

May 26, 2015

[Original]

Government Spending

Mr. Fitch: We thought that last week was going to be a break week. Then it became the estimates week. The people of New Brunswick thought that it would be a break week from the poor choices and policies of the Liberal government.

It was revealed during the estimates that there was a \$30 000 advertising campaign to sell the seniors' asset grab to New Brunswickers. It was developed by the Executive Council, or so the minister says. It was paid for by the Department of Social Development. Can the Premier confirm today that the amount of money that was spent to develop this ad in the Executive Council Office was \$30 000?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I listened to the first question from official opposition members today. One day, they criticize this government saying that it does not communicate enough with people regarding decisions it makes in terms of public policy. The next, they criticize us for investing money in informing New Brunswickers about policies our government is putting forward for our province.

We chose to purchase advertising to inform New Brunswickers about the new policy regarding seniors and nursing homes. It is important that all New Brunswickers understand what fact-based decisions are being made and what their consequences are. That way, New Brunswickers, especially the ones affected, will fully understand our decision. That is why the advertising was purchased.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: It is interesting that the Minister of Finance would get up and answer that question. A year ago, the minister and the member for Shediac Bay-Dieppe put forward a bill on the floor of this Legislature, when they were in opposition, that denounced taxpayers paying for ads in the newspaper and for ads on television. They were the ones who denounced it back then. Here is the quote from the now Premier: The Finance Minister is saying that we are in a difficult state when it comes to our finances. In spite of that, the government is paying for TV ads with the taxpayers' money.

Now, here we are, a year later, and this government is using taxpayers' money to go out and sell a bad policy decision that it has made. Will the Finance Minister stand up today and explain why they have had such a change of heart and why they now feel that it is all right to spend taxpayers' money when, a year ago, they said that it was wrong?



Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I have said it once, and I will say it again on the floor of the Legislature. If the official opposition members would read the policy and would understand and really educate themselves about the decisions that we are making in this province to try to have sustainable, long-term social programs and economic development and if they would stop fearmongering and giving information to the public that is not factual, we would not have to put these ads together.

Work with us. Work with us as a true Legislature to make sure that New Brunswickers understand the facts and understand the reality and the challenges that we have in our province, financially and economically, when it comes to making sure that we have sustainable, long-term social programs. Work with us. If you would come together here as legislators, we would not have to put these ads together to try to explain and clarify some of the fearmongering that the opposition is bringing forward.

Mr. Fitch: Another phrase I hear in Tim Hortons from many people when they evaluate this Liberal government is that it is going to be a one-term government. I will tell you this: The Minister of Finance talks about fearmongering. He was the one who stood on the floor of this Legislature on March 31 and said: We are going to take the seniors' assets. That was all he said. He said that they would protect the house. That was all he said.

It was not until the opposition and the seniors of New Brunswick pushed the government for details that it made a quick decision on policy and brought it forth on May 4. He was the one who left the void in the public. He was the one who left the void in the details. He was the one who has caused unrest in the seniors in the province. Last year, he was the one who stood on the floor of this House, presenting a bill and saying that it was wrong to use taxpayers' money. Is \$30 000 the full cost of this ad, or is it more than that?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Again today, the official opposition is trying to fearmonger and is not really stating the facts. When I gave the speech on the budget, I said that we would be protecting the homes and the assets of seniors. The official opposition does not read.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: The opposition goes out and plays small politics—partisan politics. We are at a crossroads in this province. We have an average structural deficit of \$400 million, an aging population, and a decreasing population. We need to turn this around, as a province, as a government, and, certainly, as legislators.

Work with us. Come together on the floor of this Legislature and work together with us so that we can make good decisions, explain the decisions, and have a long-term, sustainable social and economic fabric for the future of our province.



(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fitch: The Minister of Finance is so concerned about the deficit. Why did he double the deficit when he put forward his first budget on the floor of the Legislature? His words are like the gonging of bells and the clashing of cymbals. They make no sense whatsoever. He is the one who says that we have to get our fiscal house in order, yet he is the one who is promoting a \$2-billion patronage paving program in New Brunswick.

