

May 27, 2015

[Original]

### Senior Citizens

**Mr. Fitch:** I think that the time has come for the Premier to admit that the seniors' asset grab has been a poor policy choice. He has tried everything—slide shows, radio ads, newspaper ads, and sending the Atcon Six out to try to sell this—and no amount of slick advertising is going to make up for a very, very bad policy. It will not be acceptable to the people.

Tomorrow, there will be another protest on the lawn of the Legislature, I understand. It will probably be a record for a first-time Premier and a first-time session in the Legislature in terms of how many protests have occurred in the Legislature and in the gallery. In order to try to mitigate the damage that has been done to his reputation, his government, and the decision that he would be making, will the Premier get up on his feet today and at least say that he will consider reversing the Atcon Six decision to grab the seniors' assets?

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

[Translation]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** As a government, our priority is to create jobs and grow the economy. We also want to ensure that New Brunswick is the best place to raise a family. There is no doubt that, to do so, our fiscal house must be put in order.

So, as a government, we have tabled a budget that will help us achieve our goal, and we have also undertaken the Strategic Program Review. Both exercises will help us reach our goal of ensuring we have strong financial capacity for several years to come in order to provide high-quality services to New Brunswickers. There will be support for seniors, as well as first-class health care and education systems.

So, we are going to work very hard with New Brunswickers to reach our goals and respect our priorities. We are asking the opposition to help us put our fiscal house in order and focus on efforts to grow the economy, as we have been doing since our government took office.

[Original]

**Mr. Fitch:** It is good to see that the Premier is back and well rested after his break week, which became an estimates week. I would like to say again that we are trying to help. We have made the observation that, in the media, it has been reported that people are leaving the province. When people make a decision to leave the province based on a policy decision that this



government makes, how is that good policy? It was reported that the seniors are leaving because of this asset grab.

When the Premier says that it is a great place to raise a family, he is neglecting the fact that it has been reported that people are leaving the province because of his policy decisions. It is \$1.6 million that the government is trying to grab from the seniors, and that may not even be implemented this year. Why does the Premier not put a moratorium on this decision? Put a moratorium in for a year and allow a committee of some sort to be formed to study it. Will the Premier put a...

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

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** We must put our fiscal house in order, and we must do so now. Our first budget was guided by principles that will enable us to reach this goal in an equitable manner.

[*Original*]

In our first budget, we made sure that we followed the principles of being progressive, that we made these decisions together, that everybody would participate a little bit, and that nobody would be the sole focus when it came to asking people maybe to give a bit more or to receive a bit less. That is exactly what our budget does. It is a progressive budget, one that helps the most vulnerable and supports those who need help. Those are exactly the principles that we will follow under the Strategic Program Review.

I have to remind the opposition and the people of New Brunswick that we are doing this so we can gain the fiscal capacity, for many years to come, to provide strong social programs and a strong social fabric and also to invest in our priority of creating jobs. I am very happy with the work that we have done so far. The New Brunswick economy has produced 2 500 jobs since we have been in office, and we are going to continue that momentum.

**Mr. Fitch:** The Premier says: We have asked people to pay a little bit more. I wonder whether he is going to go out on the lawn of the Legislature tomorrow if the seniors show up, as they are planning to do, and tell them: We want you to pay a little bit more, and it is going to be \$40 000; you, a bit more, and it is going to be \$50 000; you, a bit more, and it is going to be \$100 000; and you, a bit more, and it could be up to \$200 000.

When the Premier put the cap of \$175 a day on care in seniors' homes and the government said that seniors also have to deplete their assets above and beyond the \$50 000, or above and beyond the \$100 000, did he know that the little bit more is a substantial amount of money to a number of seniors who could potentially go into nursing homes?



I wonder whether the Premier, again, would agree to at least consider this \$1.6-million asset grab, put a moratorium on it for a year, form a committee of whoever can look at this and look at the fact that this is the only province in the federation of Canada that is now attacking assets in order to pay for care. Will the Premier...

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

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Newfoundland and Quebec have similar policies. Let's start off with that. Second, I think it is important to note what this policy actually does.

*[Translation]*

Contrary to what the opposition member, who is using scare tactics to fear monger, has said, we have clearly said that the nursing home policy we have implemented to help seniors is progressive.

