

June 5, 2015

[Original]

Senior Citizens

Mr. Fitch: There have some very defining moments here in the last sitting of the Legislature, and, again, it goes back to the credibility and the personality of this Cabinet, the forgotten backbenchers, and the Premier, in making choices that have hurt New Brunswickers. When we see the government members stand up and cheering for the poor choices that they have made and that are hurting New Brunswickers, we are really concerned about that. We will stand up and, when it makes sense, support it, but, when it hurts New Brunswickers, we are going to stand against that. When I ask these questions again, it is to make sure that the decisions and choices do not hurt the province.

When the Premier stood up and denied the fact that he said before the election that he would not take the seniors' assets and then said to show him the recording, he inferred that the seniors were not being honest, even though there were 100 eyewitnesses. Will the Premier regain some credibility, stand up, and apologize for making those offensive comments?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have already discussed and debated this issue many, many times, and I have already answered this question. Our policy on seniors and the nursing home support they can receive is progressive. It will ensure that those who are able to do so pay a bit more. We think it is a very reasonable approach, since these people will still be able to get government support. It is just a matter of a change in the amount of support, based on the senior's financial resources.

As well, this policy will help us give more money to seniors who have fewer financial resources. Senior couples with an annual income of \$60 000 or less will have more money in their pockets to help their spouse or their dependents. We think this is a good way to get our fiscal house in order; it is a progressive approach that will help us move the province forward.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fitch: The Premier is continuing again to be on message, but the problem is that message was not an answer to the question that I just asked, which, again, really crystallizes the attitude that the Premier, the small Cabinet, and the forgotten backbenchers have for the people of the province.



The point I was making in the question is that we have eyewitnesses. Even the member for Moncton Southwest heard the Premier say to the seniors: We will not touch your assets when we are in government. Even Hector Cormier, a very respected retired teacher, who was actually taking the minutes of that meeting, heard the Premier say: We will not take your assets. I am trying to allow the Premier the opportunity to regain some dignity and credibility by saying: I am sorry; I said it; I should not have called you folks liars because, in fact, I said it; I am sorry; we have broken that promise, and we are moving forward.

I am going to give the Premier a chance once again. Do not go to the rhetoric. Admit that you made a mistake and apologize to the seniors.

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Once again, we have had this debate. Without exaggeration, I think I have answered this question 20 or 30 times. Since there are no more questions on this topic, I want to bring up a point the Leader of the Opposition raised in his first question.

[Original]

He says that the opposition members will support things if they are right for New Brunswickers. He says that he will support things if it helps New Brunswickers. Where were the opposition members when we raised the minimum wage?

Mr. Speaker: Member for Southwest Miramichi-Bay du Vin, come to order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Are they saying that giving those who are trying to work hard, pay their bills, give good care to their children, help their parents, and make sure that they have a good quality of life... Giving those people 30¢ per hour was not something that they could support—30¢ per hour more than they have at minimum wage.

Where were they when we asked that the 1% richest among us pay a bit more in taxes? Why would they not support our giving more money to seniors who need it?

Government Agenda

Mr. Fitch: We could go on at length about some of the broken promises of the Premier. Before the election, he said one thing to the students of the province and one thing to the young professionals who are trying to stay here and get help with their student debts. What did the Liberal Party do when it became the government? It cancelled the tuition tax cash back credit. That takes a significant amount of money out of the pockets of the students and the young professionals in New Brunswick who were trying to stay and create a life here in the province.



What did the government members do? They dashed the young professionals' hopes of getting any money back under the tuition cash back.

On Tuesday, the CRA polls are coming out, and we do not know the results of those yet. I would challenge the Premier, if, in fact, he is still ahead in the polls, to call the by-election in the Carleton riding and take advantage of the situation. If the polls show positive for him, he should get his report card marked and call the by-election in the riding of Carleton.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: When it comes to students at the postsecondary level, we made sure that education at this level was more accessible. In fact, we removed the parental contribution in the calculation of loans and grants, an initiative that the opposition does not support. We created the Youth Employment Fund, enabling our young people from postsecondary institutions or various high schools in our province to gain experience in the workforce, but, again, the opposition was against the measure. So, if the Leader of the Opposition tells us in the House that he supports initiatives to help New Brunswickers, why was he against the measures that are going to help the people who need a little more help?

