

June 2, 2015

[Original]

Elections

Mr. Fitch: I want to congratulate Stewart Fairgrieve again. I was in Woodstock for the nomination on Saturday. I also want to thank and recognize Danny Foster, who also put his name forward to be considered by the people of Carleton.

This is an easy question for the Premier today, to start the week. I would like to ask him when the by-election will be.

The role of an MLA is not just to sit here in the Legislature to debate, ask questions, and make statements. There is a significant amount of constituency work that goes on year-round. Some people would say that being an MLA is a 24-7 commitment. Certainly, the needs of the constituents are 24-7, and every riding needs a good MLA to work hard for the people of New Brunswick.

Mr. Premier, will you call the by-election today?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: First, I would also like to thank Stewart Fairgrieve for putting his name forward to run for the Conservative Party. We certainly encourage anybody to get involved, no matter which political party they choose to make their home. It is important for people to speak up, to get involved, and to do what they can to better their community and province. I wish him the best of luck—but, maybe, not too much luck. I wish him a good campaign. I am sure that he will enjoy the experience. He is certainly no stranger to politics, so I have no doubt that he knows what he is getting himself into and that he will enjoy the experience, no matter the outcome. Congratulations to him.

[Translation]

The Cabinet and I, the Premier, have six months to call a by-election. As I said when I was asked the same question last week, we will call the by-election within the prescribed period. We look forward to holding it, and it will be called by the end of the prescribed period.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: That is really not an answer that makes the people of Carleton feel at ease. It is very similar to what the Premier did with the seniors when the information came out on the asset grab. There was a statement, but there were no details. Now, for six months or more, the people of Carleton County are left with the question of who is going to represent them.



When it comes to the number of people in the area looking for information, there was a meeting for seniors, and 150 people were there looking for answers from the government, which were not forthcoming. Seniors are turning to the opposition to look for the answers to their questions. The government seems unable to find traction with that because it made a poor choice.

When it comes to a by-election in the province, the precedent has been set. The past seven by-elections have been called within a very, very short period of time. Saint John East is a prime example. Will the Premier call the by-election today?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: When we learned that the member's seat for Saint John East would be vacant, I explained quite clearly that, in my opinion, it was important that the riding be represented in the House. We found out about it at a time when it was possible for us to call a by-election. Of course, there would have to be a campaign before the election, but the person elected would have the chance to be in the House at the beginning of the session.

[*Original*]

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: That will not be possible in this particular case, so, obviously, the situation is a bit different from ones we have encountered before. I have been very clear; we have six months to hold a by-election, and we are going to meet this timeline. I think this way of doing things is sensible and very reasonable, and we will meet the prescribed timeline.

[*Original*]

Mr. Fitch: If you look at history, you see that history does set a bit of precedent. In terms of the Saint John East by-election, Mr. Keating resigned on October 14, and the writ was dropped on October 18, which was four days later. In Kent, Shawn Graham was done on March 11, and the writ was dropped on March 18. In Rothesay, the MLA quit on May 25, and, right away, the writ was dropped on the same day. There are Restigouche-la-Vallée, New Maryland-Sunbury West, and Moncton East. You could go on and on. It even goes back to the days of Saint John Harbour.

The practice—the accepted practice—in the Legislature and in New Brunswick is that people expect a by-election to be called right away. That is why I am calling on the Premier today. If there is a good reason why he should not do it... The excuse that the Legislature is not sitting is not acceptable. It is not acceptable to the opposition, and it is not acceptable to the people of



Carleton County. Mr. Premier, will you get a note from the anteroom? They will tell you. When is the by-election going to be called?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Since the member opposite wants to give a bit of a history lesson in the Legislature, I will contribute to that history lesson.

In 2003, a seat was vacant in the region of Shediac. The former Lord government, in which the member opposite who is asking the questions today was a minister, took 11.5 months to call a by-election. It is interesting that the Leader of the Opposition chose not to put that in the list during his history lesson, but I will remind him of that. In fact, it is because of that situation—the member opposite was a minister under the government that waited 11.5 months, and the people of Shediac and that region were not represented at all—that we now have the rule that says that you have to call a by-election within 6 months.