*[Original]*

We are asking those who can pay a little bit more to do so. Those who have liquid financial assets—that is not the home or the proceeds from the home, no physical assets, only liquid financial assets—over \$100 000 as a couple or \$50 000 as an individual will be asked to have a small percentage of 10% or 20%, if it is a couple or a single person, added to the contribution that they pay on a yearly basis. On top of that, we are giving those who have less income—\$60 000 or less as a couple—more money in their pockets. It is progressive, and it is the right thing to do.

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

**Mr. Fitch:** The Premier talks about misinformation, but the only misinformation is coming from that Premier, the Atcon Six, and the other backbenchers who are trying to sell this to the public. If he could point to one bit of misinformation that came from the opposition, we would be happy to review it. The Premier cannot, because there is none. The only misinformation came from the government.

On March 31, those members said in the budget that they were going to take seniors' assets and that family homes were protected. That was it. We asked questions, but the information did not come. It was not until a hastily put-together news conference on May 4 that they rolled out what the policy was going to be.

It is interesting that the Premier tries to minimize who will be affected. If those members look back at Hansard over that period of time, they will see that they kept saying 13% of the people would be affected—13% of the people would be affected. Now, they have done a 180, and they say: The people in the nursing homes are not going to be affected. What is the percentage of the people in the population of New Brunswick who have liquid assets that are going to be attacked by this government?



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

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I would love to have some time to correct the member opposite. First off, Quebec and Newfoundland have similar policies, unlike what was said. We find ourselves with this also: If somebody was paying \$0 in the nursing home and went up to the maximum of \$175, if you do the math, it is certainly not the increase of \$200 000 per year that the member opposite is trying to insinuate. We find ourselves with a very fair rate.

Again, we have to make this point because the member opposite certainly will not make it: Everybody is going to be subsidized in some shape or form. Every single person in a nursing home or going into a nursing home will be subsidized. How much we subsidize will be based on a formula that we think is very fair and that is progressive.

On top of that, I would like to point out the fact that we have made it very clear since day one, when the policy was announced, that people in nursing homes right now would not be affected. We have made that clear, and I hope the member opposite will realize that.

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

**Mr. Fitch:** You think that the formula is fair, but there are a number of seniors who do not think it is fair at all.

The Premier across the way talks about people in nursing homes now paying zero dollars. They all contributed to the OAS. If they are entitled to Canada Pension, they receive that, and, if they get a supplement, they get that as well. Everyone is paying a little bit now. When the Premier talks about paying a little bit more, if you look at various asset classifications or asset levels, they can pay a significant amount.

When you come to think about what this could affect here in the province, with people moving out of the province... Again, the Premier made the distinction many times, as did the minister, that 13% of people would be affected. Now, they have changed that song and they are saying that it is the new people coming in. How many of the new people who are going into nursing homes will be affected by this policy?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** As we said on day one, when the policy was announced, people who are in nursing homes now will not be affected. For those who are going into nursing homes, yes, there will be some changes, including the fact that we will be putting more money into the pockets of couples that have \$60 000 of income or less per year. They are going to have more money in their pockets for their spouses and dependents at the homes. I have yet to hear the member opposite acknowledge that. I would ask him if he realizes that and if he thinks that is not a good policy, to give more money to those who have less.

I would also like to point out that, in 2005, some people were paying over \$175 per day for nursing homes. We had some people who were paying \$182. The member opposite was a



minister at the time, so, for him to get up now, a few years later, and accuse us... I think it is a bit unfortunate. We have to make some decisions that are fair and progressive and that will allow us to invest in strong social programs and things that will create jobs for New Brunswickers. That is what we are doing.

**Mr. Fitch:** Do you know what? In 2005, we saw the injustice and we changed that policy.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Mr. Fitch:** We changed that policy, and the subsequent government followed through with it. That was one of the best decisions on which it followed through. It did not reverse it, as this government has done with every other policy decision that has gone ahead. This decision continued under David Alward, and it should be continuing under this government.

The Premier talks about this being fair for one group of citizens, but it is unfair for the others. There needs to be a better way. There needs to be more information that people can give to the Premier so that he can understand that this \$1.6 million is not worth his career or his government. In moving forward with this, he is becoming known as having what will be a one-term government.

