

May 17, 2016

[Original]

Legislation

Mr. Fitch: I want to welcome the Premier back to New Brunswick and back to the Legislature. Just to bring him up to speed on a few events that have happened in the past little bit, last Wednesday, while the government was being questioned on Bill 12, it quickly shut the proceedings down and exited the House.

Just to refresh the Premier's memory, Bill 12 is the bill that excludes NB Power from tendering large projects. People wanted to know why. A lot of suspicion was on the Mactaquac Dam and whether the current Liberal Premier would be able to create a rampant patronage project just like many years ago, as alluded to before. When we saw former Premier Shawn Graham at the dam and when we saw the former Liberal Energy Minister in the basement of the Legislature, the suspicion was raised even further as to exactly what was going on.

Could the Premier advise us today as to why the committee discussing Bill 12 was shut down so quickly last Wednesday?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: As the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, would know, the work of that committee is still not done. We adjourned for the day, for that piece of legislation. As the member would also know, I came onto the floor of the Legislature six times to try to explain.

I actually provided some essential information, I believe, to explain to the opposition and, certainly, to explain to New Brunswickers who are paying attention why this piece of legislation or the amendment to the legislation has been brought forward. At the end of the day, NB Power, if it ever gets to a decision where it has to make major, nonroutine investments, would have an option to share some of the risk with a joint venture, but it is not there yet. It is still working on due diligence, and this piece of legislation, to be amended, has not even been passed on the floor of the Legislature yet.

Mr. Fitch: In the case that was mentioned by the minister, many people were thinking it was the Mactaquac Dam that was in the sights of the Premier to create a Liberal patronage program. The fact of the matter is, as we started looking into it a bit further and reports came out that the Mactaquac Dam may be good for another significant number of years, our focus turned to other projects and to the Indian Island wind farm. If you go to the GNB Web site and type in the search box "Indian Island wind", a PDF file comes up, and the first line says:

Good Afternoon Commissioners!



My name is Bertin LeBlanc, and I am the spokesperson for the Indian Island First Nation.

I wonder whether the Premier could confirm to this House whether that is the same Bertin LeBlanc who was the Premier's campaign manager during the 2014 election campaign.

Hon. Mr. Melanson: The Leader of the Opposition knows full well, as I have explained it clearly on the floor of the Legislature to the committee, that it is the *Crown Construction Contracts Act* that would be amended. That law, that Act, only applies to Crown land projects or assets that are owned by government on Crown land. For any other projects that NB Power or any other department would be looking at doing, if it is not on Crown land, it would not be applicable under this piece of legislation.

I do not know where the member opposite is trying to go with these questions. I thought that we had explained the intent of this piece of legislation quite in depth and at length. If this amendment under Bill 12 is passed, it will allow NB Power to actually respect its private sector operating model—the mandate letter that it got when the members opposite were in office—that we support. This is what it is all about, sharing the risk.

Mr. Fitch: Obviously, the Premier is not briefed on this file. He does not want to take the questions. Again, it goes back to a very, very serious situation. We are talking about Crown land, joint projects, and the Premier's former campaign manager. I will let him spend a little time within the next 24 hours to get fully briefed on this file, and maybe he will answer some questions on it tomorrow.

Student Aid

Speaking of not being briefed, everyone has to watch the CBC interview that Harry Forestell conducted with the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour on Friday. It was released, and it was certainly a huge embarrassment to the government here in the province. The minister was claiming that the tuition bursary access program was better than the one that was released in Ontario. When Mr. Forestell asked the minister about a sliding scale rather than a hard cutoff, she said: I was not aware of that.

Mr. Premier, can you tell us this: Is the New Brunswick program better than the Ontario program?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: This is fantastic. This is absolutely fantastic. Under the previous government, we would have to sit in the Legislature and discuss why we were last when it came to job growth, why we were last when it came to GDP growth, why we were last on every essential indicator of the fundamentals of our economy here in the province. Now, the member opposite is asking us whether we are the best in the country or the second best in the country. Times have changed, and I will be glad to debate the merits of our project.



It is not a race with Ontario. I am very proud of what Ontario is doing for other Canadians across this country. We are also incredibly happy about what we are doing for New Brunswickers and about the fact that both provinces have had the political fortitude and the vision to make it so that those who need it most get the support they need to get a postsecondary education. That is something of which we should all be proud.