I will give him a couple of suggestions. He could reduce the \$150-million slush fund that he is creating, he could reduce the extra spending that the government is promoting as part of its patronage paving program, and he could get the deficit down closer to where it was when we left office.

I will give the Finance Minister one more chance. When he includes this ad on the day cares, the ad on the seniors, and any other poor policy decision that the government is making, how much is the total cost of this ad campaign?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Again, it is another example of this opposition not really understanding the facts.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: We have said that there is a contingency reserve of \$150 million that is not borrowed money in the financials of our province that are being projected. It is a contingency reserve in case we have a revenue shortfall. Again and again, the official opposition keeps giving false information on the fact that it is a contingency reserve. It is not borrowed. It is in case of a revenue shortfall. It is being prudent. It is having prudent financial practices.

Why are the opposition members not agreeing with this? Why can they not understand this? It is a contingency reserve. It is a contingency reserve. I will repeat. It is a contingency reserve. Do you understand that by now?

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fitch: The Minister of Finance is getting pretty aggressive today, because he knows that he is wrong. Maybe he could just tell the people why, when he is in a deficit situation, he wants to set up this contingency fund. The federal government is in a surplus. It set up a contingency fund.



When Bernard Lord was the Premier, he set up a contingency fund. Why? It was because he was in a surplus.

Will the minister tell us this here today: If the revenue softens up and does not come in, where is he going to get the \$150 million?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I am glad that he is at least getting some numbers that are factual. It is a contingency reserve of \$150 million that is built in, not borrowed, in the budget. If we do not need it, we do not borrow it.

We are being very transparent and open in our finances. The worst-case scenario is \$476 million. If we do not need the contingency reserve—and we hope that we do not need the contingency reserve—it will be a deficit of \$326 million, which is still too high. It is absolutely still too high.

(Interjection.)

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

Hon. Mr. Melanson: We need to get to a position where we have a balanced budget and then a surplus budget. We can then have a very meaningful conversation, hopefully, on the floor of the Legislature, on how we invest these surpluses as we get to that position. However, we need to get our fiscal house in order so that we can have long-term sustainable health care, senior care, and education, and our economy...

[*Translation*]

Senior Citizens

Ms. Dubé: New Brunswick seniors are definitely very disappointed with this government, as they were expecting continuity in the Home First Strategy; they were expecting to get government assistance to help them with renovations that would enable them to stay in their homes as long as possible.

The only thing in this budget is a tax credit for a \$10 000 investment. So, seniors must spend \$10 000 in order to receive \$1 000. Here is my question: How many seniors or senior couples will this initiative help?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I find it hard to understand the question, since this is good news. Indeed, it is good news to provide a tax credit to seniors who are able and want to stay in their homes but need to renovate it to meet some of their needs. We are going to allow a 10% tax credit, meaning up to \$1 000, for seniors who invest up to \$10 000 per year, year after year, so that they can stay in their homes as long as possible. It must be emphasized that this is the most comfortable place for them; it is the most appropriate place for them and the most efficient for the taxpayers. Therefore, I do not understand the member's question, since it is good news and is more than the



previous government did. Everything is connected to the strategy to enable them to stay at home as long as possible in New Brunswick.

Ms. Dubé: When we tabled our budget last year, \$7.2 million was voted for Home First; that is good news. However, this government has not invested anything in this strategy, and that is not good news. The minister did not answer my question. How many New Brunswick seniors is this tax credit going to help?

All seniors want to stay in their homes, but they will have to invest \$10 000 of their own money, even though they are struggling to make ends meet. This is a poor return on a \$10 000 investment; it is peanuts. What we are asking this government is to actually set up a program and actually invest in helping seniors stay at home.

So, my question for the minister is this: How many seniors will the program you set up really help? How many seniors are you going to help, according to your estimates?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I will remain calm because this is a situation where there is good news. This is great news for New Brunswick seniors, since they will get access to a tax credit if they renovate or adapt their homes to accommodate their needs.

I am assuming that all members—but I cannot speak for the opposition—agree that we need to encourage seniors to stay in their homes as long as possible. Nobody wants to go into a nursing home or an institution. If seniors go into these institutions, it is because they need a very high level of service.