We are here to help. Reverse the claim. Put a moratorium...

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

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Again, it is tough to be able to correct some of the things that have been said in one minute, so I have to continue into our third question.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** First of all, I still have not heard the member opposite confirm whether or not he thinks it is a good policy to give more money to couples that have an income of \$60 000 or less per year. We are giving them more money in their pockets. I do not know if the member opposite thinks that is good or not. I would like him to clarify whether he thinks that is not something we should be doing. We think it is progressive. We think it is needed, and we think it is helping those who need support.

I would also like to talk about dates. In 2006, one of the first of a handful of decisions made by the previous Liberal government was to bring in a different cap. That was not done by the member opposite when he was a minister in the previous Lord administration. On top of that, it was actually \$200 per day on the watch of the member opposite. How is it that he is accusing us now? On top of that, they took the homes.



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

**Ms. Dubé:** I can get up and certainly correct the Premier because it was part of our budget. In 2006, it was announced and voted on in this Chamber as well.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, members.

**Ms. Dubé:** Get the facts straight.

[*Translation*]

I would like to come back to a question I asked yesterday, since the minister might have had a chance to get the information. How many seniors will actually benefit from the tax credit the government is offering them to renovate their homes so they can stay in them longer? We assume that not many people will. Given that the minister has now had 24 hours to get the requested information, I would like to get his answer.

[*Original*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** To be clear, from 2003 to 2006, I believe that the member opposite who is asking the questions was the minister at the time. If not, I believe that, at least, she was an MLA. I also believe that the Leader of the Opposition was a minister at the time.

From 2003 to 2006, we found ourselves with a cap well above \$175 per day. In fact, it hit \$200. The member opposite is trying to say that they fixed it. They did not. It took them years and years even to acknowledge that maybe there was an issue. They did not do it in time, and they lost the election. They found themselves with the previous Liberal government actually making the change.

How is it that the members opposite will get up on the floor of the Legislature today and criticize us when they had the daily rate at about \$200 for three to four years? They were after the family home. It is a bit rich for us to have the opposition get up and lecture us on this policy, which will put more money in the pockets of those who need it the most. It is progressive, and it is fair.

**Ms. Dubé:** I have been in this House for a long time. I can tell you that it was under the McKenna and Graham governments. They were taking seniors' homes. It was under our government that we corrected it. Today, instead of the Premier defending former Liberal governments, he should be defending the seniors of this province and protecting them. That is what we are looking for.

We are supposed to have a government that helps seniors stay at home longer. Those members basically brought in nothing to help the seniors stay at home longer. We have a tax credit that was announced by the government.



Again, it is a simple question. How many seniors will benefit from that? How many are we talking about?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I have to go to the preamble of the member opposite again.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, members.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Now, we are going into the eighties for policy. Those members are trying to blame previous Liberal governments. The truth of the matter is that, from 2003 to 2006, I believe those two members opposite were ministers under the Lord government at the time. I am very happy that the member asking the questions has been in the Legislature for a long time. I am sure that she remembers that, from 2003 to 2006, they took the home.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, members.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** They took the home when it came to nursing home costs. They were charging about \$200 per day for nursing home care. She will probably remember that they tried to have a communications exercise just before the election, saying that they would change it. However, they did not. It was another government that had to change it. In fact, the \$200 rate stayed in for quite some time.

(Interjection.)

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Portland-Simonds will come to order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** It was not until the Liberal government took action on it. I ask the members opposite to tell us why we should accept their criticisms when they did worse than that when they were in power for years and years.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, members. Order, members.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Dubé:** It is sad to see what is going on in the House today: Instead of the Premier being seen standing up for seniors' interests, he is seen deciding to get into their bank accounts. He is reversing the decisions that were made by a Progressive Conservative government, and this is unfortunate, because people will remember it.



I would like to ask a final question today: How many seniors are supposed to benefit from the tax credit that has been announced to ensure they can stay in their homes longer? Are we going to get an answer today?

[Original]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I can certainly agree with something that was said by the member opposite. It is Liberal governments that reverse their decisions. They reversed the decision on going after the family home of seniors...