[Original]

On top of that, they have gone against and voted against raising the minimum wage and asking the richest 1% among us to pay a bit more, to put more money in the pockets of the seniors who need it the most.

Mr. Fitch: When I give the opportunity to the Premier to regain some credibility, he just seems to lose it more and more and more. We do this at our own peril, because we are trying to help the Premier gain back some dignity and an opportunity to not be falling in the polls.

We will stand up and we will argue against things that hurt New Brunswickers. When he talks about removing the parental contribution yet he takes away the opportunity for students to be able to pay back their student loans by ditching the tuition tax credit, it is sending a mixed signal. We have seen that again and again with this government—saying one thing and doing another.

For instance, the commitment to literacy before the election was one thing. Then what did the government do after that, to one of the most symbolic symbols of literacy? It cancelled the bookmobile. That was a small amount of money with a big return. Will the Premier...

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We are very happy about the fact that we have started the development of an aggressive literacy strategy. We have invested 3.1% more in education and early childhood in our



province. We are ensuring, through a nonpartisan, expert-led education plan, that we are going to have a long-term map that will help us get the results that we need when it comes to our education system.

One thing that is clear this morning, which is unfortunate, is that we see the opposition members still governing themselves based on polls. One thing I can tell you is that our government will not govern based on polls. We will govern based on what we can do to help New Brunswickers and how we can improve their everyday lives. To do that, we need to make some difficult decisions so that we can have the funds that we need to invest in job creation efforts, to invest in strong health care, to invest in education, to help seniors, and to lift people out of poverty as well. That is exactly what we are focused on. It is exactly what we will continue to be focused on, and we ask the opposition to stop focusing on polls and focus on that as well.

Mr. Fitch: I will tell you that the thing that we in the opposition are focusing on is the people in New Brunswick. The people in New Brunswick, especially in the riding of Carleton, are saying: We want representation. We know that it is not just here in the House, in the Legislature, that an MLA does a job. There is significant work that is done in the riding every day of the year. That is why we want a by-election in the riding of Carleton.

We have heard it from the teachers who are seeing 300 positions cut. That has a real effect on education. They are demoralized, depressed, and distraught because of some of the promises made by this government and the reality of what it is doing in a reaction.

We can look at some of the things that this government has said and what it has done when it comes to various sectors of the province. You can go from the high-income earners to the people in day care. Will the Premier review the decisions on day care, on taxes...

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Again, the member opposite does not seem to be painting the whole picture. When it comes to education and early childhood, we have actually invested an increase of 3.1% in the budget. That amounts to \$33 million more. On top of that, we are now investing \$95 million in the buildings and infrastructure that will help to give a strong education system to the kids of our province.

The member opposite seems to fail to understand that we face some challenges in our province. We are making choices that will help us gain the fiscal capacity to invest strategically in creating jobs, giving opportunity to all New Brunswickers, but also ensuring that we are able to have a strong health care system and a strong education system. We want to give a strong social safety net and social fabric throughout our province, helping to lift people out of poverty and giving the seniors the support they need as well. We will continue to focus on this, and we ask the opposition to do so as well.



Community College

Mr. Jody Carr: The PC Party and the official opposition have always been aware of the fiscal challenges facing our province, but it comes down to a matter of debate around the choices, the poor choices that the Liberal government is implementing. Cutting the support to the most vulnerable is not leadership, and we in the PC opposition will never support the unacceptable cuts to people with disabilities and those who are most vulnerable.

As I said in question period on Wednesday, I was told by an employee on Tuesday that the New Brunswick Community College has made significant cuts as a result of the Gallant government decisions, largely affecting students with disabilities. Can the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour inform us in this House? She has refused to answer up to now. She has not answered questions to the media in the rotunda. Today, perhaps, she can give us some information around these cuts.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour is really looking forward to talking about what the opposition member is putting forward, but I would like to make a point about his remarks here.

[Original]

If the member opposite wants to get up and say that those members understand that we do have fiscal and financial challenges, I ask him to get up and I ask his colleagues to get up to tell us where they would make the difficult choices.

(Interjection.)

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

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Where would they find the fiscal capacity to invest in job creation? Where would they find the fiscal capacity to sustain and improve health care, seniors' care, and day cares and to lift people out of poverty? Where would they find all the money?

(Interjection.)

