

December 2, 2015

[Original]

Senior Citizens

Mr. Fitch: Yesterday, the throne speech talked about the past 12 months quite a bit. Today, the Premier and I have a little unfinished business that we need to put to bed so that we can move forward. Last March, in the budget speech, the Premier said that the government would be moving forward with means tests for people who are in a nursing home or entering a nursing home. The test included liquid assets, which was also known as the cash grab. The opposition said that it was a poor policy choice and wanted it reversed. Seniors' groups said that it was a poor policy choice and wanted it reversed. After many, many months of anguish for many seniors, the Premier reversed the asset grab. I am wondering today: Can the Premier give seniors reassurance that he will never again put the asset grab on the table during his mandate?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: To start with, I would like to welcome members to the Legislative Assembly; I hope they enjoyed the past weeks and months while we were not sitting in the House. Of course, I also want to welcome the member for Carleton; I am sure that he will work very hard to represent his community and the people who have placed their trust in him.

I think it is also important to point out that our government presented choices that we have to make together as a province. Of course, we have a deficit, a debt, and economic challenges to overcome.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I hope the opposition will take the time to suggest to us ways of overcoming these challenges.

To provide a more specific answer to the question, I will say that we clearly established that the policy put forward with regard to nursing homes will not be reconsidered. We made that very clear months ago, when we made an announcement about it.



[Original]

Mr. Fitch: Again, this was a suggestion that was put forward by the opposition. I would like the Premier to give us a clear indication, without any preamble, without any flowery speeches. When the asset grab was reversed, the Premier said: We are hitting the reset button. That “reset button” could mean a number of different things. Could the Premier just be very clear and concise and say that he will not be putting the asset grab on the table again as long as he is Premier?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I answered the question. I am sorry if the member opposite did not like the fact that my preamble included welcoming everybody to the Legislature and welcoming the member of his own party who has now taken a seat to represent the people of Carleton. I am sorry if that 30 seconds irritated the member opposite, but I think it is important for us to recognize that we have been put here by the people of our ridings, the people of New Brunswick. We have a duty to represent them to the best of our ability.

I have answered the question, so I will go to a couple of the member’s statements that were made, to clarify a few things. It was mentioned that postsecondary education had only limited space within the speech from the throne. I think it is important to point out that, for us, when we talk about education, it includes early childhood development, it includes adult literacy, and it includes postsecondary education. In fact, education had its own section. There were four sections of content in the speech from the throne. On top of that, the word “education” was mentioned 12 times.

Mr. Fitch: Again, the Premier has decided not to answer that question. That is fine, but I would like to move on to another issue, because the asset grab did cause a lot of worry and concern to the seniors of the province, even to the point where a number of people were considering leaving the province because of the poor policy choices this government made. Also, the Premier showed a significant amount of disrespect when he stood in the House and, after promising seniors that he would not touch their assets... He made that promise at an AGM of the seniors’ coalition. He said: If you do not have a video, I did not say it. A number of his ministers parroted the same remark after he said it.

The Premier knows that respect starts at the top. Can he show some respect to the seniors, lead the way, and apologize to the seniors today for the anguish that he put them through for all those months?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I do not much appreciate what the Leader of the Opposition says about me; I would like him to show where I said the words that he is putting in my mouth. I think it is important to always very clearly indicate the sources of what we say here in the House. In addition, when we made the announcement a few months ago, we clearly stated that we had made mistakes, as a government, when it was time to communicate and work with people on



policy development. We will correct these things, and we will, of course, learn from our mistakes. I have said this very clearly, and I will be pleased to repeat it once again today. I have already answered this question several times.

Therefore, I will move on to a statement made by an opposition member, who said that we have not been transparent. I am very surprised to hear that. The report that we tabled a few days ago is the greatest sign of transparency shown by a government for years here in New Brunswick.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: It is interesting, because the Premier talks about transparency, and we are going to deal with some of the numbers and some of the years that the government is choosing to put forward to make its case, which, again, is not very correct. It is interesting that, again, the Premier is saying that there is no video to prove that he said that. It is interesting that a number of PC MLAs returned to the AGM of the seniors' coalition just a few months ago. The Leader of the Green Party and the Leader of the NDP were there. Strangely enough, there were no Liberal MLAs.