Mr. Fitch: When we compare the number of programs that are available across the 10 provinces, including New Brunswick, you will see where New Brunswick lies in that category as well. However, looking at the comparison between Ontario and New Brunswick, again, it appears that the minister was not briefed and did not understand the difference between New Brunswick and Ontario. The minister kept saying that the New Brunswick program was better, but, when asked about specifics, about the number of people who were being cut off and cut out of this program because of the decision that was made here by the Premier or the minister... Again, we have to ask the Premier some very, very tough questions.

The fact of the matter is that 42 000 students and graduates have been cut off from any student financial aid here in the province. When we look at the numbers, when we include all the programs that have been cut, it is \$50 million. The ones that have been put on the table are \$25 million. Will the Premier confirm that he has cut student aid in the province by half?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As we have already said, we should not consider the program on its own when we talk about it. With our first budget, we made sure that more people had access to postsecondary education, since we eliminated the parental contribution, introduced by the previous government, in which the current Leader of the Opposition was a minister.

This measure meant a lot of people could not get student loans. More importantly, since they could not get student loans, they could not get bursaries tied to this program or other programs that could have helped them.

[Original]

They could not even use the Timely Completion Benefit because, under the previous government, that had to involve the parental and spousal contribution.

We are very proud—incredibly proud—of the fact that we, here in the Legislature, are now debating whether New Brunswick is at the forefront or just behind Ontario in being visionary when it comes to postsecondary education.

Mr. Fitch: No, what we are debating here on the floor of the Legislature is that the Premier has left 42 000 students without any student aid here in the province. Because the government put this program together on the back of a napkin and the minister was not even properly briefed,



we saw her communications staff hurriedly rush her away from the interview because she was sinking deeper and deeper and deeper into an embarrassment for this government.

The fact of the matter is that the government did not look at sliding scales. It has a hard cutoff at \$60 000, and, when asked whether that was gross or net, again, the minister did not realize the difference between gross or net and how many people she was hurting because the government has put a family income of \$60 000—gross income—as the cutoff point. Again, the Premier has some trouble with gross and net income. We have seen that in the past. Can he explain to the people why the government chose gross income over net income and made our program less accessible to many people?

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Again, we have done much to try to help students and, very importantly, graduates. It is obvious that, when the members opposite, the Critic for Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour and the Leader of the Opposition get up and say that there are cuts to education, it is clear that they do not understand. They do not understand that a tax credit after you graduate is not a program to help students. They do not understand that. Thankfully, we do, and so does Ontario. That is why we are making sure that we have upfront grants going to those who need them most.

Now, do we want to do more for those who will not qualify for TAB, the Tuition Access Bursary? Absolutely. Will we try to do more? Absolutely. We said that the day we made the announcement. However, we have fiscal challenges that we have to overcome, and, as we see how that goes, we will see whether we have the fiscal capacity to invest more to do more for more people. We will be happy to do that when we have had the chance to get our fiscal house in order.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Mr. Fitch: Again, the numbers speak for themselves. The Premier cut \$50 000 from the student aid program in New Brunswick. The government has reinvested \$25 million into a program that has excluded a substantial number of students in the province. Now, the graduates have no reason to stay in New Brunswick. There is no incentive for them to stay here. The Premier says that he is going to add to this and that he is going to expand it.

Again, why does he not put a moratorium on this particular project for a year? Students have made decisions on where they are going to university or college this year, and the Premier has excluded private industry and private schools, such as Crandall University, Oulton College, and McKenzie College, that were creating opportunity for people to come out with an education that was going to lead to a job. If the Premier has a bigger package that he is going to give to us at some point, why does he not put a moratorium on this one, get the package right, and roll it out at the same time so that students can make a good decision on where they are going to get their education?



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As I have said several times in response to questions from the Leader of the Opposition a few weeks ago, we are introducing a new program in order to do two things.

First of all, we want to make sure postsecondary education is more accessible and affordable for those who need it the most.

As I said the day we announced our new program, we will try to do more for more people. That being said, for now, we are certainly going to target those who need help the most. We are talking here about approximately 7 000 students, maybe even more, depending on the number of people who will attend university or college thanks to our program.

