

April 8, 2016

[Original]

Legislation

Mr. Fitch: There is a report on social media from the Premier's Office that claims that the Premier made a slip of the tongue yesterday when he spoke about Bill 24 going to the law amendments committee. In the interest of clarity and for the people gathered here today and at home watching, I would like to give the Premier the opportunity to clarify this quote.

The quote is: "We have made it very clear that nothing is moving forward at this time. The bill is going to the law amendments committee." That is recorded in Hansard. It is recorded on tape. Was the Premier's Office accurate in correcting the Premier, claiming that he made a slip of the tongue, or is Bill 24 going to the law amendments committee?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I actually very much appreciate the opportunity to clarify this once again. Yesterday, the member opposite would have been told and would have gotten the information that this was something that was not the case. I apologize if we led anyone to confusion.

However, I would like to point out, as I pointed out several times yesterday, that the members opposite should stick to the same subject when they are asking questions. The member opposite from Quispamsis...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The member for Quispamsis started his questioning about the *Inquiries Act*, so when I mentioned "the bill", I was still talking about the *Inquiries Act*. I want to apologize if the opposition did not get that. I should have been clearer.

I would like to point out that the members opposite should stick to the same subject. I would also like to say that we clarified that right away yesterday. As well, I would like to thank the media for giving us the benefit of the doubt and checking with us to see exactly what we meant by the statement. Thank you.

Mr. Fitch: Again, we have talked about Bill 24 and the ramifications that it has right across the province. We have had a reasonable amount of labour peace, and we have had a number of contracts through both government and private enterprise that have been settled. There has been no labour unrest of note for many, many years. Obviously, some of the issues that the Premier is bringing forward in Bill 24 are causing a problem and concern with labour groups, both in government and outside.



I would like the Premier to reconsider what he is doing. We appreciate that he has clarified yesterday's situation, but the government members have obviously had time to think about it in the past little while. Will the Premier reconsider Bill 24, the omnibus bill, take the labour portion of it out, break it up, and either continue to sit in the House and have the questions and answers on it or send it to the law amendments committee and have a really good look at it?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I think that these are obviously some of the scenarios that we find ourselves in where there could be confusion when I say "bill" as to which bill we are talking about. The members opposite often have a tough time staying on one subject. I do not know which one the member opposite would rather I focus on.

First off, on contracts with workers, I am very pleased to say that, when the member opposite was a minister, he did basically nothing to move in such a way that we would have contracts with our workers. We, along with the Minister of Human Resources, have been able to sign 15 contracts. There are 3 others that are just waiting for ratification. That is out of 24, if I am not mistaken. This shows that we are working very closely with stakeholders. We are listening to the stakeholders. We are engaging with the stakeholders. We are ensuring that whichever contracts we sign are going to be in the best interests of all the people of New Brunswick. We appreciate the work and cooperation from all of those involved who have gotten us to the point that we are at when it comes to labour negotiations.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Mr. Fitch: That is the point. There is labour peace here in the province. The Premier has created problems. We knew that there would be problems. The Premier went with a small Cabinet. The ministers are not on top of their files. The Premier is not on top of the files because the ministers are not able to be briefed in all the aspects of them. Now, we have come forward with this omnibus bill. Whoever came up with it, I do not know. Maybe it was Dominic LeBlanc. Maybe it is something out of Ottawa that the government thought is a great idea.

Here is an opportunity for the Premier to take steps out of that deep, deep hole that he has dug himself into, in various aspects. Here is another area where the Premier could improve his credibility by stopping and taking the time to say: Okay, let's take Bill 24 and look at the labour portion specifically. Let's either split the bill up or send it to the law amendments committee. Will the Premier do that and retrieve some of his credibility today?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Again, to make sure that we are talking about the same things, I would like the member opposite to clarify something for me. We asked the members opposite yesterday if they had any other concerns other than the labour component—or the arbitration component, or whatever you want to call it, to make sure we are talking about the same terms... We asked if they had any other concerns with the omnibus bill, other than the labour component. They said nothing, so I would ask the member opposite why he thinks the omnibus bill has to go to the law amendments committee.



Most of what is in there, I would assume, they agree with because they have not asked any questions about it. Everything that is in there has been very publicly discussed. It has gone through a consultation process through the Strategic Program Review. We have been very transparent and very open for over a year about what this bill was going to contain, based on the budget that we presented a few weeks ago. I would ask the member opposite why he thinks we should send the whole bill to the law amendments committee when everyone knows what is in this bill.