Within the minutes of that meeting... It was an annual general meeting, and the minutes from the previous year were read. They talked about the Premier's saying that he would not touch seniors' assets. No one stood up to make a correction to those minutes. No one stood up to say: There needs to be a correction because the Premier did not say that. There, we have the minutes of an AGM saying that the Premier stood up and said he would not touch the assets. Now, again, we have the Premier showing disrespect. He has the floor. He should apologize to seniors.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am a bit puzzled; we announced months ago that we were not going to make the changes to the policy regarding nursing homes that had been brought forward in the previous budget. We said very clearly that we were not going to propose these changes again.

If the Leader of the Opposition had problems, he should have talked to the media or called our minister or me. I am a bit confused. In fact, in addition to everything I listed, we tabled a report a few days ago that indicates, just like the throne speech delivered yesterday, that we have choices to make as a province. I am a little surprised to see that the Leader of the Opposition is not taking the time during question period today to talk about this report and discuss it and even debate how we are going to make these difficult choices as a province. We do indeed recognize that these choices will not be easy.

Therefore, I would point out to the Leader of the Opposition that we are focusing on this report, which is very important for the future of our province.



[Original]

Mr. Fitch: The seniors' asset grab was a poor choice. It was a poor choice that this government made, so I do not have any confidence in the choices that it is going to make in the future. That is why we are bringing it up here today.

On Friday, the Premier met with the coalition and members of the seniors' groups. Then he had a weekend of campaigning with the Liberal candidates from Beauséjour and Papineau. Then, on Monday, he reversed the seniors' asset grab. I wonder whether the Premier could tell us this today: Was he taking his policy direction from the Liberal candidate from Beauséjour and the Liberal candidate from Papineau? Is that why he reversed the seniors' asset grab? Why does he not tell the people exactly where the direction is coming from?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: To answer the question, no.

Now, I am going to take up my time, because I have answered the question very directly, to talk about something that I heard the member opposite mention in the media. Again, during a member's statement, we had one of the members opposite discuss some of the plans that we have to invest in the priorities of New Brunswickers.

I want the opposition members to clarify to us, as a government, and to clarify to New Brunswickers whether they support our investing in infrastructure or not. We heard criticisms again this morning about the fact that we are investing to create jobs and stimulate the economy. We heard the member opposite in the media this morning. She was speaking about the fact that she does not think that we should be spending in infrastructure. I invite her to tell us whether we should be investing in the amphitheatre in Edmundston. I invite the members opposite to get up and tell us whether we should be investing in the renovations of schools in Riverview and Woodstock. Are they for or against investing in our future, investing in the priorities of New Brunswickers?

Mr. Fitch: It is quite clear.

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fitch: Again, when we talk about investment in schools and education, that was one of the priorities that we had. Actually, if you look back historically, I was the one who pushed hard to make sure that the Riverview expansion was on the capital expenditure list. Again, I can take no lesson from the Premier here today.

Maybe the Premier can take a lesson in leadership because respect comes from the top. Respect is something that people look to their leader for. Through an RTI, the chief of staff refers to the seniors' groups in New Brunswick as "the negative ones that spoke to the" media. I



wonder whether that attitude of the chief of staff, where he calls seniors negative people, is shared by the Premier. Is that attitude coming from the Premier, or is it coming from just the chief of staff?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have clearly indicated that the policy on nursing homes introduced in the last budget will not go forward and will not be introduced again. We clearly said that we must learn from our mistakes, and we will make sure we communicate more effectively with New Brunswickers in the future. We will also make sure we have conversations with people who represent various organizations and, of course, with New Brunswickers.

This all goes to show that we have been very transparent with regard to the report that lists the choices we must make as a province. Once again, I am asking the Leader of the Opposition this: Does he support government investments, or does he only support them when they are made in his riding? If this is the case, then he should clearly say so.

[*Original*]

Mr. Fitch: Again, the Premier is trying to avoid the question because it is of some concern to the public that the attitudes floating around the Premier's Office—calling people negative if they go to the press to express their opinions... Again, I think that it is setting the tone for the next number of weeks here in the Legislature and into the spring.