However, as a government, we have undertaken initiatives to encourage people to stay in their homes, and we are offering a \$1 000 tax credit, which amounts to 10% of a \$10 000 investment. Moreover, seniors will be able to apply annually, year after year, to adapt their homes to their changing needs.

Ms. Dubé: This is a broken promise and a disappointment for seniors in this province. Actually, very few seniors will be able to benefit from this tax credit. They have expectations of this government. Indeed, when government members were in opposition, they said they were going to support the Home First Strategy. There are a lot of people in hospitals.

There is \$600 000 coming from the Department of Health budget, very limited funding from the Department of Social Development, and a tax credit that the government is presenting as good news. The minister did not answer my question, probably because very, very few seniors will be able to benefit from this program. When the government planned this program, it must have had to do some analysis. I am asking the minister my question again: How many seniors will actually be able to invest and make use of this program that is only providing peanuts?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Again, the official opposition members cannot make suggestions or ask questions in a constructive manner. They talk about “peanuts” when referring to the program



that provides access to a \$1 000 tax credit for seniors who make an investment of up to \$10 000 to renovate their homes, which represents a 10% tax credit.

There are days when official opposition members tell us that we are not investing enough, days when they say that we are investing too much, other days when they tell us that we are cutting too much, and, finally, other days when they do not know what they are talking about.

Let's have fact-based and constructive discussions so we can move our province forward as a society. As a government, we are seriously committed to making the right decisions to ensure that our province has a sustainable future in the long term. We would like the official opposition to work with us.

[Original]

Pesticides

Mr. Coon: My question is for the Minister of Health. Spring has finally arrived, and that means that pesticides are once again being sprayed in our neighbourhoods. New Brunswick bans over-the-counter sales of only a single active ingredient, 2,4-D, which is used to make cosmetic pesticides, despite the fact that other pesticides are known or suspected to be linked to cancer, neurological damage, and reproductive damage.

Both Ontario and Quebec have had comprehensive bans on the use of pesticides for purely cosmetic purposes for years. Why? To protect public health and to protect the health of our children. This is preventative health care and an essential part of any cancer prevention strategy. Will the Minister of Health request that the Minister of Environment use his powers under the *Pesticides Control Act* to implement a comprehensive ban on cosmetic pesticides in our province?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: Cosmetic pesticides have been reduced quite substantially since 2010 in New Brunswick. We look at our pesticide regulations through Health Canada.

This is a very important question. As the Minister of Environment, I will look into the question the member has asked about specific pesticides.

Lawn care professionals in the province have made some very good strides in the reduction of pesticide use, and there are proper programs to make sure they monitor where these pesticides are going and how they are used. We look forward to moving ahead with these programs.

Mr. Coon: Ontario prohibits the use of 84 over-the-counter active ingredients used to make cosmetic pesticides. New Brunswick prohibits the use of 1. It prohibits use on residential yards, school grounds, and hospital grounds. Nova Scotia has based its prohibition of cosmetic pesticides on Ontario's list.



Children are particularly vulnerable to the hazards of exposure to pesticides because of their physiology. Children's immune systems are not fully developed, and their skin is more permeable to pesticides. It is the risk to children's health that has driven action by the governments of Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia. Will the Minister of Health immediately request that the Chief Medical Officer of Health prepare a set of recommendations on how the Minister of Environment should proceed to eliminate the risk to children that is posed by the use of cosmetic pesticides in our neighbourhoods?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: Again, our department reviews this with the lawn care professionals. They do have a rigorous program in place, with a lot of training for the people who actually apply pesticides. Since 2010, we have moved forward quite substantially with the regulating and monitoring of what is being used throughout our province. We have also put bans in place on the ability to sell many of these pesticides in local retail markets.

However, there is more work to do. I will take the question under advisement and report back to the Legislature on where we are going this year. I will also talk with my colleague the Minister of Health to see if there are any improvements that can be made. At this point in time, I do believe that there are substantial rules and regulations in place that prohibit these pesticides throughout the province. If there is room for improvement, we will look at it. Thank you.

