

May 29, 2015

[Original]

Senior Citizens

Mr. Fitch: I gave the Premier a piece of advice yesterday to try to help his failing government, and he did not take it. It is a bad, bad reflection on the Premier. We have heard that already in comments, as we have mentioned in the House. I wonder whether the Premier can explain to us who are in the House and to the people who are listening why he did not take the time to go out and listen to the people on the lawn of the Legislature.

The estimates show that there were over 500 people out there. That is one of the biggest protests I have seen since the former Liberal Premier tried to sell NB Power. Can the Premier enlighten us today and tell us why he made the choice not to go out to talk to the people who were so upset with these decisions and these poor choices that he and his small Cabinet have made over the past seven months?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Day after day, we hear the Leader of the Opposition ask us questions about our schedules, our communications, and our announcements. I dare say that we would make better use of our time in the House by discussing policies, choices that must be made as a province, and ways to work together to restart our economy and ensure that New Brunswick is the best place to raise a family.

I am going to answer the question from the Leader of Opposition directly. Since the opposition is focused on my schedule and those of ministers and private members, I will tell him that I had a meeting planned for about three months, with people who had to fly here to see us. I was in Saint John to talk about an opportunity to create jobs; it was a good opportunity for New Brunswickers, and I certainly did not want to miss it. I am still very pleased that several ministers were at the protest.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: It is truly a shame that the Premier did not make himself available to those people who took the time to come from all parts of the province. We know that the Premier has cancelled meetings before, has changed meetings, or has had them scheduled and then not shown up. Other than something that could have been managed better to allow the Premier to go out, we know... When Frank McKenna was here, he used to go out and meet with the public. When David Alward was the Premier, he used to go out and meet with the public. Richard Hatfield even took a pie from the public because he was out and wanted to hear what the people were saying.



Unfortunately, some unruly people in the past may have caused the Premier to fear going out and meeting people face to face.

Yesterday, the demonstration was done in a manner that seemed to be respectful, and I know that a number of our MLAs and a number of the ministers were out there. Kudos to them for going out. A good discussion was had. Why did the Premier not change the meeting...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Again, I want to say that I was very happy to see that about two thirds of the members of our caucus were at the protest. I, personally, had a meeting about job creation that had been scheduled for about three months. Our government's priority is to grow the economy and create jobs. I think New Brunswickers' priority is to focus our efforts on economic growth and job creation. I did attend this meeting, then, which was also attended by people who travelled from other Canadian provinces to meet with us and talk about these opportunities. So, it was very important to me to be there.

I hope I will not have to review my schedule with the Leader of the Opposition, week after week and day after day. I almost feel as if he is lobbying to be part of my team, and he wants to take on the job of arranging my schedule.

We should discuss some very relevant matters, such as the economy, ways of helping New Brunswickers, and how to get finances in order in the province. I hope we are going to debate these matters, rather than my schedule.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: Again, I will quote Norbert Cunningham about the poor choices that the Premier has been making. Norbert said: "But there's remarkably little fear in the public about taking 'hard decisions' the premier now admits are necessary—most citizens accept the reality. They don't accept relatively petty cash grabs from seniors and others".

We have been discussing the choices that the Premier has been making. We have been discussing the fact that some of the choices that have caused province-wide upheaval—province-wide concern—were based on the choices that the Premier has made. If he made himself unavailable yesterday, will he agree now to reach out to members of the coalition of seniors and meet with them and again look for an alternative? This is not making a huge dent in the coffers of the government, but it will make a significant dent in the coffers of the people who are affected.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Of course, our government consulted with New Brunswickers, and particularly



with seniors, on the policy regarding nursing homes; the minister met with several groups. I note with interest that the Leader of the Opposition is focused on the members of the seniors' coalition because he knows that they are probably the most frustrated by this policy. Many other organizations represent seniors in the province, and it seems interesting to me that the Leader of the Opposition does not suggest consulting them too. The Leader of the Opposition need not worry—all of these groups were consulted, just like seniors and New Brunswickers, when the time came to develop the budget and our policies, including this one respecting nursing homes.

We are proud of this progressive policy that asks people who can pay a bit more to do so, but will also give more money to the most vulnerable and more support to the people who need it.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Mr. Fitch: Does the Premier have a video of that—that all these groups support what he is doing? Again, the government members are sometimes very selective in whom they talk to. If it is someone friendly to their party, then they will trot that person out and try to make the case that what they do is acceptable. Again, their consultation is a tell-sell. It is just to inform people, saying: This is what we are doing; we are moving forward with that; like it or lump it, that is what we are doing.