Mr. Fitch: Fine, then the Premier can amend it and send just that portion. If we had been getting questions, as opposed to slips of the tongue, maybe we would be able to move on. I know that the privatization of the pension portion is a concern to many people as well and a number of pensioners who will be involved in that have not been duly consulted.

We see that job numbers continue to decline here in the province. The Premier is down by a net 600 jobs again this month. We thought that there would at least be some kind of uptick after the dismal effect of the last couple of months. However, now, the unemployment rate is 10.2%, and that is no slip of the tongue. That is based on the things that this government is doing.

I am appalled that the Premier will not take the opportunity and will not take the time to address the situation and take the portion of Bill 24 that is so offensive out of that bill. Will he split up Bill 24 at this point in time?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We certainly do not want to find ourselves in the same situation as yesterday. When the member said “that portion” and when he said “split it up and take out that part”, he did not clarify which part, so I just want to make sure. He is talking about the labour component, I am assuming.

I would suggest to the members opposite that they can moan if they like. Given yesterday and given that they opened their questioning on the fact that there was a little confusion as to which bill they were talking about, I think they can understand that it is important that we clarify.

When it comes to first responders, I want to make it very clear that we believe we have done some good things to help. We have been, obviously, in consultation with them with regard to the Strategic Program Review bill. On top of that, many of my colleagues who were in previous governments have done things like the presumptive cancer coverage and the elimination of the three-day waiting period. Of course, working with the opposition, we have recently presented the PTSD bill. Good things are happening, and we are going to continue on that path forward.

Tobacco

Mr. Fitch: I am going to move on to the Deputy Premier because I am not getting anywhere with the Premier.



I will ask the Deputy Premier, who has had an extensive career in law enforcement. I would like to ask him this: With his extensive experience, when someone keeps changing the story when being asked certain questions, would that spark suspicion in his mind? Also, I would ask the Deputy Premier: If you had a witness who kept changing the story, would that lead you to believe that the person was guilty, innocent, or hiding something?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I am always glad to stand up and talk about my policing career, and I am sure that the member for Carleton-York would like to do the same. Being a police officer or a first responder of any sort, such as a fireman, is an honourable job. Our job is to respond very proactively. We want to make sure that the people of this province are safe, be it from fire or from criminal activity.

The member opposite is talking about investigations. I have done many investigations, and, again, the member for Carleton-York can testify that he has done the same. Investigation, when dealing with people, is not always black and white. There are three sides of a story—I always hear the words of a judge in my mind—theirs, ours, and, somewhere in the middle, the truth. I am not sure if the member opposite is talking about specifics.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: Again, there are a lot of different stories, and it is not always as plain or as black and white as the member opposite states. As a former police officer, I can attest to that.

Mr. Fitch: Okay, now, we are getting somewhere. We have an acknowledgment that the truth is out there somewhere. Let's find the truth today.

Here is a direct question to the Deputy Premier. He has blamed his deputy minister for hiring a colleague whom he had worked with for many, many years for his new cigarette enforcement squad. That hiring was done without competition. I will ask the Deputy Premier today to find that middle ground and the real story and to tell us who in his department is responsible for hiring, without a competition, a long-term friend of the Deputy Premier. Was it the minister, or was it the deputy minister?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: Again, this is a show of disrespect from the members opposite. It is the Contraband Enforcement Unit. It is not a cigarette unit. It is not a million-dollar unit. That just shows disrespect for all first responders, for the opposition members not even to acknowledge the true name of this unit. These are people who will be protecting our province and our people.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.



Hon. Mr. Horsman: He should be speaking with the member for Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins. I hope I got that... As a former Minister of Public Safety, he knows what these people do. They are there to protect us every single day, and I have a couple of stories in ministers' statement to do the same.

As ministers, we do not get involved in hiring anybody. Again, it would be the staff. It might be the deputy minister. These people have gone through extensive interviews. They have been hired, and they are the best. It is a shame that the... They realize that only one has been hired from the Fredericton area.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Mr. Fitch: Oh, yes, thank you very much. We have some interesting information again. The Deputy Premier has admitted that there was a hiring from here in Fredericton, and he named names yesterday, after saying: I do not know exactly whom you are referring to.

There was a platform commitment that hiring into the civil service would not be done without competition. Here we have the Deputy Premier hiding behind the deputy minister. The question is clear. There is either a rogue minister or a rogue deputy minister out there because they have been hiding behind the fact that it was done by the deputy minister.

