 280 people working at Trevali Mining and the Caribou mine site, that the opposition is criticizing the people working there. I find that pretty low on the part of the opposition.

In the next several weeks, that mine will be in full production and over 300 people will be working in northern New Brunswick. I think that is good. The investment we have made through various departments, including the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour... When Trevali said that it wanted 20% of its workforce to be First Nations, I was very proud to



make that announcement for the government. That is much, much more than what we saw from the opposition in the last four years when it comes to northern New Brunswick and First Nations.

Mr. Stewart: That was actually our idea, on the First Nations piece.

We certainly hope that Trevali is successful, but the Atcon Six do not seem to have learned any lessons from the past. The Minister of Energy and Mines has already lost \$18 million on the Caribou mine by giving the mine's owner taxpayer dollars in the two years prior to the company's bankruptcy in 2009.

The problem we have now is that Trevali has long had plans to hire up to 300 people with its own money. Now, this government comes along and throws taxpayer dollars at positions that are already funded in the company's business plan. This is simply political PR.

Since the Minister of Energy and Mines has already lost \$18 million on this mine and the current owners have their own money for the jobs at the mine, can the minister responsible let us know whether this is the kind of peer-reviewed due diligence we can expect from the Opportunities New Brunswick taxpayer-dollar giveaways?

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: I would love to figure out the logic of the opposition member. Since last week, he has been saying that the Trevali announcement we made last week was his idea and that it is a good thing that we invested in Trevali because it was his idea. However, now, we are investing some dollars in Trevali, and it is a bad idea. Figure it out. I do not know where the opposition stands.

First of all, with regard to Blue Note Mining, you are right. The former government gave a \$15-million loan to Blue Note Mining. Do you know what? Blue Note Mining invested \$100 million in infrastructure at the Caribou mine site. Today, I have to say that Trevali has invested \$70 million in the Bathurst Mining Camp, including \$40 million at Trevali's Caribou mine site.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: I will quote officials from Trevali. They have said that, if the \$100-million investment by Blue Note Mining that was done a couple of years ago had not been done, Trevali would not be able to operate today or to make that work.

Do you know what? This month, there will be more than 300 New Brunswickers working on-site, and I am very proud of that.

Mr. Stewart: This mine seems to have an unusual hold over the Minister of Energy and Mines. Losing \$18 million of taxpayer funds is apparently not enough for him. He wants to keep giving away taxpayer dollars to this mine. In fact, if we look at the PR exercise from last Friday, the



government claims that 89 jobs are part of its giveaway. Some \$18.3 million for 89 jobs means that this minister has now spent over \$200 000 for every job the company has long planned to pay for out of its own resources. That is rich for the minister on the other side of the floor, even by Atcon standards.

The Premier said that the government would learn from the mistakes of Atcon. Can he explain how giving more money to a mine that has already cost the taxpayers of New Brunswick \$18 million, when it is clear the current positions would be filled without government assistance, is learning from your mistakes?

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: The only hold that exists is the member opposite's leadership aspirations. That is the only hold that exists.

I will repeat myself because he does not seem to understand and the rest of the Tories do not understand. This is a file on which they failed, and they failed on many files. I am very proud of the leadership of our Premier. He took this file on and wanted to make sure it worked, and I think it does work. Right now, there are 280 people working on-site, and, in the next couple of weeks, there will be more than 300. There are First Nations people from six First Nations communities working on-site. The company has an objective of having 20% of the workforce come from First Nations. That is great news for New Brunswick. It is great news that we can make it work.

Do you know what? I know the members opposite did not get the memo, but there is life outside of fracking. There are other resource development activities that we can do to create jobs. With Trevali and the lead, copper, and zinc mining sectors, there are more than 300 jobs in northern New Brunswick, someplace... You guys do not have a clue where that is.

Mr. Speaker: Again, minister, I request that you address the Chair. "You guys".

School Closures

Mr. Holder: Last week, I attended a district education council meeting at which the chairman of the DEC read a letter from the Minister of Education, who indicated that he supported the DEC's recommendation to close Lorne Middle School in the North End of Saint John.

A few years ago, a Liberal Minister of Education, along with some of his colleagues who are still in the House, overrode the DEC when it tried to do this previously. The basis was that there were some inner-city issues in Saint John, some challenges as well as some priorities, and that, to meet those priorities, we had to have a school presence in the community. My question to the Minister of Education is this: What has changed?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: You know, policy 409 clearly lays out the different criteria that must be considered in this province. As I did a few weeks ago, I urge opposition members to read this



policy I have here, and I will be happy to provide them with a copy in French and English. The different elements to be considered are clearly laid out in this policy. If you wish, I can list them, but, since I am running out of time, I will only say that these criteria have been very clearly set out in policy 409.

This policy also addresses consultations that have to take place. As minister, my responsibility is to look at all of this and make a decision based on the information that was provided in this process. Based on policy 409, I did indeed accept the recommendation under this process.

[Original]

Mr. Holder: It is very clear from that answer that the minister does not indicate in any way, shape, or form what has changed. I can tell you that there are a lot of positive things happening in that neighbourhood. There has been investment in the playground across the street from the school. There has been investment in the refurbishment of the community centre adjacent to the school, in which they share a gymnasium. There has been investment in a playing field just down the street. There is a new YMCA around the corner. This is a community on the move. This is a community that still has a lot of challenges but also some opportunities—opportunities that can be met with that school presence.

The minister, a few years ago, indicated that that school was necessary, with a lot of the same cast of characters around the table. The minister has not indicated what has changed. Will he not step up to the plate and override the district education council until a wider discussion around this community can take place?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: Based on the information gathered and the criteria that I am required to follow, I did make a decision. Thank you very much.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