The other day, we saw the minister go out and basically put crumbs on the table for some of the seniors who wanted to have a really good dialogue. The seniors wanted to say: The decision—the choice—that has been made by the government is wrong, and we have made suggestions as to how the government might find the funds to do it.

Again, when we look at the commentary in the newspapers: “The only fear, cutting across all party lines, is that the government is failing miserably, which is sure to make our fiscal crisis worse, not better. No amount of finely spun damage control will alter that.”

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: There was certainly no question in there, so I will perhaps take the time to comment on a few of the members' statements that I heard just before question period.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Gallant: First off, we had one member talking about us not being progressive, and I found that quite odd. This is the opposition that actually does not support our taxing the wealthiest 1% among us to get some funds to be able to help those who need support, to be able to invest in things that will create jobs, and to be able to get our finances in order. This is the



opposition that does not support our giving more money to senior couples who have a combined income of \$60 000 or less per year. We are giving them more money in their pockets. The opposition did not support that. This is the opposition that says we are not being progressive, yet it does not support raising the minimum wage for hardworking New Brunswickers. I would ask the opposition members to look at themselves in the mirror. We are being progressive. They, unfortunately, are not.

Mr. Fitch: We are just here trying to help. We make suggestions. I suggested to the Premier yesterday that he go out and meet with the people. He made himself unavailable. I get that. I understand that. He sent some of his ministers out to face the music, and we give them kudos for that.

Here is what is happening. Even some of their party supporters are deserting them. Going back to Norbert Cunninghams's remarks: "Premier Gallant has a huge problem, a party increasingly divided and restive. That's never good news for a leader."

We have said that the leader has an opportunity to really lead. Why does he not realize that this choice of taking seniors' assets was poorly thought out and reverse it? It is not going to affect the overall budget significantly this year because it is not going to be implemented until later. Why does the Premier not just admit that this was a mistake, reverse it, and go forward from there?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As I have said many times, there will be no touching of the physical assets. That includes the home and the proceeds from the potential sale of the home. On top of that, it is progressive. Only those who have significant liquid financial assets will be asked to pay a bit more. Everybody will be subsidized, and those who have less money will actually receive more money under our policy.

Since the member opposite likes to quote things, as he has done today and yesterday, I will quote again. What we are focused on is creating jobs and growing the economy, and we are happy to see that the New Brunswick economy has been going in the right direction since we were sworn in as a government. There have been 2 500 jobs created, and, to quote the Conference Board of Canada, "The economy of New Brunswick is starting to look brighter... Overall, real GDP is expected to advance by 2.3 per cent this year and 2.6 per cent in 2016." This is after four years of the previous government not being able to create jobs, not being able to have any GDP growth. We are proud of our record, and we are going stay focused on jobs.

Advertising

Mr. B. Macdonald: The reality is that this government has told us very clearly that it is going to seize seniors' life savings, and that is a concern. It took quite a while to get any kind of transparency out of this government. In fact, this week, it took 12 questions to get a figure from the Minister of Finance about how much this Adscam is costing New Brunswickers, and I still doubt the accuracy of that figure.



I will keep this simple for the government. Yesterday, the Premier actually took time in question period to read quotes rather than answer the questions he was presented with, as was his duty, so I will refer this to the Minister of Government Services. Can the minister tell us who was awarded the contract for these ads? What was the fair, open, and transparent process to make sure that this \$30 000 was allocated in a fair and transparent way?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I invite the opposition member to read the record from yesterday. I answered the questions, but the opposition members simply did not like the answers.

When the opposition member asked some questions on the same topic yesterday, I answered that he had no problem putting his face on ads to take credit for Hanwell Road investments.

[*Original*]

He had no problem putting his face on some pamphlets, trying to take credit for the Hanwell Road construction. Yet, when we put out an ad with no politician attached to it—we put out only facts and figures to explain a policy that the opposition members have been fearmongering about—they criticize us. This is the member opposite who was in a government where former Premier Alward had an ad in which he was the ad. He was the one talking the whole time. We have no lessons to learn from the member opposite.

Mr. B. Macdonald: I am quite proud of the investments that our government made in the Hanwell area, and I am glad to say that we put that money in the budget.

I would suggest to you that, in fact, this government and this Premier do have a lot of lessons that they could learn from me and from this opposition. The Premier will be interested to hear that I did, in fact, clear my ad with a legislative officer. In fact, I personally discussed the matter with the Chief Electoral Officer of the province and the Supervisor of Political Financing. These are things that this Premier told us a year ago that he would do. I am wondering if he has done this. Has he taken the time to consult the Supervisor of Political Financing about his ad? If he has not done it, will he do it today?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I answered the question yesterday. Again, the member opposite clearly did not like the answer, but that is the way we have to roll here on the floor of the Legislature.

