

April 1, 2016

[Original]

Job Creation

Mr. Fitch: I have some good news and some bad news for the Premier. First is the bad news. There are still 38 000 New Brunswickers out of work. That figure has not changed. It is still 38 000. It is static, unlike the job numbers in Sussex that went from 100 to 89 to 39 and unlike the Fredericton job numbers that were 400 and then none and then 100. Anyway, there are still 38 000 people out of work. That is the figure.

Now for the good news for the Premier.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fitch: The Premier knows that he is leaving. He has only four scheduled days in the House left, and then he is “Gallant-ing”—I mean gallivanting—off somewhere. The good news for the Premier is that he is not going to have to face question period again.

I am asking him this because he promised on Tuesday that he would put his draft jobs plan on the table of this House. Do you think, Premier, that you would be able to get around to putting that draft jobs plan on the table before you leave next Friday?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As I have already said this week, our plan is in development, but our government thinks it is very important to consult community leaders, industry, businesses, and all New Brunswickers.

So, the last time the Leader of the Opposition asked us this question, we quite clearly answered that, as a government, we would be happy to introduce our plan. However, before we do so, we want to complete our consultations.

The Leader of the Opposition knows that we are organizing summits to discuss the opportunities and challenges we, as a province, have before us. Once these summits are completed, it will obviously take a little time to make sure that all the suggestions are included in our plan. That being said, we will be happy to introduce our plan in the House once the summits and consultations are completed.



[Original]

Mr. Fitch: The question period is in Hansard, and we could go back and look at the exact words that the Premier said. However, I have them right here. It has been recorded, and it is on tape. He said: "Do we have a plan? Absolutely." He will remember that I said: Table the draft plan here on the floor of the Legislature so that we can have a discussion on it. That was the indication that the Premier gave to us, that he would put the draft plan here on the floor. Maybe it is like his jobs-now plan that he talked about during the election and that really was not a plan at all. Maybe there is no New Brunswick jobs plan.

Again, if there is a draft that the government is working on—I know there is because the Premier has indicated that—will the Premier put the draft plan on the floor of the Legislature so that we can have a discussion, so that we can see it, and so that we can be part of that consultation that he so proudly boasts about?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I think the Leader of the Opposition is showing sometimes what is wrong with politics. We are being as transparent as we can possibly be. We are telling them that a plan is coming. We are telling them when. We want to finish our consultation. Now, the leader is trying to make it seem as if there is some secret plan. It is incredibly unfortunate.

Obviously, we are being as transparent as we can possibly be. We have a plan that is being developed as we listen and consult with industry. We have had over 20 sessions and summits, and that does not include some of the more formal and informal meetings that ministers and members of our government have taken with stakeholders. We will have a plan that will be finalized and presented here in the Legislature.

Unfortunately, we had a forestry summit that had to be postponed because of weather, so we are going to have our summits go a little bit longer than we would have liked. I hope the opposition can understand that, and I hope the opposition can move on to more important things so that we can discuss the future and how we are going to work together, instead of trying to make some falsity when it comes to the transparency we are showing when it comes to our plan.

Mr. Fitch: More important? More important? There are 38 000 New Brunswickers out of work, and the Premier thinks there is something more important to talk about. There are 5 000 fewer jobs than he promised when he said he had a jobs-now plan during the election. He has failed miserably. He has not lived up to that commitment of 5 000 jobs. In fact, he has lost 6 000 jobs since he took office. He is down by 11 000 jobs. No wonder he wants to move on. We are not moving on until we can get every New Brunswicker who wants a job back to work.

Again, the Premier talks about being transparent. He has summits that are by invite only. The Minister of Economic Development has said that the time for talk is over and that it is time for action. I am calling the Premier to action right now. Put the draft plan on the floor of the



Legislature. Let's take a look at it. Let's let all New Brunswickers take a look at it to give their input and to get New Brunswickers back to work.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The Leader of the Opposition should be encouraged to know that when he screams and yells, it does not make what he is saying any more true.

What I have talked about is the fact that we are trying to have a debate here on when the draft plan should be presented, or the plan should be presented. Yes, I do think that there are more important subjects. There are more important subjects such as how we are going to work together to increase the number of jobs in New Brunswick and to create growth.

We are very happy and pleased to be working with our partners across the province to try to create the climate for economic growth. We are starting to see some positive results. There are still some rough waters ahead as the Canadian economy is struggling, but we are still very pleased that, by working with stakeholders, community leaders, and the business community, we have had 250 jobs announced by IBM. We had 39 jobs, and there are more to come, in Sussex. There are 113 jobs in Moncton.