The Premier has an opportunity to apologize for the anguish that he caused the seniors' group. He has an opportunity to tell his chief of staff that he should apologize for the comments that he put in his emails—"the negative ones that spoke to the press". That is a method of using fear against people who want to speak out and challenge the government on some of its policy choices and decisions. If the Premier will not apologize and show respect, maybe the chief of staff would like to apologize for the email that he sent that called seniors negative. He can tweet it right now, because we know that many Liberal employees are tweeting all the time. Will the Premier tell the chief of staff to apologize?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have actually already apologized for the angst that we created. I actually said that months ago. I would like to point out that it is not something that we see very often, having a Premier—or any politician, for that matter—admit mistakes. We actually said months ago that we were very sad to see that we had done that and that we had created angst for the seniors. We have already admitted that. We also admitted that we have to learn from our mistakes. We have to communicate policies better, we have to engage with stakeholders better, and we have to ensure that New Brunswickers can voice their opinions and concerns. I said all that months ago. I can do it again on the floor of the Legislature, which I just did.

I think it is important, however, that we start to discuss some of the choices that are before us, which are incredibly significant. We have a report that came out with \$1 billion in revenue



increases and expenditure reductions. I would suggest, very humbly, that the Leader of the Opposition focus his efforts on giving us his feedback on what we should do with those choices.

Mr. Fitch: We will be more than happy to go through the shopping list that he is putting out to the people and making them choose. The members opposite were elected to govern. They are the people who have the majority. They are using that majority in committees and subcommittees of the Legislature to push through their rule changes and whatnot.

It is clear that we want to get on to other topics as well. The minister of the seniors' asset grab said that it was a good policy. If the Premier has apologized, if he has said that he will not put it again, obviously, there is only one thing left to do, and that is for the Premier to ask his minister to step aside or to shuffle his Cabinet, because of the rapport and the respect that the minister has as a result of pushing this asset grab for so many months—so many months—knowing that it was causing so much concern and anguish for the seniors in the province. The minister has said that it was a good policy. Let's give the minister an opportunity to apologize and tell the public that it will never be back on the table again.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I think we try as best we can, especially since it is the first day back in the Legislature, to be respectful. That is clearly not the name of the department or the minister in question. I do not think the Leader of the Opposition is really contributing much to the debate and to the discussion when he goes to that low.

Was the last budget an easy one for us? Absolutely not, because it was not easy for the people of New Brunswick, and we recognize that. We know that we have been asking New Brunswickers to accept tough choices and to make tough choices with us. We also acknowledge that the speech from the throne, the *Choices* report, and what we have been saying over the last little while are setting the stage for more difficult and tough choices. We recognize that this will have an impact on New Brunswickers. That is why it is so crucial that we debate and discuss, as a province, the best way to chart a future in our province that will be brighter. Again, I would humbly suggest that the Leader of the Opposition participate.

[*Translation*]

Strategic Program Review

Ms. Dubé: Over the past year, we have faced a lot of uncertainty in New Brunswick. We have certainly seen that all options are on the table. There was a province-wide tour with discussions. We also saw a report that was released by the government following those consultations. Other reports were also published in order to discuss the choices to be made in New Brunswick.

I would like to hear the Minister responsible for the Strategic Program Review tell us whether he is prepared today to remove some options. We could talk, for example, about closing beds in



various New Brunswick hospitals and certainly in rural areas. There are also the closures of small hospitals and the conversion of small hospitals into nursing homes.

Now that the minister has tabled the report and consulted the people, I would like to hear him tell us whether he is prepared...

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I know the minister really looks forward to answering the questions from the member of the opposition, but I cannot resist answering the member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre, who said that she is against our irresponsible investments in infrastructure. She said that these are investments we should not make.

I would like her to rise today and tell us whether she supports the investments we made in the amphitheatre in Edmundston. These are investments that were made and could be made because we prioritize infrastructure that will create jobs, stimulate the economy, and help us prosper over the long term. So, I hope that, in the next few minutes, the member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre will finally clarify the position of her party. Are you in favour of the investments in infrastructure or, once again, are you in favour of investments only when they are in your own riding?