I am going to take issue with what the member said in his preamble. He is very happy about the construction of the Hanwell Road. I thought the opposition members were against infrastructure spending. I thought they did not like our infrastructure plan. I thought they said that we should not be doing that. I am very confused, and I really hope that they are going to clarify for New Brunswickers whether they support infrastructure investment or they do not. Do they support the fact that we have invested in the NB Naval Center? Do they support the fact that we have



invested in the Saint John barge terminal or maybe the Miramichi Centennial Bridge? Do they support the fact that we invested in the schools in Riverview and Woodstock?

Mr. Speaker: The member for Southwest Miramichi-Bay du Vin will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: They have also taken time to encourage us to invest in the bridge in Cherryvale, the Moncton metro centre, and the justice building in Sussex, and now they are taking credit for investments in infrastructure in Hanwell. Which one is it? Do they support infrastructure investment or not?

Mr. B. Macdonald: This Premier loves to present false dichotomies, which is what he is doing here. I will clarify it for this Premier. I will make it crystal clear for him. We support prudent, measured investments in infrastructure. What we do not support is having \$150 million a year shoved into procurements and infrastructure investments that we do not need. We do not support a \$150-million slush fund that is not required. We do not support doubling the annual deficit. These are all measures that this government is quite keen to embrace.

Another thing we do not support is unprocured government procurements of \$30 000 for advertising. I would like to ask the Premier this question, since his own minister will not answer. The *Procurement Act* states clearly that anything beyond \$10 000 must be competed. Where was the fair, transparent, open process that awarded this \$30 000 contract for advertising?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: With regard to advertising, we very clearly said that we would always inform New Brunswickers and that we would not produce partisan ads; that is exactly what we did, and it is exactly what we will continue to do. However, this is not at all what the previous government did.

[*Original*]

Again, on infrastructure, the member opposite gets up and says that the opposition members support responsible—I forget the words he used—responsible investments in infrastructure. I would like to have him point out which of the projects that we have invested in that they do not support. Which projects do they think were not strategic? Was it investing in schools in Miramichi? Was it investing in the NB Naval Center in Caraquet? Was it investing in the Saint John barge terminal? Was it investing in the schools in Riverview and Woodstock? Which projects, specifically, do they think were not good investments? Why is it that all the investments they think are good happen to be in Tory ridings?

Autism

Mr. Coon: As the Minister of Education well knows, the rate of autism has been increasing by leaps and bounds, but our services have not been keeping up. While we have a very effective



Early Intervention Program for preschoolers, the average age of diagnosis for autism for children who are not severely autistic is age 8, while they are in elementary school. Parents whose children are diagnosed in school do not have access to the same kind of help and therapy for their children as is provided for the preschoolers. I fear that the budget cuts will actually set these children and other vulnerable children back further as large numbers of teacher mentors are being eliminated.

Does the Minister of Education plan to do anything to provide therapy to autistic children who are first diagnosed while they are in elementary school?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: First of all, I want to thank the member for Fredericton South for his question about a very important matter; this is a file my department has been working on really, really hard and on which hard work remains to be done. Yes, the preschool stage is very important, and this is why our department ensures children are diagnosed and then have 20 hours of follow-up so we can make sure they are okay to enter the school system.

Then, when these children enter the school system, we provide some very important training, which, by the way, was recently recognized throughout the Atlantic Provinces, as the other provinces in the region want to take advantage of our program. In that regard, I know that we have made cuts, but, when we look at the amount we put in our budget this year for everything related to children diagnosed on the spectrum...

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Coon: Autistic children can also struggle with mental illness, on top of their autism, while they are in school, creating a very difficult situation for both the children and their parents. Parents in these situations have discovered what parents of non-autistic children who have been diagnosed with a mental illness have discovered—that psychotherapy is not a publicly funded medical treatment, whether you are in school or out. This is not just a nice-to-have option. It is a frontline treatment for mental illness, and it should be publicly funded.

In 2012, Canada's Mental Health Commission estimated that only one child in four was receiving support and treatment when he or she needed it. In other words, our health system is ignoring 75% of children in need. Imagine if our health system ignored 75% of childhood cancers. It would be a scandal.

For a start, will the Minister of Education request the Minister of Health to extend public funding for psychologists and clinical social workers to provide treatment for autistic students in the school system who are also suffering from mental illness?



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: This is another excellent question from the member for Fredericton South. As he knows, the question is twofold. In the school system, we continue to invest with respect to mental health problems. Unfortunately, this is a reality, and, this year, my department has again added money to it.