The leader wants to know where I am going after question period. Next Monday, just so he knows, there are hundreds of jobs that are coming to New Brunswick that we will be announcing in Moncton, and he is welcome to come.

Mr. Fitch: It is similar to some of the BMM Testlabs jobs that are five years away. It does not solve the problem of today, which is that there are 38 000 people in this province out of work. It is like the Nordia jobs that were announced in Moncton as well. Really, the next day, 250 jobs were lost in Riverview because that same contract just walked across the border to Moncton.

When it comes to jobs, the Premier needs to hear the words, and he needs to hear them very clearly: There needs to be action now. We are asking him to table the draft so that we can look at it. When he talks about the climate, I wonder if the right climate is driving high income earners away because of the high taxes that this government puts on them. I wonder if the right climate is increasing property taxes by \$25 million. I wonder if the right climate is cancelling the tuition rebate so that people with university degrees are being driven out of the province and going somewhere else. I wonder if the right climate is putting a moratorium on shale gas.

Tell the Premier to put the plan on the table...

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I can agree with something that the member opposite just said. He is right. Sometimes these deals do take two, three, four, or five years to come to completion. That is



how the private sector works. It wants to look for growth, and it wants to have partners to support it in its growth.

The real problem we have right now is that we lost four years. There was a four-year gap when they could not sign any deals at all.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Gallant: There were no deals being signed, and nothing was being announced as a result of the previous government's efforts. Therefore, we have had to start from scratch, but we are going to work very hard with all our partners, the community leaders, the stakeholders, and the business community.

I am happy to say that the climate is looking good for this province. The minimum wage has been increased. Small business taxes have been reduced. We are investing in infrastructure, and, just recently, we saw that Fredericton received the accolade of the most competitive city in the country. We are going to continue to do what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Government Funding

Mr. K. MacDonald: Invest NB had a great record, and I would invite the Premier to take a look at it.

Ah, ah, oh, oh, oh. From grow-ops back to co-ops, reports from yesterday's court hearing into the remains of Co-op Atlantic indicate that there may be some sort of end in sight, an end to \$7.5 million of New Brunswick taxpayers' money. I see that Nova Scotia taxpayers are getting creamed in this deal as well but only half as badly as us. Ironically, it seems that the head of Opportunities NB was also the head of Nova Scotia Business Inc. when the loan in Nova Scotia was given out. Is this true? Can the minister confirm this?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: First of all, I want to say that I like the member opposite's tie and ensemble. It looks good this morning.

I would also like to add that, in his preamble, the member talked about the record of Invest NB. Look, I have to get up, and we have to talk about the record of the previous government. In 2011, under the watch of the previous government, the GDP went up by a measly 0.2%. In 2012, it was -1.2%. In 2013, it was 0.3%, and, in 2014, it was -0.3%. Cumulatively, the economic growth rate from 2010 to 2014 was 0.4%.



We have had to start from scratch. You cannot just start the economy and say that we are going to rev it up now. There were four years that we lost, and we have had to build up. I am convinced and optimistic that, by working with New Brunswickers, we are going to have a climate that will have economic growth happening right here in our province. We are going to make sure that it gets done.

Mr. K. MacDonald: The Premier seems to be in some kind of OrganiGram haze.

The people are asking questions about this deal, and it is our duty to bring them to the government. Taxpayers would like to know who made the decision to provide this loan guarantee for the National Bank two months before the company went belly up. It reeks of “Atconian” behaviour all over again. People are asking how this could happen and whether the advice of senior civil servants was ignored once again. Surely, someone stood up and said: For heaven’s sake. Do you not see what you are doing?

This is exactly like the Atcon deal, but the decimal point has been moved to the left. It is \$7.5 million as opposed to \$75 million. Do the minister or the Premier view this as some sort of improvement, losing only 10% as much?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: Over on the other side of the House, the honourable member mentioned something about a haze. The only haze that I see is over here, so it is April Fools’ to them.

Very clearly, as I stated the other day, the Co-op Atlantic file is currently under court order, companies’ creditors protection and arrangements. Opportunities NB and the Office of the Attorney General are currently closely monitoring the ongoing court proceedings to determine what, if any, effect the liquidation of Co-op Atlantic assets might have on the guarantee. Therefore, I cannot comment any further on something that is before the court.