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

Hon. Mr. Gallant: They certainly did not find it over the last four years when they were in government. They were unable to balance the books, they cut services, and they raised taxes. If the member opposite, who was a minister of the previous government, wants to get up and say that they understand that there are fiscal challenges, I ask him to get up and tell us where they would find the money.



(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Southwest Miramichi...

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We would be glad to look at their suggestions, and we would be glad to look at their ideas.

Mr. Jody Carr: Again, the Gallant government does not want to be accountable for the choices, the poor choices, that it is making. We took an \$800-million deficit and reduced it to \$250 million, and that is without making cuts affecting children and, in fact, with \$38 million for a child care plan.

(Interjection.)

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

Mr. Jody Carr: In fact, our plan was for private sector jobs. We have a suggestion for you: Start drilling, Mr. Premier.

I can also tell you that another poor choice is at the community college. I want the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour to be accountable for the decisions of this Gallant government.

Again, this is Disability Awareness Week. We have not heard one minister's statement recognizing Disability Awareness Week. Some 17% of the population, the poorest, most marginalized group, according to the World Health Organization... Minister of Post-Secondary Education, your cuts to the community colleges largely affect students with disabilities. Please update this House, be accountable, come out and answer, know your files, tell us the impact of your poor choices...

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The member opposite's condescending tone to the minister is not helpful. If he wants to get up on his feet today and talk about his past government's record, then we have a lot to discuss today on the floor of the Legislature. He is proud of that government's record on reducing the deficit? It missed every single one of its debt-reduction plans. The deficit reduction plans were not hit once under the former Finance Minister, who failed at his task.

The member said that the former government's plan was private sector job creation. It was the only government in 40 years that did not have a net gain in jobs. How in the world is the member opposite going to get up today to defend the past government—one in which he was minister—on its record of getting the deficit under control and its record on creating jobs? It clearly did not get the results.

(Interjection.)



Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Luckily, we are focused on them. With the help of all New Brunswickers, we will get results.

Mr. Jody Carr: Again, I think the Premier is on the verge of another temper tantrum. What we are seeing again is masterful deflection from the poor choices of this government, masterful deflection away from being accountable for the cuts, the impact on human lives and the impact on families.

This is Disability Awareness Week. The largest minority group in this province is marginalized—17%, high unemployment. You cannot be accountable and responsible to this Legislature and to the people of New Brunswick even out on the rotunda. You cannot be accountable for your poor choices in the community colleges.

I can tell you this. Your department has said and your government has said that there were no cuts. I have a letter from Marilyn Luscombe of the New Brunswick Community College, dated May 21, confirming a reduction in the operating grant of 2%, or \$1.1 million, as well as a reduction of \$1.3 million in student support service initiatives such as accommodations services, and the list goes on. Minister, be accountable, answer the question, and know your file.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Again, the condescending tone of the member opposite is not helpful. It is not contributing to the debate. I would suggest that maybe he would want to speak to the Speaker and not directly to the minister. This is potentially the last day of the Legislature, and it would be nice if we could all leave with our heads held high, have good decorum, and have a good debate.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order. The member for Oromocto-Lincoln will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: For the member opposite to talk about Disability Awareness Week is fantastic timing, because I have a ministerial statement that I will be making after question period to talk about this important issue.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Oromocto-Lincoln will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I would certainly invite him to get up at that point, if he would like to have a nice, constructive discussion of how we work together to ensure that we give everybody an opportunity, including those living with disabilities.

Again, there is an overtone to the opposition members' questions. They need to come to the floor of this Legislature, go to the public, and show everyone where they would get the money, where



they would make the tough choices, and how they would create jobs. They certainly did not do it when they were in government.

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

Medical Equipment

Mr. Flemming: I have a few questions for the Minister of Health. By way of background, when I was Minister of Health, I set up a system to depoliticize the purchase of capital assets. The program starts at the local hospital. It then goes to the medical staff of that hospital. It then goes to the medical advisory committee of the Horizon Health Network, which is made up of over 30 physicians from around the network. It then goes to the Horizon board of directors. It then goes to the Department of Health for funding. That was the system that I set up.

Why would you reject this entire process? Why would you reject all the medical professionals, reject this process, and cancel the purchase of genetic sequencing equipment at the Saint John Regional Hospital?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: There are a few things that the former minister, the member opposite, left out in that whole process. One thing that he left out was the fact that the Atlantic Cancer Research Institute, which is based in Moncton, has four genetic sequencing machines that were bought back in 2010. They were actually paid for by the federal government, not even by the province. They were paid for by the federal government, and they have been in operation since 2012.