We certainly have no lessons to learn from the member opposite. The by-election will be called in the time allotted for us to do so.

Mr. Fitch: Again, that is a rule that has made it a point in the province. The people will be represented, and they will be represented soon. This Premier said: I will do governing differently. The Premier set the precedent himself when, four days after one of his MLAs quit the Legislature after the people had voted him in, the Premier called a by-election. It was four days.

Again, the only thing that I can conclude from that is that the Premier is afraid to get a report card from the people of New Brunswick. He is afraid that the seniors will come out against him. He is afraid that the day care operators will rally against him. He is afraid that the students who are not going to get the tax rebate are going to rally against him. He is afraid that the health care workers are going to rally against him. He is afraid of all the editorials by Fred Hazel, Bill Belliveau, and Norbert Cunningham. Maybe he is waiting for the CRA polls to come out shortly, or maybe he is hoping that former Liberals, such as Hector Cormier, will not rise up against him.

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am not sure that there was a question, so I will give the exact same answer that I have given on the subject since last week. We will call the by-election within the time that has been allotted to do so. We think that it is a reasonable time, and we will make sure that the by-election is within that time frame.

I will take the rest of the time that I have on the floor of the Legislature to say that we very much look forward to continuing to give our message to New Brunswickers about focusing on creating jobs, and that will also include the people of Carleton during the by-election. We are focused on creating jobs and growing the economy, and we are happy that, so far, it looks as though the work that we have been doing with the people of New Brunswick, businesses and entrepreneurs across the province, has started to come to fruition in that respect.



We have seen 2 500 jobs produced in a net gain for the New Brunswick economy. On top of that, the Conference Board of Canada stated that, over the next two years, we will have 2.3% and 2.6% growth in our GDP. That is what we are focused on, and we are happy to see some momentum when it comes to job creation.

Government Restructuring

Mr. K. MacDonald: Last week, the Minister of Government Services announced a massive consolidation of Service New Brunswick, the Department of Government Services, the New Brunswick Internal Services Agency, and FaciliCorpNB. Can the minister provide the House with the business plan on which he based his go-forward decision?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: This was actually an initiative that flowed through the Strategic Program Review. Obviously, my colleague the Minister of Government Services worked very closely on the file with me and members from multiple departments.

This is something that should not be a secret to anyone. This was in our platform. We were very clear that we were going to look at finding efficiencies within the back offices of the government, and that relates to everything related to IT, finance, administration, human resources—mind you, human resources is going to be a separate project—and procurement. We are looking to find efficiencies within the government. We are looking to reengineer the government, and this is a perfect example.

This is probably the biggest initiative to come out of the Strategic Program Review to date, and it is one that we are very proud to see through to completion.

Mr. K. MacDonald: This is a project that, by the minister's own admission, was in the platform of the Liberal Party. It is one that he has worked on very closely with other ministers. One of the hallmarks of this government is the uncertainty that its decisions create with seniors, with day care owners, with rural schools, and the list goes on.

Now, in the dying days of this Legislature, the minister has unveiled this massive consolidation plan with absolutely no details around implementation. Can the minister tell this House how many jobs will be impacted as a result of this decision?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: First of all, I would remind the member opposite... He refers to the dying days of the Legislature, but that is totally up to the opposition. Everybody in this House knows very well that the government decides when the session starts and the opposition decides when it finishes.

This is all about finding efficiencies within government. It is about reengineering government. We have said very clearly that we are looking at taking four different government agencies and departments and wrapping them into one, which is Service New Brunswick, version 2.0, if you



will. We will continue to provide services to New Brunswickers, but we are also going to be looking at providing back-office services to all of government.

Yes, there will be jobs that will be lost as a result of this exercise. We have not denied that. We are not prepared to divulge exact numbers yet because we are still in the very preliminary parts of this process. This is going to be a very lengthy process, but we need to start by setting up the new corporation. That is what this piece of legislation does.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. K. MacDonald: One thing that I agree with the minister on, following his statement, is that he is not prepared.