Furthermore, we want to help our universities and colleges, which are facing very real enrollment challenges. We have an aging population, which means fewer and fewer people are studying in our postsecondary institutions. Our program will help us provide financial support in a creative way to the public postsecondary institutions we fund in the province.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: Again, the Premier has rushed this program. He has rushed the program, and he has it wrong. He has rushed it to the point that he is actually now excluding students who could have gone to university but will not. Because there is no needs analysis, people whose families are making \$60 001 gross income and perhaps have three or four children are excluded from this tuition bursary. Students or families that are making \$50 999 and have one child have a better ability or opportunity to go to university.

If there had been a sliding scale similar to the one in Ontario, there could have been more people able to celebrate this particular project, to realize that they again will have access to more education. However, because the Premier has taken a hard line and based it on gross income, he has cut 42 000 people from student aid here in New Brunswick. Premier, will you rethink this, put a moratorium on it, get the whole package, and include those people who really need the help?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have to invite the member opposite to stop saying that number.

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Many students will have access to loans and grants because we got rid of the parental and spousal contribution that the past government had. They will then, because they are borrowing money, have access to the Timely Completion Benefit. They did not, under the previous government, have access to that. We have helped those students as well.



Many of the people he is talking about are not students. They are people who have graduated. He talks about there being no incentive for them to stay in New Brunswick. All evidence—all evidence—points to the fact that, if you want to incent people to stay here in New Brunswick, it is through a job that we are going to accomplish it, not through a tax credit. I can understand why the member opposite thinks that there is no incentive for them to stay here. It is because, when he was in government, it was unable to create jobs.

We have GDP growth at record amounts, and we are going to continue on the track of focusing on the economy.

Mr. Fitch: Let's talk about job creation for a little while. Let's talk about job creation. The Premier has added a new special assistant in his office, a person named Katie Davey. She is listed on the LinkedIn profile as being the former UNB Student Union President and having worked for the New Brunswick Student Alliance. Now, we know that the Student Alliance was supporting and praising the TAB program initially. Actually, Ms. Davey appeared on the platform with the Premier and the minister when the announcement was made.

My question to the Premier is this. Now that the Student Alliance has a new executive director who has said that there are conditions on this that exclude people, I wonder whether the Premier can tell us: When it comes to job creation, was the offer of a job to Ms. Davey made before she pledged her support for the TAB program or after?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: This is certainly a new low. We have a young lady who is clearly impressive. The member opposite just cited two things that she has accomplished over the last few years, two things that I would argue are very impressive. Just because she is coming to work in the Premier's Office, the member opposite now thinks that she should be criticized by the opposition. To bring up a young lady like that, who is trying to make a difference in our province, who is working in the Premier's Office, trying to better her community and better the lives of the people of New Brunswick...

She started last week, and she just graduated from UNB. The member opposite thinks that it is appropriate to bring her up and try to drag her name in the mud. It is unfortunate, and it is unacceptable. I think that the member opposite should get up and apologize to Katie Davey for trying to have us have an HR debate on the floor of the Legislature about a young lady who is passionate about her province and passionate about education, who wants to make a difference, who is very keen to do so, and who started just one week ago. This is the thanks that she gets from the member opposite.

Mr. Fitch: I should not have to remind the Premier about the number of HR debates that he had here in the Legislature when he was in the opposition.

(Interjection.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.



Mr. Fitch: It is very, very clear how he treated people who were trying to move the province forward. He fired people at the assistant deputy minister level, the deputy minister level, and the director level and went right down through the managers because they had an association with the PC Party. The Premier should take caution in what he says because he actually went so far as to renege on the severance benefits that some of those people were entitled to when he fired them from the positions that they had earned through the experience that they had in the province of New Brunswick.

Once again, I wonder whether the Premier could tell us this: Is he going to put a moratorium on this project until he expands it to get it right so that more people can benefit into the future in getting an education?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I will take the bait. If he wants to use 45 seconds of his question with that preamble, I will take the bait. I ask the member opposite to tell us whom he is talking about. Go ahead. If he wants to talk about HR issues, he can make the very inappropriate gesture of talking about them on the floor of the Legislature, as he is trying to do by couching his comments.