However, we, as a government, are not looking to put all our eggs in one basket. The opposition members are talking about only one thing. They want to keep going back in history. I love to bring up history.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: The other day I brought up the harbour bridge. We are on the hook for \$150 million because the opposition members’ friend decided to sell it to Mr. Harper. Mr. Harper gave it to us. We are going to be paying \$150 million for that bridge. Point Lepreau...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister. Time. Time.

(Interjections.)



Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. K. MacDonald: I am sick of the minister's dope. It is vital that the taxpayers are told whether Mr. Lund was involved in this Co-op Atlantic decision because he is the man who has sworn to enact the Auditor General's recommendations that were given as the result of the ongoing Atcon scandal. If Mr. Lund had any involvement in this Atconian intervention in favour of a bank, then, clearly, he must remove himself as the person in charge of overseeing the very recommendations designed to prevent this very occurrence.

Does the minister understand that? Would the minister prefer that I ask to be laid upon the table of the House all records of involvement regarding Mr. Lund and this decision? Would the minister agree that this would be the proper thing to do?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I think that one of the proper things to do would be for the members opposite to come on over to see Opportunities New Brunswick sometime. Sit down and have an open conversation with those people. Have a conversation with the CEO, Mr. Lund, along with some of the key people who are there driving the Opportunities New Brunswick group.

The member keeps on bringing up the Co-op, which is under creditor protection. It is before the courts, so it is not something that I can bring up and talk about in the House. Those members keep talking about these draconian things going on and about the sky falling in New Brunswick. It is not.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: The sky is not falling in New Brunswick. We have some very impressive businesses in New Brunswick that are working. Let's just talk about some of the sectors that are really doing well. In ICT, let's talk about big data and the big data centres that are being put in place. Let's talk about the activity around the ICT start-ups and the angel investments. How about general manufacturing? The general manufacturing industry in the province is looking for people. Aerospace and defence—what a great opportunity for us.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Community College

Mr. Fairgrieve: There has been extensive funding announced through the Education and New Economy Fund. I would like to ask the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour whether she will be using any of these announced funds to address the chronic deferred maintenance problems facing our community college network. The amount, according to her own department, exceeds \$200 million, and some of this deferred maintenance has resulted in cuts to programs like the welding program in Woodstock that was always full.



[Translation]

Hon. Mrs. Landry: As you know, education is one of our priorities. NBCC and CCNB are responsible for the day-to-day management of their colleges, anglophone or francophone. Through their own executive, they make the appropriate decisions regarding capital investments in infrastructure.

[Original]

Mr. Fairgrieve: The minister did not answer the question.

Dealing with the welding program at NBCC Woodstock, it was a program that was always full. The graduates who completed the program were employed right here in New Brunswick, a goal shared by all members of this Legislature. The program was cut in an area where metal fabrication is a dominant industry through my riding, through the riding of the member for Carleton-Victoria, and into Victoria-La-Vallée. I am asking the minister this: Will these seats be returned if the maintenance costs can be addressed?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have to get up on this one. First off, the deferred maintenance was deferred by the previous government.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Number two, I just cannot get over it. It has to be an April Fool's joke. That is what he is going to use as his third question.

(Interjections.)

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

Hon. Mr. Gallant: How can the opposition, day in and day out, criticize us for wanting to invest in infrastructure to stimulate the economy, to create jobs, and to ensure that we are prosperous in the long term and then have the member opposite get up and question us about investing in infrastructure? When I first heard the question, I could not get over it. I was completely surprised. Then, when the second question came in, I understood, because it is in his riding.

Those members are okay with infrastructure investment as long as it is in their ridings, while we are focused on infrastructure because it is going to help us develop a long-term economic plan, stimulate the economy in the short term, and ensure that we have the right social infrastructure for our province and the people in it.



Mr. Fairgrieve: Then, let's move on from my riding. There have been cuts to programs in Charlotte-Campobello. There have been cuts to programs at NBCC Miramichi. All the rural campuses of NBCC have experienced cuts due to maintenance deferrals. If the Premier wants to invest in infrastructure, why can we not invest here at home in our community college network?