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre will come to order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** They reversed the decision by not charging \$200 per day for nursing home care. On top of that, they found a way to save money and to get our finances in order.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre will come to order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** On top of that, we found a way to save some money and to be more progressive than we have ever been as a province. We are giving more money to those who need it—those who have a spouse or a dependent at the home, those who are struggling to ensure that their family members will still have a high quality of life. We are talking about senior couples that have an income of \$60 000 or less per year. We are giving them more money in their pockets.

The Leader of the Opposition did not answer the question, so maybe the member opposite will. Are the members opposite against that policy? Are they against giving more to those who need it the most—the seniors in our province who are more vulnerable? I hope the opposition will answer that question.

## Mental Health

**Mr. Coon:** According to the research referenced in a series on mental health being carried in the *Globe and Mail* this week, one in five young Canadians aged 9 to 19 is living with mental illness. That means that somewhere around 17 000 of our youth and children in this province are facing these challenges, and as many as three quarters of those in need are not receiving the treatment they should. That means that more than 12 000 young people in New Brunswick are hurting. This means countless trips to hospital emergency departments and families or friends looking for help that is not there or that they cannot afford.





We cannot wait to balance the books before we take action, as the Minister of Health contends. What action will this minister take to address the mental health needs of our children and our youth?

**Hon. Mr. Boudreau:** I remember the questions coming from the member opposite during estimates. I do not know if he just failed to understand the fact that certain envelopes of money have been moved from one place to another within the estimates to better reflect what those budget envelopes are there for.

The point of the matter is that our government is still very much engaged in implementing the Action Plan for Mental Health in New Brunswick. There are many initiatives that are part of that action plan. We are continuing to implement that action plan. We think that it is important to make sure that we are providing the necessary support and services to our youth and to the families of our youth, to make sure that they are getting the best treatment possible, whether it be in the community or elsewhere. The action plan is being followed. There is money in the budget to continue to move forward with those initiatives.

**Mr. Coon:** An estimated 70% of mental health problems manifest in childhood or adolescence. The earlier the diagnosis and treatment, the better the outcome. The Minister of Health was quoted in a CBC story, when commenting on the Strategic Program Review forum, as saying: "I understand when people stand up and say that we need to do more... to provide positive outcomes in health... Well, before getting there... We need to balance the books."

Is the minister saying that he will not resolve the barriers to accessing mental health care for children and youth until he balances the books?

**Hon. Mr. Boudreau:** I guess what I would say to the member opposite is that I can multitask and I think our government can multitask. We need to balance the books, there is no question. As far as the Strategic Program Review is concerned, we need to make sure that everybody in the province is contributing to balancing the books so that we can provide an even brighter future for our children and for our families as we move forward.

At the same time, we need to continue to provide the day-to-day services and programs to people in need. That is what we are doing, whether it be for youth, for seniors, or for youth who are looking for their first job. We have brought forward many different initiatives, and we are going to continue to bring forward many different initiatives to help the various segments of our population. We are moving forward with the Action Plan for Mental Health in New Brunswick. It is a priority of this government. It is something that we committed to in our platform, and it is something we are going to continue to invest in.

**Mr. Coon:** Some of the solutions are right at hand, such as implementing the Integrated Service Delivery program throughout our schools and implementing it across the province now, beyond the successful demonstration projects in Charlotte County and on the Acadian Peninsula. Those



projects eliminated the waiting lists for mental health and addiction services for youth in those counties. It was very successful, and it needs to be rolled out now.

Right next door, in Nova Scotia, Dalhousie University's Dr. Stanley Kutcher has been helping to introduce mental health literacy to high schools around the world. It is a question of political choices, and it is a question of political will. Will the Minister of Health agree to make eliminating the barriers to mental health care for children and youth his number one priority?

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Mr. Boudreau:** As I have already mentioned, the Action Plan for Mental Health in New Brunswick is a priority for our government, and we are investing in the different initiatives in the plan. The member opposite was talking about Integrated Service Delivery. This is a plan that involves several departments working in close collaboration to ensure that we provide the best care possible to the people who need it. A pilot project is underway in Charlotte County and in the Acadian Peninsula.

Mental health is certainly an issue that we will continue to look at. In fact, this year, we have invested in the creation of a treatment centre as part of the network of excellence for youth with complex needs, which will be located in Campbellton and which we have discussed before here in the House.