The content and details of this consolidation plan are either too vague or completely nonexistent. Where is your business plan? How can a business case to consolidate be evaluated without a business plan? How can success be measured without criteria to evaluate? Is this just policy on the fly, as is so often the case with the Liberal Party in areas like private day cares, rural schools, nursing home fees, bookmobiles, cable ferries, cuts to Service New Brunswick, and cuts to courthouses? The list goes on and on and on.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I think it is worth reminding the member opposite of this: As I mentioned, this file was part of our election platform, so it is no secret. We have worked on this file since we took office, and we made many presentations to Cabinet committees and Cabinet itself.

Several departments and government agencies are working together to eliminate duplication, find efficiencies, and come up with a better way to provide services. We expect to save about \$30 million through this initiative, so it is very important. Yes, these changes will have an impact, which is as yet unknown. We are doing the analysis as the member opposite has suggested and are reviewing the business plans. This is the first step of many. It will be a long process, but the corporation has to be set up first, and this bill will enable us to do just that.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Student Employment

Mr. Coon: This spring, I was just flabbergasted, frankly, when I discovered that I was responsible for recommending SEED grants for nonprofit organizations needing to hire summer students in my riding. I cannot understand for the life of me why this selection process is not conducted by the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour. Perhaps the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour can explain to me why MLAs are asked by her



department to recommend which nonprofit organizations receive SEED funding to hire summer students.

Hon. Mrs. Landry: Thank you for the question. The SEED Program has been in place for quite a while. We administer the program exactly as it has been administered in previous years. We anticipate that approximately 1 115 jobs will be created in 2015-16. As well, we increased the budget this year because of the increase in the minimum wage. Additional positions will be created by the co-op budget program as well. We are aiming at...

[Translation]

This summer, with the SEED program, we will be providing support to 1 115 students. As you know, our priority is creating jobs; that is what we are going to do with the SEED program.

[Original]

Mr. Coon: The funding process described for nonprofit organizations to hire summer students is a throwback to the time before Equal Opportunity, politicizing the granting of public money to support the hiring of summer students. You do not have to look further than the fact that twice as much money is provided for hiring students in ridings held by government members than in those represented by members from opposition parties. Further, some ministers are provided with even more workweeks to grant to nonprofits in ridings adjacent to theirs, represented by members of opposition parties.

The patronage astounds me. Politics should not play a role in summer employment opportunities for students. Will this government bring SEED grant allocation under the sole responsibility of the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour?

[Translation]

Hon. Mrs. Landry: As you know, it is not our government that is doing the hiring for student jobs. We leave it to employers throughout the province, in all New Brunswick ridings, to choose to hire students. This year, we are going to create 1 115 student jobs, which will be distributed throughout the province. There will also be 98 positions created as co-op work terms under the SEED program. We really care about students having the opportunity to get summer jobs so that they can save money to pay for their studies. This is what we are doing with the SEED program funding, which is being distributed throughout all the ridings in New Brunswick. Incidentally, employers are now hiring people who have shown interest in a position.

[Original]

Mr. Coon: I am not actually alone in my distaste for the current SEED funding distribution practices. In a briefing note prepared by the minister's own staff, a recommendation has been made to transition the SEED Program to the PETL regional offices for the year 2016-17. That is



next year. Will the minister commit to following the advice of her own staff and enacting these changes for next year?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mrs. Landry: Thank you again for your question. Certainly, we are going to review all of our programs as part of our strategic review; all programs are currently being reviewed, including the SEED program.

I want to repeat that, this summer, 1 115 student jobs will be created throughout the province, which makes us very proud. These students need the money they are going to earn during the summer to pay for their studies. We will make sure that all the weeks available and the entire envelope for the SEED program are distributed throughout New Brunswick.

[*Original*]

Day Care

Mr. Jody Carr: We have not found very many people who think the Gallant government is doing a very good job at just about everything. The Premier and Cabinet unfairly cut \$2.4 million from private day care and early learning operators. Last Friday, on the last day before the cuts took effect, the government admitted that it was unprepared when making these cuts. It decided to announce a new review of day cares in order to restore a shred of confidence in the government.