We often talk about avoiding unnecessary duplication and about not overbuilding our system and overbuilding our capacity. This is a very good example where we have more than enough capacity. We actually have, at the centre in Moncton, over five times the capacity that is required to service the entire province. We thought it was a responsible decision not to create duplication and to save taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Flemming: I discount the minister's allegations as to capacity. The Atlantic Cancer Research Institute is a private organization. It is not government, it is not a Crown corporation, and it is not part of the Crown. Why would we be purchasing equipment for this critical program outside government and privatizing it so that your political friends can benefit?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Again, the member opposite should get his facts straight. First of all, we did not purchase anything for the Atlantic Cancer Research Institute. I told the member that this was bought and paid for by the federal government back in 2010. It has been in operation since 2012. This was all when the former member was minister. He should know this.

Maybe he should also know that, as it stands today, the Saint John Regional Hospital actually sends these samples to the Mayo Clinic in Boston to be analyzed. If we are able to send them to the Mayo Clinic in Boston, why on earth would we not be able to send them to the Atlantic



Cancer Research Institute in Moncton, New Brunswick? That makes perfect sense to me. Again, these four units in Moncton have a capacity of over 13 000, and our requirements here in the province are between 1 800 and 2 400 a year.

Mr. Flemming: They are sent outside because of quality control, continuity, and the standards that the various labs have, which are a necessary part of the process.

This is what I would like to know. Did you discuss this with the member for Saint John Harbour? He is a physician of some reputation. He knows better. He knows that I am right. Did you discuss it with him, and did the member for Saint John Harbour support you on this decision?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I think it is important to give more facts to the member opposite and to the opposition, because they present only part of the picture.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Southwest Miramichi-Bay du Vin—four times.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: If you look at a jurisdictional scan across the country, you will see that Ontario and Quebec are the only two provinces in Canada that have two centres—the only two—and they are the two most populated provinces, by the way. British Columbia and Alberta have one centre. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island have none. Newfoundland has one, but only for research, not for clinical. The fact that we now have one centre in New Brunswick, which has over five times the required capacity to service the needs of the entire province... To me, it makes no sense.

Yes, I have the support of the entire government in making this decision.

Government Services

Mr. Higgs: Yesterday, a lot of time was spent on Bill 55, in relation to the shared services model. While I completely agree with the need to consolidate shared services and to look at this across all government departments so that we can derive greater efficiencies and while I believe that there are key individuals within the government who can play a strategic role in ensuring that this is successful, the questioning certainly resulted in many concerns about the implementation process. That certainly has been highlighted previously by me, I know, because that was a problem we had—the implementation, the execution, and making it actually happen.

The issue is around defining the problem, and I think a lot of effort has been put into that—the SNB fix, which is kind of a new twist on it, and where that might work. The concern is the reporting process of developing “okay, we have done this” versus the actual concern of whether we have done it correctly and in a timely fashion that can be absorbed properly. Will the proper benchmarks and timelines be developed first, before the execution plan is just identified and put into place without those measures?



Hon. Mr. Boudreau: As Minister responsible for Strategic Program Review, I am finding the messaging from the opposition a little confusing. In the early days of the announcement of the common services, the opposition was totally against it. Now, the former Minister of Finance gets up and says that it is a good idea and that we have to find efficiencies. It is so difficult to get a common message coming from the opposition.

This is all about finding efficiencies. Yes, it is a multistep process, and we are going to have to look at various business cases for each of these components as we move forward. The first part of this, which is the legislation that was tabled during this session, was to create the entity, to create this new corporation, which is a revised version of Service New Brunswick, which is a very well-respected and well-run organization in the province. By combining three other agencies in the effort of finding efficiencies...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Higgs: I have had these discussions about the shared-services model, and the idea of moving that together has been portrayed by a lot of individuals with regard to that. We have had those discussions.

My question was actually for the Minister of Government Services, and it was in relation to understanding exactly the business plan, the timelines for execution, and the Gantt chart that were put in place to measure milestones so that, at the end of the day, it is not throwing things together. I am not doing this without past history of seeing these things happen without the real results being achieved. I think there are tremendous results to be achieved here. If you look at the NBISA, when it was put together, it was basically moved to the North Side, and that was the extent of the plan. When we previously talked about the health authorities moving from eight to two, it was primarily done in name only. It was not done in terms of restructuring underneath to capture the \$40 million. That is a concern.