Ms. Dubé: I can certainly tell the Premier that I am against closing beds in hospitals and closing small hospitals in rural areas in the province. Also, I am certainly against the conversion of small hospitals to nursing homes, because that is definitely not a good environment for seniors. Here is my question for the Premier: Is he prepared to remove some options? If so, which options are they?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Thank you for giving me the chance to chat with the member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre; I very much appreciate the comments she just made. Thank you for suggesting that I leave some services alone, but now I would like to hear about what we should address. What choices should we make? Once again, if the member wants to go to the media to say that she is against our investments in infrastructure, I think the people in her riding, in her region, and in her province have a right to know if she is for or against the investments in infrastructure that we have made in the amphitheatre in Edmundston.

Ms. Dubé: If you had listened to the interview, you would have understood that I did not necessarily speak out against all infrastructure, because we will always have a need for it in New Brunswick. However, I have put very clear choices on the table; they are there. Is the Premier prepared today to put an end to this fear, particularly in rural New Brunswick? The choices are all on the table, and he should begin to identify some things that are not necessarily options he is considering, whether it be closing beds, closing hospitals, or converting small hospitals into nursing homes for seniors, which is not an acceptable environment for them. Here is my question for the Premier: Is he prepared to take some choices off the table?



[Original]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: This is quite alarming. If we are going to tackle the challenges before us, we have to get away from petty politics.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We cannot be only for things that are good for our ridings. We have to represent the province as a whole. We have to ensure that we are bettering the quality of life of all New Brunswickers, not only the people of our ridings. To have the member opposite get up and say that she is against infrastructure spending but she is for the amphitheatre in her riding, I think, is incredibly unfortunate. It is clear that the members opposite are for the amphitheatre in Edmundston. It is clear that the members opposite are for the renovations of the schools in Riverview and Woodstock. Could the members opposite tell us which ones are not supported by their party, or should we just assume that the infrastructure investments that they do not support happen to be in all our ridings?

Victorian Order of Nurses

Mr. Steeves: One week ago today, the lives of literally thousands of New Brunswickers were thrown into chaos by the sudden closure of the Victorian Order of Nurses offices across our province. From the programs dealing with healthy babies to mothers' programs, nursing, and care for our veterans, there is a huge void in the delivery of essential health care services. Over 100 people have also been thrown out of work.

All the MLAs on this side of the House as well as, I am sure, many MLAs on the Liberal side of the House, are being contacted by people who are worried and uncertain over what could come next. The minister has had a week now to develop an interim emergency plan. I am asking the minister to rise and tell the House today what that plan is.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I thank the opposition for the question. The announcement that came on Friday—not quite a week ago, contrary to the member's opinion—from the Victorian Order of Nurses Canada is obviously something that shocked the entire province and probably the entire country. The VON is a third-party service provider and is not directly tied to government. Six provinces across the country are being affected by the closure of the VON. This is not something that the province is doing or that is the province's responsibility. It provides service to New Brunswickers. We are currently in the process of assessing the impact of the VON's closure and looking at where the gaps are and which other service providers could step in to fill the void, whether it is other third-party service providers, the Extra-Mural Program, or others.



Mr. Steeves: I stand corrected. It was not quite a week ago. Maybe we will have that complete plan in place by this Friday, which is in a couple more days. The VON is a third-party provider, absolutely. It provided services to the citizens of New Brunswick. They are the citizens who elected this government to help them. The VON visit was a necessary part of the week for lots of folks, including seniors in rural areas. It was not just for health reasons but for mental health as well. It was a friendly weekly visit for a lot of people. It might have been their only visit that week.

We have now gone almost a week, and the Minister of Health seems more focused on holding social programs for ransom with his program review. I think that the minister should adjust his priorities and put the VON crisis at the top of the list. He should put rural New Brunswick on the top of that list as well. If the minister says that it is not going to be ready in two days, will he give us a time commitment as to when the interim emergency plan will be ready?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Thank you for the question. As I mentioned earlier, the announcement regarding the Victorian Order of Nurses surprised everyone, including the department and me. We heard the news Friday, like everyone else.

We are talking here about a provider that ceased operations in six Canadian provinces, so this decision will not just have an impact on New Brunswick. The Victorian Order of Nurse has been around for 118 years, so no one expected this news.

We are currently doing a complete review of the programs and services that were provided in the province by the Victorian Order of Nurses. We are trying to see where there are gaps in the services provided to people and who would be in the best position to fill these gaps, whether it be the Extra-Mural Program or someone else. So, we are doing that, and as soon as we have news...