Also, as the member is well aware, a pilot project in Integrated Service Delivery in Charlotte County and the Acadian Peninsula was done, and we are looking at rolling out this program in other regions. We will hold consultations from May to October, and our intention is really to expand this program by 2018, as we promised, to provide these integrated services across the province.

So, yes, we are working with the Department of Health, and we will continue to do so. However, this is not just about this department, because several others participate in the integrated services. Our commitment is a firm one: We are going to expand these services across the province.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Coon: Children with autism in the school system, of course, can stay there until age 21, but when they exit, there is no support whatsoever. There is nowhere for them to go. They cannot care for themselves. If their parents are unable to care for them, autistic adults in this situation are put in nursing homes or in the Restigouche Hospital Center or, in a few cases, sent across the border to Maine.

We need a residential facility in New Brunswick, staffed by trained professionals, for autistic adults needing care. The Minister of Health told this House that this government could multitask and address our fiscal challenges while meeting needs that were not being met. This is a need that is not being met. Will this government ask the new Committee on Social Policy to hold public hearings to review available autism services and provide actionable recommendations to the Executive Council to address the needs of autistic children, from diagnosis through school to adulthood?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: The member opposite has raised several issues around mental health, and I want to remind him that there is an action plan on mental health. It was put in place a while back. We are committed to the full implementation of that plan. We continue to work on the basis of that plan. There have been investments in this year's budget to move that plan forward. We will continue to move that plan forward. We are also going to start work on what the next mental health plan will be.



This is a priority of the government. We have been in office but a few months. We were elected for a four-year mandate, and we are committed to meeting the commitments that we made in our platform. The Action Plan for Mental Health is a priority for this government, and we will continue to implement its various initiatives.

Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal

Mr. Oliver: On April 17, the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour announced appointments to the new Appeals Tribunal of WorkSafe NB effective April 1. In part of her remarks in the press release, the minister stated: "These candidates have the necessary skills and qualifications to carry out the functions of the tribunal".

While I am not questioning the skills of the government's appointees, I must question the timeliness of the appeals process. Why have no appeals been heard since these people were appointed?

Hon. Mrs. Landry: The Appeals Tribunal, as the member opposite said, has been appointed since April 1. Since then, seven vice-chairpersons were appointed. There was an open competition for a Chair as well. That position will be filled in the near future. The seven vice-chairpersons who have been appointed to the Appeals Tribunal are actually getting training on their new role. They are all lawyers, and they have to know what they have to do in order to hear appeals from injured workers. Thank you.

Mr. Oliver: I hope these government appointees intend to go about their business in a more timely fashion than the government's appointments on the shale gas ban committee.

I would like to ask the minister to advise the House regarding how many cases are now backed up because this government has spent valuable time dithering on this file. Is it 100 or 1 000? How many injured New Brunswick workers are currently waiting for their appeals to be heard?

Hon. Mrs. Landry: I am very happy to answer this question because the backlog was from the former government. We are working very hard to fix this problem. We have enhanced our advocate services. We have taken the Appeals Tribunal out... We are looking at consultation on all the benefits that the workers will be entitled to. The public will be invited to make comments on the benefits and everything. We are fixing the problem. We are looking after workers who have been injured.

Mr. Oliver: I would like to remind the minister that it was our government that put this new Appeals Tribunal in place to address the process and the backlog that we have. The role of the Appeals Tribunal is to hear appeals of the decisions of WorkSafe NB. In fact, the Appeals Tribunal has not heard any appeals, as the minister has stated, since April 1—two months ago. This should be unacceptable to the government, unacceptable to the minister, and unacceptable to the injured workers, as well as to the official opposition.



Will the minister advise the House when the Appeals Tribunal will begin hearing appeals from injured workers, as its mandate states? Why were the appointments not made earlier to accommodate the training process that was necessary so that they could have started their work on April 1?

Hon. Mrs. Landry: Thank you for the question. As part of the consultation last year, we listened to the public with regard to what was needed. We have put in place a new Appeals Tribunal that is independent from WorkSafe NB to make sure that the workers are being heard in a timely fashion, in a timely way. We will listen to all the backlog that was there when the Appeals Tribunal was put in place on April 1. We need this to be independent to follow all appeals tribunals in all other jurisdictions in Canada. They were taken out of WorkSafe, or whatever they are called in the other provinces. That is what has been done. We will look into everyone that is backlogged. That will be done in a timely fashion. Thank you.