I would invite him to mention exactly whom he means. I would like him to mention who they are and how they got the jobs. I would be very curious to know when they got the jobs and how they went through the process of getting the jobs. I would then like for him to confirm this on the floor of the Legislature.

If he wants to couch his comments while talking about HR matters, then tell the people of New Brunswick which one of these people he thinks should get severance. That is money from the people of New Brunswick that he thinks that we should pay to these people. He wants to talk about it. I invite him to elaborate.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr. Fitch: The Premier is very defensive on that topic. I invite him to go to Hansard if he wants to look at the whole debate. We have limited time here. Again, it is on tape. It is written down. He cannot deny that he brought it up here on the floor of the Legislature.

In the time that we have left, we will talk about jobs here and the economy. Particularly, there are some of the issues that the Premier has brought forward that have stifled jobs and investment here in the province. We know that a number of reports have been given to the Premier. They sit on his desk, they sit under his desk, or maybe they sit in the garbage.

I wonder whether the Premier could tell us this. He has had the report from the panel on hydrofracking here in the province for a period now. Certainly, it has been a period that would have enabled him to review it, look at it, and read it. It would have enabled him to share it with his Cabinet colleagues, to share it with his caucus, and, basically, to make a decision. Can the



Premier tell us here today whether or not he intends to make a decision on the report that was tabled by the panel on hydrofracking?

Mr. Speaker: Time.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We did get this report, and, as we have said to New Brunswickers, we are reviewing it. We will follow up on this subject very shortly.

[*Original*]

I cannot help but notice that we talk about the economy, the member opposite talks about the economy, and then he goes to hydraulic fracturing. I get it. He cannot understand how we increased the GDP in 2015 by 1.9% without fracking. He is just flabbergasted that the people of New Brunswick, when we enabled them to do what they do best—to use their entrepreneurial spirit to compete and to be innovative—were able to grow the New Brunswick economy in 2015 at the fourth-fastest pace in the country. The people of New Brunswick, going against the trend that we have seen nationally with the struggling economy, were able to have the largest GDP growth that we have seen in New Brunswick since 2010, and that was without fracking.

Job Creation

Mr. Fitch: Again, I would like the Premier to look at the sectors in which there has been substantial growth here in the last bit. The forestry area—whose plan was that? We were the ones who put the forestry plan on the floor of this Legislature. We have seen mill expansions. Why? It is because the mills have access to a reasonably priced product with security of supply. You look at the refinery turnaround. You look at the blueberry industry. Again, the blueberry plan was put on the floor of this Legislature by our government. It is no wonder that there has been GDP growth. It is because the members opposite continue to follow through on the plans that we put here on the floor of the Legislature.

Here is one that the Premier needs to address. Since he took office, 2 700 jobs have been lost in the province. Since he took office, there are 3 900 fewer workers here in the province. Does the Premier intend to give us a plan?

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: This is excellent. It is actually impressive. When the member opposite was in the government as the Minister of Economic Development and they were shedding jobs, it was not their fault. When the GDP increased in 2015, it was all because of the good stuff of the members opposite. However, then, if there were job losses during the same time period, that was because of us. The universe in which the Leader of the Opposition lives is actually quite impressive.



In fact, we know that all the good indicators are because of the people of New Brunswick—their innovative spirit, their entrepreneurial know-how, and the fact that they work hard. The 1.9% GDP growth is because of New Brunswick businesses working hard. From November 2014 to November 2015, New Brunswick had the second-best wage growth in Canada. Again, it was because of the hard work of New Brunswickers. KPMG ranked Moncton, Saint John, and Fredericton as three of the four best cities in which to do business in the country. Again, it is because of New Brunswickers.

[*Translation*]

Extra-Mural Program

Ms. Dubé: When he tabled his budget, to everyone's great surprise, the Minister of Health informed the House and the people of New Brunswick that he had begun negotiations to privatize a service that we all know and cherish, the Extra-Mural Program.

The minister said at the time that it would take about three months of negotiations before this service could be privatized. He was considering Medavie EMS because the company had a better computer system.

So, since the three months have now passed, I would like the minister to update me: Will he privatize the Extra-Mural Program with Medavie EMS, yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I thank the opposition for the question. However, I invite the member to read the Hansard because, if I am not mistaken, we had talked about a period of four to six months, not three months. This has always been very clear: I have always talked about a period of four to six months, and I can confirm today that discussions are still ongoing and no formal decision has been made. We are looking to see if we can combine three programs that have all been successful. The New Brunswick Extra-Mural Program is very well known and greatly appreciated, and the same goes for Ambulance New Brunswick and Tele-Care 811.