[*Original*]

Mr. Steeves: We are looking for an interim emergency plan. Perhaps the other provinces will have some ideas as well. It seems to us maybe you could take the VON nurses and support staff who are now unemployed. They are fully trained. They are experienced. They know the patients, particularly in rural New Brunswick. They are set to continue to provide services. Could they not be moved over to Extra-Mural, at least in an interim emergency plan? Move them over to Extra-Mural and take care of the citizens of New Brunswick. It seems to me that this could have been done even 10 minutes after the announcement was made.

People are looking to the government for answers, whether it is in five days, seven days, or whenever. They need the answers. They need them now. They need to know what is happening this week and next week. We have gone five days without that VON care in rural New Brunswick and for some of our seniors, our veterans, our children, our babies, and new



mothers. Will the government commit to making the VON—those nurses and staff—part of the Extra-Mural Program?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Again, I want to reassure the opposition and the public in general that we are taking the closure of the VON services very seriously. It is a third-party service provider. They are not government employees. They work for government on a contract basis, similar to many other third-party service providers. Based on collective agreements and the like, what the member opposite is suggesting is not even possible. We are assessing the situation.

Across the province, we are looking at what impact these closures are having, what services and programs are being affected, and how we can address the void that has been created. Other service providers have offered to help. Internally, we know that there is capacity within the Extra-Mural Program as well. When we talk about vaccines, for example, we know that the local pharmacies provide those as well. We are trying to assess the situation. As soon as we have a plan...

Strategic Program Review

Mr. Coon: The government has presented a grocery list of options to tackle the deficit. The minister responsible for this review has spoken at length about the public consultation process that resulted in these options. I have said that was well done. Indeed, New Brunswickers contributed many ideas.

However, I cannot help but wonder why some of the top suggestions have been taken off the table. In the *What Was Said* document that was published during our last sitting, many people said that they wanted this government to eliminate or reduce corporate subsidies. My question to the minister responsible for the Strategic Program Review is this: Why has cutting or reducing corporate subsidies been taken off the table in the options paper?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I would like to thank the member for Fredericton South for the question, and I want to thank him for having participated in what has been a very lengthy process. He is the only member of the opposition to have participated in a really constructive way.

As a government, we have choices to make. We have had some pretty extensive consultation around the province. We have gathered feedback from New Brunswickers, stakeholders, and the bureaucracy. The choices that have been put out in the report are the choices that we believe best represent the overall feedback that we have heard and the solutions moving forward. For the next number of months, we want to get feedback from New Brunswickers again on the choices that are in this report. As we have said all along, all the decisions will be made in time for our second budget.

Mr. Coon: Cutting corporate subsidies was on the top of the list for the people who participated in the consultation. It was in the top 10 of the *What Was Said* report, as were raising royalties on our natural resources and not giving our natural resources away at fire sale prices. In the



throne speech this week, there was mention of a new forest strategy and the expansion of our mining sector. If this is to be the case, there would be new opportunities to increase our revenue by charging companies prices that reflect their fair value and a fair return to New Brunswick. Why was increasing royalties on our natural resources taken off the table and out of the options paper?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Once again, I would like to thank the member opposite for his question. As he very well knows, one of the priorities of this government—if not the very first one—is job creation and economic development. We have already put steps in place to really focus fully on this priority and get maximum results. Opportunities New Brunswick was created. We have a different way of working with businesses, since we only give them money once the jobs have been created, unlike what the former government did in the past. We can even talk about the choices that we indicated in this report. Some choices will have an impact on businesses, particularly on big companies, depending on the direction that is chosen. However, that is why we published a report on the choices available; we want to know what New Brunswickers think about the best choices to make in order to move New Brunswick forward.

[*Original*]

Mr. Coon: The minister has said that he actually wants feedback from New Brunswickers on the options that his government is presenting to them for tackling the deficit. My question for the minister is this: Will he bring a motion to the floor of this House to request that the report on the options for tackling the deficit be sent to the Standing Committee on Estimates and Fiscal Policy? Will public hearings on the options presented be held so that the committee can report back to this House about what it heard from New Brunswickers?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: As soon as we finish question period today, I will be tabling the report in the Legislature, which is the normal practice. Then we will have the next number of weeks to debate the options in the report, to debate the choices that we, as New Brunswickers, need to make. All of this is going to lead up to our second budget, which will be tabled by my colleague the Minister of Finance in the new year.