Again, for clarity today, will the Deputy Premier tell us this: Was it the Deputy Premier who gave the order to hire the people in that squad, or was it the deputy minister?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: Again, let's be very clear. As a minister, I do not get involved in hiring whatsoever, whether or not they are personal service contracts, which these people have. There have been only two full-time members who were already working for Public Safety. They just came over from another section. The other six, seven, or eight have been hired on personal service contracts. They are not full-time. If they were full-time, they would go through the process that the member opposite is stating, and he should know that. I would imagine that he has spoken with the MLA for Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins.

I am very proud of the hirings. Not only are we getting four top cadets, who are people here in our province, from the Atlantic Police Academy, but also we are getting three officers who bring 20-plus years of full experience. This is going to be a great unit. It is going to protect the people of the province. It is a public safety issue as well as a public health issue. I am sure that these people are going to do a fine job. They are going to start next week, and I look forward to great results. Thank you.

Government Funding

Mr. K. MacDonald: Respectfully, the Auditor General made some recommendations after her first Atcon report. The Premier said that he had a man in charge of implementing those recommendations. I guess he had another slip of the tongue on that commitment. These



recommendations have not been implemented. The man who is supposed to be handling the task may very well have an Atconian connection of his own in the Co-op Atlantic loan guarantee. I speak of Stephen Lund of Opportunities NB. Will the minister confirm for us that Stephen Lund was involved in the March 15 loan guarantee to Co-op Atlantic?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I cannot understand for the life of me why the opposition would want to be politicizing a company such as Co-op Atlantic. It has been around, serving New Brunswickers in Atlantic Canada, for many, many years. Approximately 400 people were employed with that company. The cooperative movement has been huge in Atlantic Canada. To talk this way about Co-op Atlantic and to keep on bringing up Co-op Atlantic in the House is shameful. Successive governments have been involved in investing in Co-op Atlantic. Even the previous government, back in 2005, was involved in successive investment with Co-op Atlantic.

From my perspective and our point of view, the work that has gone on with Co-op Atlantic in the agriculture sector...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. K. MacDonald: The people of New Brunswick raised a mighty cheer when the Auditor General told the Gallant government that she was going to get to the bottom of where the \$75 million of Atcon money went. She did not ask. There was no confusion. She did not have a slip of the tongue. She stated in no uncertain terms that she was going to search for the answers.

Now, it appears that she will have another, almost identical, situation to investigate. The Co-op Atlantic loan guarantee for \$7.5 million must be investigated to determine who made this decision three months—three months—before the company went bankrupt. The first question that needs to be answered is this: What was the involvement of Stephen Lund? Will the minister give us this answer?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: There is certainly no need to be screaming and yelling in the Legislature. We can hear the member opposite quite well over here.

I think that the minister has made it very clear that there are some proceedings that are ongoing. We cannot comment further.

I want to take a second to remind the member opposite that, when it comes to Co-op Atlantic, a \$15-million loan was given by his government. The \$15-million loan that he is talking about was given by—loan guarantee, I am sorry—the Conservative government. Therefore, for the member opposite to get up today and scream from the rooftops is a bit rich.

We are working with officials. People are looking into this matter to ensure that we protect the taxpayers of New Brunswick as much as possible and that we have a positive outcome as much



as possible. The member opposite should be reminded that it was actually his government that made the \$15-million loan guarantee.

Mr. K. MacDonald: I think that what we have just witnessed here is yet another slip of the tongue on behalf of this Premier. We got our loan guarantee back. It was on their watch that the members opposite extended a \$7.5-million loan guarantee to the National Bank as part of a \$10-million loan to Co-op Atlantic three months before it went bankrupt.

Hiding behind a bankruptcy hearing is convenient but unnecessary. My questions have no bearing on the outcome of the bankruptcy hearing as they pertain to the government loan guarantee that was, as I said, made three months before the company's bankruptcy filing. I am just asking a very simple, unrelated question. I will ask it one more time, in case the minister or the Premier has a change of heart or perhaps another slip of the tongue. Was Mr. Lund of Opportunities New Brunswick involved in the Co-op Atlantic loan guarantee?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Once again, I remind you that we have already answered the question. Obviously, when a matter is before the courts, we cannot comment further on it, and I would hope that the member is aware of this principle which has been followed for a very long time.