What we want to do here is to combine the three programs under a public corporation that would be managed by Medavie EMS, but all this is still in the discussion phase, and no contract has yet been signed. When we are able to make a decision, I will certainly communicate it to the opposition and the public.

Ms. Dubé: What the minister is telling us is that he will discuss all of this behind closed doors and, of course, inform us of the results after he has signed the document. Now, I am asking him to be transparent and share the content of these discussions with us. I can tell you that the general population is very concerned about the privatization of the Extra-Mural Program and that nurses and other health professionals are too.

The public must be reminded that Medavie EMS is first and foremost an insurance company, and that, as a result of the agreement, it would have access to medical records through services



provided by the Extra-Mural Program, Ambulance New Brunswick, and Tele-Care. So, we are all very concerned, and I am asking the minister if he is too. Why is he not being transparent with people about these discussions? What discussions are going on behind closed doors?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Once again, the opposition must bear in mind that we are not talking about privatizing the Extra-Mural Program; that is not the case at all. What we are considering is the possibility of combining three existing programs into one under the same management.

I would also add an important point: We are consulting all health professionals. We have had several meetings with both health networks, the New Brunswick Medical Society, the three unions involved, and the professional associations. So meetings are ongoing. In some cases, there have been multiple meetings with stakeholders, because we want to make sure that everybody is part of this project and that we are all moving forward together, if that decision is ultimately made.

Ms. Dubé: As it happens, not everybody is invited, and even the parties having discussions at the table with the minister are saying that they are concerned. The people we are meeting all over the province are very concerned because this is about their medical records. They realize that their medical records will now be in the hands of an insurance company.

So the general public believes the Extra-Mural Program should remain very close to the Vitalité and Horizon health networks. If the minister wants these programs to be under one corporation, I want to remind him that both health networks are Crown corporations that deliver health care. They are experts in health care delivery and the security of sensitive records such as medical records. So I am asking the minister to end the discussions he is having behind closed doors, because people are worried. Is the minister prepared to end the discussions?

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Again, the opposition members are fearmongering. It is what they do best. They are saying that we are privatizing the Extra-Mural Hospital. We are not privatizing the Extra-Mural Hospital. They act as if decisions have been made. No decisions have been made, and no contracts have been signed. They talk about negotiations happening behind closed doors. We have had a very open and transparent process. We sat down with the two RHAs. We sat down with the Medical Society, the Nurses' Union, CUPE, the New Brunswick Union, and all the professional health care bodies. We are continuing to discuss this with each and every one of them. We want this to be a collaborative effort moving forward.

Yes, there are issues as we have discussions, and we are addressing those issues. It is important that the various health care professionals raise the concerns they have so that they can be addressed. If, at the end of the day, it all makes sense, we will sign the deal. If it does not, we will not.



Lyme Disease

Mr. Steeves: The last time we were in session, the opposition introduced a motion calling on the Gallant government to

protect health professionals who choose to treat Lyme Disease beyond thirty days from suspension by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, recruit health professionals who specialize in the detection and treatment of Lyme Disease, and implement improved professional development for health professionals in the awareness, prevention, treatment and diagnosis of Lyme Disease.

Of course, the government amended our motion. However, I would like to ask the Minister of Health to confirm whether he has any intention of recruiting health professionals with expertise in the detection and treatment of Lyme disease and chronic Lyme disease.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: What I can confirm today is that New Brunswick follows the same guidelines as every other province in the country and the federal government as well with regard to Lyme disease. It is a serious situation, and it is one that we take seriously.

I met with the advocacy group last week, and I committed to meeting with it again in the future. As we speak, our Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health is in Ottawa at a three-day conference on Lyme disease that was called by the federal government for all provinces and all health professionals. I am sure that she and her staff will be coming back with some information that we, as a province, will then be able to digest.

I assure the public that we do take this disease very seriously. However, we are also following what every other province in the country is doing and what Health Canada recommends that we do. If changes come from this national conference, we will gladly look at them here in New Brunswick.

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