Opportunities New Brunswick

Mr. K. MacDonald: Even though the Auditor General advised otherwise, the Atcon Cabinet is legislating itself the power to override anyone and give away the security of the taxpayers of New Brunswick without reason. This is the one power that the Auditor General argued that they should not have. The Atcon Six will now have the unconditional power to remove security, just as they did for Robbie Tozer. Did the government honestly think that the taxpayers of New Brunswick would not notice? How is Bill 45 in the best interests of this province and its taxpayers?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: We are really glad to have the Auditor General's recommendations, and we take them very seriously on this side of the House. We are committed to implementing the Auditor General's recommendations to improve the way that we do economic development in the province. Some of the recommendations have already been taken care of in Bill 6. The amendments that were introduced in Bill 45 further address the Auditor General's recommendations by putting in safeguards to make sure that New Brunswick taxpayers' dollars are put to use wisely and are safely guarded.

Mr. K. MacDonald: The Auditor General wanted more controls and protections for the taxpayers on New Brunswick, not less. Bill 45 is not in keeping with the Auditor General's recommendation. How can the Liberal members stand in this House and recommend that we not have a formalized policy for assigning security?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: On this side of the House, we are not going to dote on the past. If the members opposite want to talk about their Orimulsion, we will talk about that. However, I will stay clear of that. We will not talk about the harbour bridge, the \$150 million to which they have committed us going forward.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order, members.



Hon. Mr. Doucet: We will not talk about the faux pas over Point Lepreau.

On this side of the House, we are going to be very fixated on the present and the future. We are going to stay clear of the past. On this side of the House, under this Premier, under this Cabinet, under this group of people that I have the privilege of working with, we are going to be focused on job creation, getting our fiscal house in order, and helping families. That is what it is all about, as we move forward.

We do not want to talk about the past or the Orimulsion deals.

(Interjection.)

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

Hon. Mr. Doucet: We do not want to talk about Point Lepreau. We are going to stay clear of them. I know that they do not want to talk about that. Going forward, we are putting in the safeguards to make things good for New Brunswickers.

Mr. K. MacDonald: The Deh Cho Bridge in the Northwest Territories cost \$182 million to build, \$70 million of which came from the taxpayers of New Brunswick. Bill 45 continues the government's ability to waive security for its friends.

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Health will come to order.

Mr. K. MacDonald: Does the minister not see this as a problem? Does he not see this practice as a problem?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: In June 2014, when we were in the opposition, we supported a unanimous motion, asking the Auditor General to look into this matter. She did. She came up with a report, with some recommendations, recommendations that we will support and implement to the best of our abilities, and Bill 45 is helping us do exactly that.

We are focused on growing the economy and creating jobs, and I would like to correct something that was said in the opposition's members' statements.

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Fredericton-York will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Although they would like to pretend that this is not the case, in October 2013, when they were in government, the consumer confidence of businesses polled by the CFIB was actually much lower than it is now. It was at 57%. We are going in the right direction, and it is



because we are focused on creating jobs. It is also because the Conference Board of Canada says that 2.3% and 2.6% increases in GDP are projected for the next two years, and since we have been in office, the economy has produced 2 500 jobs.

Mr. Speaker: The time for question period has expired. Excuse me, the Minister of Environment has an answer to a question from the leader of the third party, which was taken under advisement.

Pesticides

Hon. Mr. Kenny: On Tuesday, I took a question under advisement from the member for Fredericton South regarding pesticides.

Regarding pesticides, all pest control products used in New Brunswick must be approved by Health Canada. In 2009, New Brunswick introduced a ban on the sale and use of more than 240 over-the-counter lawn care pesticide products, as well as the use of all 2,4-D products, on domestic lawns in the province, due to the significant potential for these products to be misused or overused.

In addition, integrated pest management accreditation was made mandatory for those carrying out lawn care services involving commercial-grade pesticides, with the goal of getting away from blanket treatments and, instead, promoting spot treatments in problem areas. The provincial permitting process also contains additional requirements for the use of lawn or turf pest control product use, such as restricting the application of pest control products to an area no greater than 50% of the total...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Coon: In fact, the Liberal government of 2009 did ban 2,4-D, a single active ingredient used in cosmetic pesticides, as Phase 1 of a two-phase initiative. The previous Liberal government was committed to the second phase, prohibiting the use of all cosmetic pesticides. The question is, what happens now that the Liberals are back in power in the House?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: As a result of these initiatives, the use of pesticide control products has declined by more than 50%. I want to credit the Speaker for being involved in this.

Mr. Speaker: Please do not include me in debate, member.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Credit is due there, though.

New Brunswick was the first province in Atlantic Canada and the third in Canada to adopt a comprehensive ban of pesticide products. These results are showing a decrease in the amount of pesticide. We continue to monitor this issue going forward, and we will continue to work with the public to make sure we have a better province.