The deferred maintenance at the Woodstock campus was deemed to be in the vicinity of \$450 000. This was without any consultation with the industry. The decision was made. Since that decision, the industry has gone forward and partnered with the community college. They estimate that the deferred maintenance is somewhere in the vicinity of \$150 000, or one third of what had been projected. Will these programs be reinstated if the maintenance deferrals can be addressed?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I thank the member opposite for trying to talk about infrastructure outside his riding, but then, he went right back to Woodstock. Clearly, the members opposite are okay with infrastructure investment if it helps their ridings. We are here to try to help the whole province. We are here to try to help the economy and to ensure that we have the infrastructure that we need for a strong social fabric.

I have to get up again, and I have to ask the opposition to clarify. We stood in this Legislature. I fielded questions. Our government fielded many questions from the member for Portland-Simonds, who criticized us because we were not at the table. We were not at the party regarding the Saint John port. He boasted about how close his friend Rodney Weston and Stephen Harper were.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Well, the truth has come out. The Harper government and Rodney Weston were never at the table. In fact, we are alone at the party right now. Will the member opposite get up and criticize Rodney Weston? Will he say that he is sorry for harassing us to get to the party when we are now the only ones who are there?

Economic Development

Mr. Coon: Yesterday, we debated a motion on establishing a plan for rural and northern economic development. As I said during that debate, such a plan should focus on community economic development for rural New Brunswick and should do so in a way that integrates goals for social development. The problem is that we do not have a department that is responsible for community development.



In its platform, the government promised to create locally led economic development agencies. Can the Premier tell this House when the locally led economic development agencies will be established?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: We are actively involved in rural New Brunswick, from the fisheries sector to the agriculture sector to the aquaculture sector. The industries are worth over \$3 billion. If you add the forestry sector on to that, a tremendous amount of economic activity is taking place.

I salute the member opposite for coming forward with some of his initiatives, including the work that he wants to do with some of the green jobs in the province and the things that we can do to uplift them. However, the member opposite comes in with a magic wand. He figures that we have an opportunity that we can just pour money into, but he does not like any type of incentives going out there.

I would like to talk about rural New Brunswick. A lot of activity is going on. Take the farming industry as an example. Of our footprint in the province, 5% is taken up by farmland. This represents about \$1.6 billion of our GDP.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Coon: One of the things that is necessary is to create the conditions for growth in rural New Brunswick. That is one of the things with which economic development agencies could potentially assist. That is why I asked when they would be established. However, I did not get an answer.

Therefore, let me ask this. The potential is tremendous in rural New Brunswick for establishing a bioeconomy in our province that would create a lot of jobs. We have woodlot owners, farmers, and fish processors who can provide a consistent supply of biomass to drive the development of a biochemical sector, a biopolymer sector, bioplastics, biogas, and biodiesel. These industries in our province would necessarily be located in rural New Brunswick in order to be close to those sources of raw materials. Can the Premier tell this House how the conditions for growth in these sectors can be created without an agency or department with that responsibility and without establishing local economic development agencies?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I have encouraged the member opposite to get involved with our departments at any time. I have extended the olive branch for him to come over and talk to our folks, to the economic development people at Opportunities New Brunswick. I have offered the olive branch for him to come in to speak to the people at the Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries.

A lot of activity is going on in bioscience, on the bioagriculture side and the biofishery side. There are so many byproducts that the fisheries group has been working with that it is absolutely tremendous. I know that the member has a busy schedule, but if he would take the



time and come to visit and see exactly what type of activity is taking place in those sectors... It is absolutely tremendous.

The potato industry is absolutely tremendous. Some new activity will be taking place very shortly with respect to beets. I really do encourage the member of the Green Party to take the opportunity to come in and talk to some of those people...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Coon: I did have an enjoyable conversation with Mr. Lund not that long ago. It was an interesting discussion that I would be happy to share with the minister at some time, if he is interested.

The closure of school buildings and courthouses in rural New Brunswick represents an abandonment of social and community infrastructure. It sends the message that the government continues to turn its back on rural New Brunswick. Now, it is time to establish the conditions for a rural renaissance. With the federal government's emphasis on building social and green infrastructure, the wise investment of these funds can help ignite that very renaissance here in New Brunswick. This requires, though, that the government establish some kind of department or some kind of agency to focus like a laser beam on rural development. This is not the mandate of Opportunities New Brunswick, which is a Crown corporation. We do not have a department or a minister of economic development anymore.

Is the Premier prepared to establish such a department or agency to create the conditions for a rural renaissance in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: As I mentioned just a few moments ago, I certainly open the door again. The member has not taken advantage of the opportunity to come to the department to talk about some of the green activities, which are exactly some of the activities that he is talking about. Rural, sustainable activities are going on in this province right now.