My question for the Premier today is this: If he really wants to be sincere and have authentic consultations with day care operators, rather than asking questions only after making cuts, will he now do the right thing and postpone the \$2.4 million in cuts until the day care review is completed this fall?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: Clearly, the member for Oromocto-Lincoln is having a bit of difficulty understanding what is going on; I often need to repeat myself, and I am going to do so again, which is kind of becoming a habit.

As you know, there have been no cuts to the Day Care Program. I repeat that the \$2.4 million has been redistributed to day care employees. These employees are typically women who make less money. They are paid minimum wage, and, thanks to us, they will earn a little bit more because they will be able to benefit from a \$5-an-hour top-up when they are working in day cares and have the necessary training. If they have not received this training, we will give them a \$3.07-an-hour top-up.

So, we are investing in day cares. We are far from unprepared; actually, we have listened to the people who work in day cares, and we agree with them, so we are going to look at the whole



sector, which is important for our province, to ensure that we meet the needs there.

[Original]

Mr. Jody Carr: I have to remind the minister that the \$5 top-up is no thanks to his government or to him as minister. That program has been in place for years. In fact, all he is doing is that his cut to owner-operators is helping to pay for the growth of this program. I have a difficult time wondering how \$2.4 million in cuts is going to help the children of New Brunswick. Unfortunately, making decisions with negative impacts and asking questions later has become all too common. It is policy on the fly with the Gallant government.

The Premier said last year that he valued seniors, but then took seniors' assets. The Premier said last year that he valued literacy, but then cut the bookmobile. The Premier said last year that children were important, but then cut \$2.4 million from private day care operators.

Now that the Gallant government has decided to start learning more about the day care sector, will the Premier postpone the cuts to private operators before parents see more increases and before more centres close?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: There have been no cuts; I do not know how else to say it. I think interpretation into English is available and excellent; I am sure these people provide excellent service. Unfortunately, I only speak these two languages.

[Original]

Maybe I will say it in English: There was no cut.

[Translation]

We have invested \$2.8 million in efforts to ensure that day care workers, who are generally women, benefit from this program so that there are more day care spaces for the well-being of our children. As a result, parents will be able to continue working, which will benefit the economy of this province.

[Original]

Mr. Jody Carr: That tells you how authentic and sincere these consultations are going to be if, even since the \$2.4 million in cuts, the minister, the Premier, and the government are still not listening to the day care operators. When you ask the day care operators, they will tell you that this is a \$2.4-million cut. If you have not been prepared to listen to the operators until now, what proof, what evidence, and what guarantee will you give to the day care operators that you are sincere? In fact, if you were sincere about this consultation, you would postpone the \$2.4 million



in cuts. Without postponing the \$2.4 million in cuts while this consultation is going on, it could be seen as politically pandering to the damage that has been done.

Is the Premier prepared to delay these cuts until this work is done, until the end of the year, or is he just pandering to the public to fix the damage that has been done? Let him answer the question now—the third question. Mr. Premier, do your job. Postpone these cuts, and make sure that you delay the...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: To paraphrase a quote I once heard: Don't raise your voice; improve your argument.

Four hundred thousand dollars is the amount by which this has increased. We cannot make it any clearer. We have raised it. On top of that, all the workers will continue to get what they were getting before, but they will also get an increase, because we have increased the minimum wage.

I have to get up because the members opposite want to take credit for the \$5 and \$3, approximately, that is given to the workers, but they do not want to take credit when we have a structural deficit of \$400 million. They do not want to take credit for the fact that, when they were in government, they were the only government in 40 years that was unable to have a net gain in jobs. They will not even take credit for the fact that they told the people of New Brunswick that they would balance the books without cutting services or increasing taxes, which they did not do.

We will take the blame and the credit for the things we do, and we are working hard to create jobs in our beautiful province.

Education Policy

Mr. Crossman: In a very good commentary last week by the Copresidents of the New Brunswick Teachers' Federation, they made some excellent points. Among them:

the Gallant government announced that they would be cutting 249 teaching positions... from New Brunswick schools.