We are making investments, we are taking the action plan seriously, and we are going to continue to support the people who need government assistance.

*[Original]*

## Government Finances

**Mr. Higgs:** A few weeks ago, the Minister of Finance said that promises could not be kept because of new information that has been determined with regard to the deficit situation.

When this government arrived, the deficit was trending downward and the credit ratings had been stable for the past two years. Provisional losses were at an all-time low, and systematic attrition meant a reduction in the number of civil servants. It went on and on. The only issue was an Education budget that was over, but offsets in other departments had more than taken care of that.

This is what I want to understand: What fiscal or economic conditions were worse than anticipated when this government arrived? I know the devastation that has taken place since this government arrived.

**Hon. Mr. Melanson:** I do not know that there was a real question there.



However, I do know one thing. When we arrived in government, we had known during our days in opposition that the former Finance Minister... I believe he wanted to get the fiscal situation back on track, but he really failed. When we looked at the numbers when we arrived in government, he had missed all his targets, both the revenue targets and the expenditure targets. When we formed government, we still had, and we still do... That is why we are working really hard on getting rid of the structural deficit every year. We have to borrow money every year and put it on the debt to pay for some of our essential services.

One thing is certain. When we arrived in government, we knew that he had predicted cutting \$37 million at the Department of Education and he had not done it because there was an election.

**Mr. Higgs:** I need to understand what projections were missed. With regard to expense projections missed, we were \$200 million below budget in the last two years. That is a good-news story. The \$40 million or \$37 million that you talk about in Education was offset by the others. Look at the main deficit. The deficit went down in every quarter. Look at it right now. It is \$255 million.

Now, the question is this, if I was not clear on the last one. In the committee, it was stated that the new projection is \$391 million. I need to understand how we can go from a third-quarter report of \$255 million. The onetime revenue will carry through the year. It does not disappear. How can we go from \$255 million to projecting \$391 million now, unless we are just packing money into last year's numbers?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I have to take the opportunity to ask the member opposite a question. A few times on the floor of the Legislature, I have heard him say, including in his previous question, that, all of a sudden, we have financial challenges, and he is trying to say that our government created them.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, member.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I would really like to give the member opposite, the former Finance Minister who clearly failed at the task, the chance to clarify.

If the member would like, we can certainly take some time to find all the quotes of him in the media and on the floor of the Legislature over the past five years, which is when he was the Minister of Finance, that talk about the fiscal challenges that we had before. If he likes, we can do that. We can find all the quotes. We can table them on the floor of the Legislature, and he can clarify if he wants. However, I will give him a chance now to tell the people of New Brunswick that we have been facing financial and fiscal challenges for many years, including when he was the Finance Minister.



**Mr. Higgs:** What I will do, if we want to go that far, is to challenge the Premier to an open debate with the media on exactly the result—documented result... I am proud of our record, and, more importantly, I can actually demonstrate it through documented results and performance measures—something that was repealed by this government.

Now, we have a contingency fund. For the definition, in a time of surplus, a contingency fund is used to protect against overspending so that you can guard against overspending and be in a position to ensure that you can meet your budget. In a time of deficit, it encourages overspending and poor accounting of performance. Given that the *Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act* has been repealed, what was the true intent of the contingency fund during a time of deficit? Was it purely an exercise to hide the real facts and report anything we want, as long as it looks good?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** The member opposite certainly did not answer my question on whether he will clarify and say that, on the floor of the Legislature, when he was the Minister of Finance, he made it very clear that we faced financial challenges.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The member for Fredericton West-Hanwell will come to order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I was on the floor of the Legislature, and I heard it several times coming from the former Finance Minister. I would like him to admit that we have been facing financial challenges for years, if not decades. I am very curious and surprised—frankly, I am flabbergasted—that the member opposite is proud of his record as Finance Minister. He missed every single one—every single one—of his deficit reduction targets. Therefore, if he is proud of what he did, whose fault was it? Was it because his colleagues would not let him make the tough decisions? Was it because his colleagues could not create jobs and could not create the conditions for economic growth? This was the government that did not create any net gain in jobs in 40 years. Will the former Finance Minister get up on his feet and tell the people of New Brunswick that we have indeed been facing challenges for quite some time?

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