As a matter of fact, on Monday, the Department of Environment is hosting a green tech summit in Edmundston. If the member could spend some time in Edmundston to hear what the stakeholders have to say about green technology and what is taking place in the economy, I would certainly encourage him to do so and to take the time to visit these areas.

I think of some of the activity that takes place in rural New Brunswick. I have to focus some of the attention on the salmon industry. Global salmon production—and this is sustainable—is 14.8 billion meals served annually, with 121 000 jobs...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.



Tobacco

Mr. Northrup: I have some questions for the Minister of Public Safety about the tobacco enforcement squad. I am not sure that it has an official name or a nickname yet, but maybe we can call its members the Marlboro men. I would like to know this. Were all the positions open in an open competition? Was anyone hired in any other manner? I refer, of course, to the 2014 Liberal platform of broken promises, which says: "Ending the practice of non-competitive hiring to permanent positions in the public service." Was anyone hired for this squad in any other manner?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I am very honoured and proud to say that we have put our task force together. Its members are spread out across the province. We have also been in contact with the province of Quebec, which has done very well. If we could just tap into that illegal market, we would raise a significant amount of taxes for New Brunswick, which would help our economy.

We have hired people who already have a police background and who have retired. We have hired people from the Atlantic Police Academy who do not have a job in the policing field, as they proposed. I know that the members opposite continue to talk about job creation. Well, this is job creation. We want to continue to do that. We are seeing how it goes now. We have nine members at this time.

We will continue to work with stakeholders from Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec. We want to make sure that people are safe. When we talk about this task force, we want to be sure that, when people buy legal cigarettes, they know what they are getting. When they buy illegal cigarettes, they do not know what they are getting. I want to make sure that they are safe.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Northrup: This is typical of this Liberal Party. When you ask a question, you do not get an answer back.

Were these jobs posted? That is all I want to know. Were these jobs posted in the normal way, which the 2014 Liberal platform said the government would do? If the taxpayers are going to invest \$1 million in this squad, I am sure that the minister would agree that the good people of New Brunswick need to be entitled to know what the minister feels is prudent and proper to be made public. Can the Minister of Public Safety tell us whether the members of this tobacco squad are peace officers? Do they have the power to search, seize, detain, place people under arrest, and so forth?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I am learning as I go along. I know that the past government just continuously raised the tobacco tax, and, yes, we have too. However, we are also putting in enforcement to combat that. The people of this province want that to be out there. The people who have been hired are trained police officers. These people are retired. We have their expertise. We have also hired people who have been trained at the Atlantic Police Academy.



These people do not have jobs, so we want to provide these jobs. One of our priorities in this province is job creation. We will continue to do that.

We want to make sure that people are safe. Our number one priority in the Department of Public Safety is to make sure that people are safe. We want to make sure that these illegal tobaccos that people are buying are not coming through our province. We do not know what they are made of. We want to make sure that they are safe. Do I like smoking? We want to see it deterred, just as the Minister of Health will continue to say. It is for the betterment of our province, and we will continue to do that.

Mr. Northrup: For the third time, I will ask this again: Has this been done in an open and transparent process, as per the 2014 Liberal platform? It is a simple question—a very, very simple question. I just want an answer to it.

Can the minister share with us where the headquarters of this new million-dollar squad will be? I ask, of course, because there is always a chance that people will wonder whether there is rent to be paid or construction to be done. Which tenders, contracts, and so forth enter into this? We remember that this government is running a \$400-million deficit. It is not watching what it is doing with its money, so it is up to everyone else. Can the minister share with us the details of the headquarters? Are they going to be in the empty courthouses in St. Stephen and Sussex?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: Our priority was job creation, and we will continue to do this.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: Unlike the opposition, we will continue to do this with enforcement. It did not do anything with jobs and the enforcement of tobacco. It raised taxes just to raise taxes, and it did not combat it.

These offices are going to be throughout the province. We are not putting any more money into infrastructure. The infrastructure is already there, in Grand Falls, Fredericton, Campbellton, and throughout the province. These are the borders where we believe the illegal tobacco is coming from. We will continue to do that.

I want to make sure that the members of the opposition and the people of the province understand what we are trying to do. We are trying to combat illegal tobacco, and we will continue to do that. It is not helping the economy of this province. We have reached out to the First Nations communities to see whether somebody could work with us in the enforcement field as well. We will continue to make sure that the people of this province are safe and that they are healthier. Thank you.

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