Again, I am asking the question because, unless we develop this in advance and have it very clearly articulated with someone clearly responsible, it will not happen. Would you please identify the person responsible and make it happen...

Mr. Speaker: Time. Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: The opposition members like to talk a good talk, but, when it comes to walking that talk, they are far off the mark.

I look back at the budget speech that the former Minister of Finance gave for the 2014-15 fiscal year. He said: "These challenges have required us to make tough choices and I have no doubt there are tough choices left to come." However, every time this government tries to make tough choices or former Liberal governments tried to make tough choices, the members opposite have gotten up and criticized.



I remember when FacilicorpNB was created. The members opposite criticized it. I remember when the New Brunswick Internal Services Agency was created. They criticized it. Yet, for four years, they worked with those organizations and they actually added to those organizations. Now, we are at a point where we can bring four organizations into one and find some real, solid, concrete efficiencies and some real, concrete savings. We are talking about approximately \$30 million in savings. That is not negligible, and these are the tough decisions that our government is prepared to make.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Higgs: I think it is clear, and I know the information that was shared was clear. Here is our model of what we thought would work on the shared-services development, and the new addition is SNB. I also know that, in relation to that, there was a very clear project plan that identified where key milestones of change would be. I am proud to stand up to confirm any statement I have made since I have been in the political world in the past five years. I can stand by every one of them, unlike what I have previously heard from many of the government members. There have been complete contradictions.

My point here is not to carry on with that. My point is to say that, in order to make this work, we have to have accountability in the process. We have to have reporting and measurements that determine whether it is achieving the results you want. I have said before that we can measure our results, and I am proud to do that. I even challenged the Premier. I said I would be proud to sit down to talk about real numbers. If we want to continue the rhetoric, that is what we continue. Let's know who is accountable. Let's know we will get constant reports on the success of it, and let's have that made public so that we know it is successful. The people in the system will be part of that success.

Mr. Speaker: Time, member.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Again, I would like to quote the former Finance Minister. On December 6, 2013, the *Daily Gleaner* says: "Finance Minister Blaine Higgs said in the legislature on Thursday that the province has a structure that is 'bigger than it needs to be.'"—"a structure that is 'bigger than it needs to be.'"

This initiative is taking four government agencies that, essentially, all provide back-office services to the government and to the public, and we are combining them into one. We are going to be saving all across the board. We are going to be saving in boards of directors, CEOs, senior managers, and middle managers. These are significant savings for New Brunswick, and it is the type of thing that we need to do through the Strategic Program Review to reengineer government and to make sure that we are getting the best value for every dollar of taxpayers' money that we spend in New Brunswick.



Privatization

[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: The Brian Gallant government seems to have decided to hide the details of its policy until the House adjourns for the summer, and we are worried about what will be revealed during the summer.

The Minister of Health has stated that he will privatize hospital services, but has left hundreds of hospital workers who, for the most part, are women, in the dark.

Since there is a lot of speculation, what new details can the Minister of Health give us before leaving for the summer? Since the minister has said that everything is on the table, I would ask him what the people who work very hard for us in the hospital system throughout the province can expect.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I thank the opposition member for her question regarding women. As the Minister responsible for Women's Equality, I want to rise in the House today to say that we are proud of the work our government is doing to improve the status of women here in New Brunswick.

[Original]

We are implementing a gender-based analysis. We reinstated the funding for the independent forum that is going to do research and ensure that it lobbies government to improve our policies that will help the state of women in our province. We were very happy as well to make a call out to all New Brunswickers to help us fill the positions on agencies, boards, and commissions within government with more women so that we can have more parity when it comes to gender analysis there.

We face significant challenges in our province. We are working very hard. I am very proud of the work that all our caucus members are doing to ensure that we make the right decisions, focusing on creating jobs, growing the economy, and making New Brunswick the best place to raise a family. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Members, during question period, the Minister of Health used the name of a member. Even if it is in a newspaper article, you cannot refer to the name of a member. Also, there were situations in question period in which members were posing questions directly to the members across, and that is not permitted either. This is the last day of the Legislature. We might as well just get through it.

The time for oral questions has expired.