So, we cannot comment at this time, but we will certainly provide an update when we have the opportunity. What we can say right now is that talks are underway, and people are working on this file to make sure the outcome is as positive as it can be for New Brunswickers.

[Original]

Again, I do want to point out that Co-op Atlantic was given a loan guarantee by the previous government. I also want to point out that I do not understand this fixation on Stephen Lund. If the member opposite wants to come to question period and ask Stephen Lund questions, then he should give up his seat and maybe Stephen Lund could run there. I do not know. However, this is not the venue in which to be screaming and hollering to have Stephen Lund answer a question.

Justice System

Mr. Northrup: On September 25, 2010, nine bullets ripped through a home in West Saint John. It was not just any home. It was the home of a Saint John police force officer and his family. They were asleep, but, at 1:30 a.m., they were woken by gunshot noise. As a police officer, the individual who was targeted understood the danger that he and his family were in. A marked patrol car gave a high-speed chase to a suspected vehicle. That chase ended with the retrieval of a vehicle and a weapon that were alleged to have been involved in the shooting incident.



Evidence has been presented to the Crown, but four years later—four years later—charges have not been laid. Would the Minister of Justice explain how our Crown system can work when significant and heinous crimes such as an assault on a police officer and his family go unanswered?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I cannot and will not comment on this issue or this topic because the legal proceedings are still ongoing.

I will proudly stand in front of the House here today... I see that the audience in the gallery is full of first responders, be they firefighters or police first responders. I will proudly tell them that I am glad that I am in their corner. I believe in what they do every day to protect the people of our province. They continue to do that on a daily basis.

Again, I have two ministerial statements coming up that will show just two stories of what the first responders do for our province every day. For the members opposite to continue to call names of units, what have you, as in the past just shows disrespect, not just for the Contraband Enforcement Unit, but for all first responders, in my view. Again, I apologize...

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I cannot comment on this because of a legal review, but at least the member can call them by their real name. Thank you.

Mr. Northrup: That is the problem with this office. This matter has not been officially moved on. It has just been sitting on a desk, collecting dust. It is the responsibility of this minister to move to that next step.

Evidence of this incident has been with the Crown for years now. The police feel that they have tabled appropriate evidence to show the alleged involvement of the persons involved, with a recovered weapon and vehicle. Police officers put their lives on the line every day. If the charges are not going to be processed against an alleged offender, then I think the Crown owes people an explanation as to why charges are not being pursued. Will the government investigate the circumstances of this shooting and find out why charges have not been filed?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: Again, I will not comment on it. The legal procedure is still before the courts. The member opposite knows full well that I cannot do that, and I am sure that the person behind him, the former Minister of Justice, will concur with what I am trying to say.

Every chance I have to stand and thank the first responders for helping to serve the people of this province, I will do so—every chance I get. I do not think they get enough of that. I know that the people of this province are very fortunate to have such good, working brothers and sisters, whether it be firefighters, first responders, or police agencies that continue to protect and make this the best place in Canada to live, work, and raise a family.



Again, I have been very fortunate to have had a 25-year policing career here in Fredericton. I want people to know that I was seconded to the RCMP for three years through the Criminal Intelligence Service New Brunswick. I had a chance to visit all of the nine municipalities and work with the RCMP in our province. I am very proud of what they do every single day. Thank you.

Mr. Northrup: That is our point. We want the minister and his office to look into this to see what the holdup is. That is the whole point of these questions. It is for him to do his job and for his office to do its job to move this file along.

What kind of message are we sending to the criminal world if we will not pursue individuals who are alleged to have attacked police officers and attempted to cause serious harm, outrageous murder to police officers and their families while they sleep? Will the minister investigate the reasons for the delay in pressing charges on a shooting crime committed against a Saint John police officer and his family? Will the minister find out if charges will be brought forward in due time? Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I must admit that I find the questions from the member opposite very surprising. I think that he would do well to consult the former Attorney General of the province, who could explain to him certain basic democratic principles. One of them is that it is not up to a government or an MLA to give orders to the Public Prosecution Services Branch. As you know, according to legislation, and constitutionally, it is very clear: The Public Prosecution Services Branch is at arm's length from us, and even the Attorney General does not give it orders, or at least not directly.