They stated that for the Gallant government

to base these cuts solely upon a simplistic comparison of the number of teachers and students over a fifteen-year period, indicates that the Government has no understanding of the diverse and the ever-growing needs of New Brunswick's students nor the reality and complexities of today's classrooms.



The 10-year education plan is rumoured to have no teachers on the committee. Can the minister tell us, with all the experience of teachers in the classroom and from the classroom, how many are on the 10-year education plan committee?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I find it interesting that the member opposite is starting to listen to what the teachers' associations are saying, as, clearly, this is not what members of the previous government did most often during their mandate. What they did most often was not to say overtly how many cuts they were making. Here, I will explain: Members of the previous government announced that they were not going to reduce the number of teaching positions, so they provided a definition of "classroom teacher". However, giving a definition of this term did not prevent the government from reducing the number of positions.

Our government has been transparent, and, yes, our government has not just been content to look at figures for the year 2000. Our government looked at classroom composition, looked at needs, and took into consideration all the factors that are important to provide quality education, not only for today, but also for tomorrow. In fact, we want a quality education system that is sustainable for today and tomorrow.

[*Original*]

Mr. Crossman: I am not sure who is yelling now, but I do not believe there was an answer there regarding how many teachers were actually on that committee. I have not heard of one.

The copresidents also noted, at the announcement of the first provincial budget, that the Premier had indicated that he had not heard of, or even read, the MacKay report or the Porter-AuCoin report. We believe that this is a must. It is important. We expect the Premier to read and understand the recommendations of these comprehensive reports before he considers further targeting efficiencies of \$100 million in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. This information should provide him with the necessary tools to make decisions based on facts and expert research, rather than on simplistic misconceptions.

If the Premier has not even read these reports, I must ask this: Has the Minister of Education read these reports?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: The answer is yes.

[*Original*]

Mr. Crossman: During the public consultation on the Strategic Program Review, participants indicated how important it was to invest in education to ensure that our children meet with



success. No one suggested that cuts to education were a good idea or that they would be easy. However, the most significant change in the 2015-16 provincial budget was a reduction in the number of classroom teachers. During the election, the Premier constantly spoke of the importance of investing in education, yet the biggest change in the first budget was cutting the number of teachers. Will the Premier rise and explain what has changed? Why did he say one thing in opposition and do the opposite in government?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I would also really like to know whether the Education Critic has read these reports. I am asking the question, hoping that I will get an answer as well.

That being said, it seems as though the Education Critic has not really looked at our budget. I do not know whether he has read the reports, but he should also read our budget, since, after we promised to invest in education, our budget went up from \$1.085 billion to \$1.118 billion.

The opposition member seems very focused on certain cuts, but he does not mention the 300 or so teaching positions that were cut during the mandate of the previous government, and, more importantly, when the member for Oromocto-Lincoln was minister. He seems more interested in giving lectures and talking about people's sincerity than in doing his job properly. He cut positions, so why would he be against us doing it?

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Appointments

Mr. Stewart: Last week, the chairman of the Minister of Energy and Mines' hydraulic fracturing commission resigned from that post. Whether it was the rigorous schedule of never meeting or whether it was the fact that, upon the only activity the minister claimed the members were doing—reading material—he discovered that all the so-called conditions laid out by the Liberal government had already been met, he decided to call it a day.

Now, we have a new commissioner who, less than a year ago, was employed by the province, where he had been an employee for many years prior. The question for the minister is this: Is the new commissioner receiving any income from the provincial government while he is participating on this committee?

Hon. Mr. Arseneault: We have been in government for the past several months—six or seven months—and I have tried to give the opposition members the benefit of the doubt as to the level of questioning they bring to the House. I hear the Energy Critic, in his tone, time and time again, talking about an individual who made a terrific career in the judicial system, becoming Chief Justice, then, for health reasons, he had to step down.



He would have been a great commissioner for the hydraulic fracturing commission, and he had done a lot of work since being appointed in March. That the opposition would continue to discredit this person's credentials, I find quite unfortunate, and bringing up his health is quite unfortunate. He would have done a great job. We had to make the decision to replace him, and I am very proud that our government asked Marc Léger, the former clerk for the former government as well. He is going to do a tremendous job.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