We are going to have ample opportunity. We are asking New Brunswickers to read the report and to provide feedback on the report. They can do that online, in person with their MLAs, or in writing. There are going to be other mechanisms made available to make sure that New Brunswickers have their say on the various choices. However, we need to be clear. There are tough choices to be made. If there are certain ones New Brunswickers do not want to make, they are going to have to tell us which ones they are prepared to make.

Mr. K. MacDonald: As a bit of clarification, we announced the Riverview and Woodstock schools. We delivered the approval letter for the Lorneville barge terminal, and the \$200-million upgrade to the refinery was because of the Irving family and not the Gallant government.



I would like to address my question to the minister in charge of the Strategic Program Review, the former Finance Minister who drove our deficit to almost \$1 billion, the man who gave the Bank of Nova Scotia the preferred creditor status for Atcon, resulting in the bank getting almost all its investment back while the taxpayers of New Brunswick received only pennies on the dollar. Given the \$1-billion deficit and the Atcon creditor fiasco, how does this minister expect the people of New Brunswick to take him seriously?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I certainly enjoy the passionate words coming from the member opposite. I would hope that he would now take the time that will be given to him to list the projects he is against. I would like to know which infrastructure projects the opposition members are against. They are saying that we should not be investing in infrastructure. We are saying we have to stimulate the economy, create jobs, and make sure we are prosperous in the long term. Not only will the members opposite not tell us which ones they are against, but also they now want to take credit for some of the infrastructure investments. It is not about taking credit.

We are debating policy. We are debating the direction of our province. We are debating choices that are before us. We believe we have to invest in things that will create jobs and stimulate the economy, such as infrastructure. I would like the member opposite who raised the question of infrastructure to tell us which projects the members opposite are against.

Mr. K. MacDonald: For the Gallant government, it is always about taking credit.

I have every confidence that the Gallant Liberal government needs money to finance its \$3 billion worth of election promises and its \$150-million slush fund. In the throne speech yesterday, we heard that everything is on the table. I would like to ask this to the minister in charge of the Strategic Program Review or to the Premier. Why do we not see the \$3 billion worth of election promises or the \$150-million slush fund on the table for discussion?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is a contingency reserve. It is clear that the opposition members do not understand what that is. When they were in government, they did not hit one of their targets to reduce the deficit. They were unable to hit them. Because we saw them struggle, we said it may be important for us to have a bit of a cushion and to make sure we have a contingency reserve. I would like the member opposite to acknowledge what the contingency reserve really is.

Second, the member is again talking about the spending and about the investments we are making. He is criticizing our investments. The one thing the members opposite always go to is infrastructure. The member opposite did not answer my question, but, in the preamble of his previous question, he listed off the things he supports. They are all things in the ridings of the members opposite. I ask the member to get up on his feet to deliver passionately the words that will tell us which infrastructure projects they are against.



Atcon

Mr. K. MacDonald: The Premier is in the frying pan, and the heat is starting to rise.

I expect, by now, everyone has become aware of the computer servers that were delivered to the RCMP on Monday. Perhaps one day, we will learn why the taxpayers' credit status was signed away to the Bank of Nova Scotia. I would like to ask the minister who signed away our credit status—or the Premier, if he chooses to stand up—why he signed away 100% when only a small percentage was requested. Why, Mr. Minister, why, Mr. Premier, did you sign away 100% when only 20% was requested?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, as you know, I am sure—and as the member opposite should know, as he has been in this Legislature for quite some time—the three questions given to a member of the opposition are supposed to be on one subject. It is very hard to understand what the member opposite is trying to bring up and what he is focused on.

What is very clear is what we are focused on on this side of the Legislature—creating jobs, investing in health care, and making sure we have a world-class education system. Again, one of the pillars of our plan to create jobs—it is a diversified plan with many pillars—is investing strategically in our infrastructure. This helps to create jobs. It stimulates the economy at a time when New Brunswickers are looking for work, at a time when Canadians from coast to coast to coast are looking for work.

We believe in investing strategically in our infrastructure. The members opposite try to give the impression that they are against it, yet they will not name a single project they are against. They only tout the ones that they like that are in their ridings.