Mr. Coon: This is a question of health. It is the responsibility of the Minister of Health to protect the health of New Brunswickers. This government has put an emphasis on preventive health care. The key element of preventive health care must be to eliminate where possible and otherwise minimize the exposure of children to environmental contaminants. Cosmetic pesticides are hazardous substances that are intentionally and carelessly released into our neighbourhoods. This simply needs to end now, and it can be done with the stroke of a pen.

Will the Health Minister meet with the Minister of Environment to ensure that he takes the necessary regulatory action to ban cosmetic pesticides in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: I will repeat what I said earlier. I will review it with my colleague the Minister of Health and look at what our current policies are. I know that he is bringing this to the floor of the Legislature today. It is my duty, along with the Minister of Health, to protect New Brunswickers from these.

Since 2010, we have also put in very rigorous protection for New Brunswickers through the rules and regulations for our lawn care professionals, who have to take specific training to be able to treat with these pesticides throughout the province. There is room for improvement.

I will take that question under advisement and get back to the House. I do think that the professionals who are out there are doing a good job. As I said, there is always room for improvement, so that is what we will look forward to in the future.



Day Care

Mr. Jody Carr: The Premier and the Liberal Party have lost all credibility, and in a record amount of time. People are asking daily: How can we get rid of the Gallant government, and how can we do it now? Never before have we seen the public turn so quickly on a lousy government.

In another broken promise, the Premier said he would double funding for day care assistance by \$15.5 million, not during the mandate, but in the first budget. Instead, we have seen a total 180, and he has cut funding to day care operators by \$2.4 million. My question is to ask the Premier if he thinks he has lost the confidence of the public and if he is ready to reverse the cuts to day care subsidies.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: Again, some information must be corrected; this is almost becoming a habit. In this particular case, there are several corrections to make.

Yes, we promised that, during our mandate, we would double the amount invested in the Day Care Assistance Program, and we will be doing that.

For the umpteenth time, I am going to repeat what I said about the money being invested in day care through the Quality Improvement Funding Support Program. There has not been a \$2.4-million cut; this amount is being reinvested. We added \$400 000 to that, bringing the total to \$2.8 million. This money is being invested according to the intent of the program, which is to help people working in this area, typically women, to enable them to make decent wages in our society. That way, they can continue to provide our young children, who are the future of our province, with a program that ensures we have plenty of day care spaces in the province.

[Original]

Mr. Jody Carr: If the minister and the Premier were doing their jobs, they would have a total budget for QIFS of \$26 million, if they included the \$2.4 million as they promised. In fact, they would have a total budget of \$95.5 million overall for early childhood services because the Premier promised that he would double the funding for day care assistance by \$15.5 million in his first year.

He said this to get votes. Ever since he took office, he has been losing votes daily. He said he would focus on literacy, but he cut the bookmobiles and fired 302 support teachers. He said he would protect seniors, but he is robbing seniors of their assets.

People are very disturbed by the direction in which the Premier is taking this province, in a way I have never seen, and so quickly after his taking office—so much so that seniors are leaving and people are wanting another election.



The Premier promised last fall that he would double the funding for day care assistance in his first budget by \$15.5 million, yet he did not deliver. Is the Premier ready to apologize to the families of New Brunswick who were expecting this support for early childhood learning and care?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Once again, I listened to the opposition. Certain people should have a discussion with the member for Quispamsis. Why? It is because this member, who was the Minister of Finance under the previous government, wanted to do even more streamlining back then, in order to find efficiencies within government.

Today, we still have a structural deficit. We still have a serious challenge ahead of us to balance our budget in New Brunswick. We still have an economy that is slowly but surely recovering, but we are still facing challenges with regard to our operating budget.

Every day, when we are in the House, members of the official opposition rise to criticize and question everything; they offer nothing constructive and propose no ideas or solutions. It seems to me that, as the opposition... Several opposition members have a number of years of experience, so they should understand that we are facing serious challenges in New Brunswick.

Work with the government and New Brunswickers; let us find solutions. That way, we will be on the right track.

[*Original*]

Mr. Jody Carr: I am proud of the member for Quispamsis. We all are.