[*Original*]

Gasoline Tax

Mr. Wetmore: With great fanfare, the Minister of Environment called the media in for a special early-morning scrum to announce a select panel on climate change. We saw this sort of big-deal announcement before with the Strategic Program Review. Now, we can look back and realize that the Strategic Program Review hoopla was all designed to raise the HST. I believe that this new select committee panel is designed purely to raise the gas tax and call it a response to climate change. Can the minister confirm whether raising the gas tax is part of the mandate of this new panel?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: Yes, this is a big deal. Climate change is here in New Brunswick, and it is here in Canada. This is a big deal. What we are doing is to have an open and transparent process to allow the members of this Legislature to get input from New Brunswickers and to take a look at their points of view. We have done this in the past, and we are doing this moving forward. I would think that the member opposite would commend me, our government, and the people



of New Brunswick for applauding this decision to have an open and transparent process in this committee.

I want to ask and to welcome the members of the opposition to work with us, as a government, to move these types of things forward and to get input from all New Brunswickers. Thank you.

Mr. Wetmore: The cliché tax-and-spend Liberals got to be a cliché for a very good reason. The Liberals love to tax, and they love to spend. This new select panel on climate change is just a lot of window dressing, as we have seen with the Strategic Program Review, designed to come back with a recommendation to raise the gas tax by 3¢ to 5¢ per litre and maybe even more. I have now put this suggestion into the record books. Would the Minister of Environment like to get up and tell me this: Am I wrong that a new gas tax, a new gas carbon tax, is not coming?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: What the member is saying today is that we do not want valuable input from New Brunswickers on this committee. What is he saying is that the people in the gallery do not have a voice here. What we are doing here is trying to get good information, as we have done in the past with all our consultation processes throughout the province.

It is kind of ironic, though, that the first thing that the former failed minister did was to raise the gas tax when he got into government.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will deal with this.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: What we want is to have an open and transparent process. I am very surprised by the honourable member opposite and his line of questioning today because he is actually in favour of what we are doing here. I had a chance to speak with him and some other members earlier.

I want to say that this is a great process. It will be open to the public to give good input to our province. I hope that, collectively, as a government and as an opposition, we will move this file forward to help New Brunswickers reduce climate change here. Thank you.

Mr. Wetmore: I will make it very simple for the minister. Could he please tell us whether members of the Department of Environment and Local Government are putting together a policy for a carbon tax? Yes or no?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I want to rise in the House because I cannot believe the questions I am hearing from the opposition members. Climate change is the greatest challenge facing the planet right now, and more must be done. Canada must do more, and so must New Brunswick, to meet this challenge for future generations. To this end, experts and stakeholders must be



consulted. We must listen to the ideas, suggestions, and concerns New Brunswickers put forward. We will do all that through a nonpartisan committee.

[*Original*]

What I do not understand are a few things. Why is the member opposite the one asking the questions and not the Environment Critic? Why would those members be telling us to send bills to committees and then, when we create a committee, criticize us? Why would they criticize us for not consulting enough and then criticize us when we want to consult through a nonpartisan committee?

Mr. Speaker: Final question.

Job Creation

Mr. Fitch: It is obvious that the Premier... We touched a nerve and pricked the thin skin. I am going to revert to an opportunity today just to mention to the Premier that he has failed miserably when it comes to jobs and the economy. There is a lot of noise and a lot of distraction going on, but the results from Statistics Canada today are that we are down another 600 jobs—a net 600 jobs. Again, when this government talks about jobs being a priority for it, it is obvious that some of the things that the government has done have failed miserably—increasing property tax, increasing personal income tax, and increasing wage payroll costs. It has also put a moratorium on shale gas, which has driven jobs and the economy out of the province.

Today, I would ask the Premier: When he said that he was going to create 5 000 new jobs and when he said that he was going to create 10 000 new jobs, was that the reality or was that a slip of the tongue?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I really appreciate the opportunity to talk a bit about the New Brunswick economy. The Canadian economy is not going in the right direction at this time. We are seeing lower growth rates than before. Obviously, this affects the economy here, in New Brunswick.

We are focusing our efforts on trying to create an environment that is conducive to investments and economic growth. In fact, that is why we are very happy that businesses recognize our efforts and want to invest in New Brunswick. There is IBM and the 250 jobs this company will create over the next few years. Family businesses in Sussex will create jobs. OrganiGram and WestJet will create more than 400 jobs here in New Brunswick.



[Original]

We are investing in things that will help us have the best climate for economic growth. However, it will take time. It will take time for the Education and New Economy Fund to make a difference. I can tell you that we are very proud that Fredericton, Moncton, and Saint John have all been ranked as some of the best places to do business in Canada.