Legislative Officers

Mr. Fairgrieve: As a newly elected MLA, I am obliged to meet with the Conflict of Interest Commissioner within 30 days. Since that position has been vacant for some time, can the Premier advise me as to whom I am to meet with so that I can be in compliance with my obligations?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As we have already said through the media, we are looking into this.

[*Translation*]

It must be understood that it is not easy to find people who have the skills required for this position. I am going to be very transparent, without, however, naming anyone, out of respect for the people involved. That being said, we approached several people who have the skills required, but, in the end, they refused the position. So, it is not as easy as people might think.



We are certainly going to reconsider the process, because we have already offered the position to a few people who, for various reasons, have turned it down.

I think that is a good question. I am pleased to see the member for Carleton take advantage of his first question to offer us something substantial. I hope that, in his case, that continues, because it is certainly not what his colleagues are doing.

[Original]

Mr. Fairgrieve: At recent LAC meetings, the Ombudsman of New Brunswick expressed concerns over the office of Conflict of Interest Commissioner remaining vacant for almost five months. He cited reasons for filling this vacancy immediately and proposed recommendations for meeting this need. Do the Premier and his government intend to act on these recommendations?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Yes, as is the custom, we have seen in the past that, normally, the person who is fulfilling the role of Conflict of Interest Commissioner would be a judge. The person would normally be a retired judge, somebody who has had some legal background. We are looking into making sure that is not always necessarily a prerequisite because, as I mentioned in response to a previous question, some retired judges were asked and, for different reasons, did not accept the position.

I think it is important to put into context that this was something that happened that was not expected. Obviously, the past Conflict of Interest Commissioner, for health reasons, did the right thing in saying that it would be in his best interest, as well as the best interest of his family and, ultimately, I suppose, the people of New Brunswick that he step aside. We completely understand, but we want to make it very clear that this was something that was unexpected. We are dealing with it. Again, we are looking into what our options are moving forward. The Ombudsman's suggestions are being strongly considered by our government.

Mr. Fairgrieve: In New Brunswick, we have a clearly defined, nonpartisan process to select legislative officers. The office of Conflict of Interest Commissioner has been vacant for going on five months. Is this extended delay a signal of the intention of this government to change the process from its nonpartisan nature?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Not at all. We will make sure that we follow the process, but we need some people who are going to be interested. Unfortunately, as we said, it is certainly not as easy as we would like it to be.

Again, I think that the previous question by the member opposite was a good one, in the sense that the Ombudsman did make some suggestions, which we think were good, and we are looking into them.



Again, I want to state that this was something that happened that was a bit unexpected. It is unfortunate for everyone and more so for the previous Conflict of Interest Commissioner. We obviously wish him nothing but the best as he recovers from some health issues. In the shortest delay possible, we will ensure that the position and the responsibilities are being met by the Conflict of Interest Commissioner.

I think that it is great to see the members opposite getting up to applaud. Again, I welcome the member opposite to the Legislature for the first time, and I am sure that he is going to do a great job to represent the people of his community.

Mr. Jeff Carr: I find it interesting that, earlier, in one of the Premier's preambles, he talked about wanting to stop petty politics. If he wants to stop petty politics, he should return the 500 SEED positions back to the capital region in the budget this year, instead of moving them to another region. Thank you for that in advance.

Human Resources

Since June of this year, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure has had a situation in his department where a 64-year-old commissioner was removed from his post. His hours were cut, and he was forced to work outdoors. Yet, the minister did nothing at all to intervene.

Not long after he was elected, the Premier said that he would create jobs. Then, he said that he would create the conditions for other people to create these jobs. This is my question for the Premier or the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure: Will you immediately create the conditions so that Wayne Grant can go back to his job that he held previously?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Thank you for the question. Obviously, this issue has been receiving a lot of attention through the media. I want to re-explain on the floor of the Legislature what I have said through the media.

This is a third-party service with which the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure has a contractual engagement. I have said publicly that in this situation, as in other situations, a third-party provider needs to respect all laws that exist in New Brunswick. This is one of them. There are different laws that exist that they need to provide for and respect.

I think that it is important to note that I would not intervene in a third-party HR issue. It is their responsibility, and it is their decision-making. For us, what we want to see are laws being respected and the service being served.

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