In our PC government, we worked to find savings in a strategic and methodological approach, not on the backs of children, on the backs of seniors, on the backs of women, or on the backs of frontline health and education services. That is the difference. Investing in early learning and day care is important to the workforce as a strong transition to public school. Every dollar invested has a return of \$7 to \$10 in social and economic benefits. The PCs know this. One only has to look at our three-year, \$38-million early childhood plan, Putting Children First.

However, today's Premier has gone back on his word, on the backs of children and on the backs of working families who need the support the most. He promised to double day care assistance by \$15.5 million in his first budget, and he has failed. All those members are able to do is point fingers and blame the previous government. Either the Premier turned down a budget proposal from the Minister of Education or he did not even get one. Either way, the Premier must apologize. Will the Premier, the Leader of the Liberal Party, apologize for turning his back on the children of the province...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.



Hon. Mr. Melanson: The member opposite needs to be reminded that this is the Legislative Assembly. It is not a place that you can use to try to push a leadership bid. We need to be nonpolitical. We need to look at the facts. We need to identify solutions.

This is a member of the previous government that got rid of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. They did it. They were the government that increased—doubled—the co-pay for seniors. They were the government that never respected a target on the financials of our province over their four years. They were the government that was not able to grow the economy. We had a stagnant economy with no job creation. They were the government that still left a structural deficit when we took office. They did not respect their promise that they were supposed to balance the books over four years.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: The status quo did not work. The credibility of the opposition is not there. We are getting the job done.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister. Order.

Government Spending

Mr. B. Macdonald: It is impossible to get an answer out of this minister today. He knows full well that one of the key roles of this Legislature is to find out where the people's money goes.

I will direct my questions to the Minister of Government Services. I would like to know what is the full and total cost of this government's ad campaign. That includes production and distribution—all costs. What are these ads costing New Brunswickers?

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Let's be factual here. There is an ad campaign to inform New Brunswickers because of the official opposition fearmongering to New Brunswickers about the facts.

What is this policy? It is very progressive. You kept that word in the name of your party. I am quite impressed about that. It is very progressive—very progressive. We want to have programs that can be sustainable in the long term.

We do have an aging population. The number of people 65 years old and over is going to increase by 60% over the next 10 years. We have a decreasing population. We have an economic challenge. We have a financial challenge. We are dealing with it. We are making difficult but



important decisions for the long-term sustainability of our province. Why did you not do this when you were in government? We will do it.

Mr. B. Macdonald: Long answer, no number. What is the number? What are these ads costing New Brunswickers?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Again, if they had talked about the facts and explained the policy and if they had actually read the policy and stopped fearmongering to New Brunswickers, the ads would not have been needed.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order, members.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: The ads would not have been needed. We are informing New Brunswickers about the decisions and the progressive impact of this policy decision.

We had some very serious challenges. We have been touring the province through the Strategic Program Review, meeting stakeholders and talking to New Brunswickers, and New Brunswickers understand and realize that we need to get this fiscal ship on track. We need to grow the economy and see job creation.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: We need to see long-term, sustainable economic growth and a progressive social fabric in our province. We want that. The official opposition does not want that.

Mr. Speaker: Time, member. This is the final question.

Mr. B. Macdonald: Again, that was a long soliloquy from the minister. I just want to know the number. How much money are these advertisements costing the people of New Brunswick? It is a simple question, and I want to know the answer to it. How much money is this costing the people of New Brunswick? What is the total amount?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: It is \$30 000. We have said it publicly. I do not know why the member did not understand it when we said it publicly last week.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.





Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick Oral Questions

Hon. Mr. Melanson: That being said, we need to inform New Brunswickers. The Cabinet ministers, my caucus colleagues, and I meet regularly to explain to New Brunswickers the decisions that we make, why we are making these decisions, and how progressive the decisions will be for the future of our province. Due to the fearmongering done by the official opposition, we had to bring forward these advertisements to give more information as we move forward, to better inform New Brunswickers, and to give them the facts, the facts as to how and why we made the decisions. That is why we are doing this, and that is why we are going to keep informing New Brunswickers, to get some long-term, sustainable solutions for our province.

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

