

July 7, 2016

[Original]

Opportunities New Brunswick

Mr. Fitch: Maybe the third time is the charm. I would like to rise in the House today and ask the Minister responsible for Opportunities NB to rise and tell us why ONB has not released its annual report thus far.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As we have already said yesterday, and—I think—the day before yesterday, Crown corporations will certainly release their annual reports within the established timelines.

Since we have already answered this question, I, too, have a question for the opposition. In my opinion, it is a very important question for the future of New Brunswick.

[Original]

Michelle Rempel, the federal Conservative critic for immigration, has spoken ill of the program in which we will see the ability for Atlantic Canada to increase the number of new Canadians coming to our region. I think that is very unfortunate. The government certainly believes that we need to grow our population, which includes keeping New Brunswickers here and bringing them back here, but also welcoming new Canadians. I would like to know from the opposition members where they stand, whether they agree with the Conservative critic or whether they agree with our government.

Tobacco

Mr. Fitch: If the minister for ONB does not want to answer questions, maybe I will go on to the Deputy Premier. On February 11, the Deputy Premier rose in the House to announce the formation of the cigarette squad. I know that he does not like that. I know that he wants to call it the Contraband Enforcement Unit. However, later, when the unit was announced, a former colleague and friend of the Deputy Premier was named as head of the unit. Later again, we learned that the brother-in-law of the Treasury Board head is also employed with this unit. Would the Deputy Premier tell the House when these two individuals were hired?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: It is awfully great to rise in the House and answer questions. As I stated before, when I was the Minister of Public Safety and of Justice, I had no part in the hiring. The contraband unit has done very, very well. It has hired people throughout the whole province. They are not full-time employees. There were two that actually were full-time employees in another department within Public Safety. They are the only two who were hired full-time. If or



when these people are hired full-time, they will certainly go through a process like everybody else.

The member opposite knows very well that I had no part in the hiring of anybody. The department looks after all that information. They all went through a rigorous process, so to speak. They are very qualified. Shortly thereafter, they had a big bust, as you would say. They are helping the people of this province to stay healthy and making this the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

Mr. Fitch: The Deputy Premier did not tell us when these people were hired, but I have an email exchange between HR and Public Safety staff. Let me just read a bit of it: I forget the name of the individual who was at the meeting with us in February. (I know Mike was there, but the other individual.)

Here is the reply: Jacques Babin along with Gary Forward, as the team lead, as well.

Could the Deputy Premier confirm that when he stood in the House to announce this unit—our first knowledge of it, by the way—those two had already been hired or promised employment?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Landry: I think my colleague clearly explained the hiring process in this unit, which is responsible for combatting contraband cigarettes, and there is not much more to add in this regard. The process was very well designed; I think the selection panel that chose these people is familiar with the file.

When this unit was established, the goal was precisely to stop contraband in New Brunswick and prevent people from selling these untaxed cigarettes as they pleased and to whomever they pleased.

That being said, I think the Leader of the Opposition wants to play petty politics with this file. On the government side, we have tried to establish a system, and it is highly thought of so far. The unit is doing its job, and we have seen the evidence over the last few weeks; we have seen the number of arrests and seizures. I would say this is the right thing to do and it is what we will continue to do.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: It appears that the fix was in, as they say, for the friend of the Deputy Premier and the brother-in-law of the President of the Treasury Board to get these nice jobs with the Gallant government. These jobs, I might add, were not awarded as a result of competitions but in the old-fashioned Liberal way of patronage and nepotism.



My question for the Deputy Premier is a straightforward one. Given this knowledge that we have revealed today, does the Deputy Premier truly believe that the people of New Brunswick can trust the Gallant government to do right by them when it comes to electoral reform?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I think it is very unfortunate that we find ourselves here today with a Leader of the Opposition who is trying to play petty politics. I think we asked some very relevant questions.

[*Original*]

We have asked whether the opposition members support the enhancements to the CPP. They criticized it. This is an important issue for Canadians and New Brunswickers, and there has been radio silence when they have been asked what their position is. The Conservative federal critic of immigration said it was a bad thing that we have the immigration pilot program for Atlantic Canada. We believe that the aging population that Atlantic Canada faces is the largest challenge facing our region and we need to grow our population, not only by keeping Atlantic Canadians here and bringing them back, but also by welcoming new Canadians to Atlantic Canada.

I would like the Leader of the Opposition to show some leadership and tell us where the Conservatives in New Brunswick stand on those two important issues.

First Nations

Mr. Higgs: I would like to ask the Minister of Finance some questions about First Nations revenue-sharing agreements. The minister will know that the agreements expired on May 1 and that this was after extensions had happened from November 2014 to the spring of 2015 to May 1. Now, we are past May 1, 2016, so the agreements have been extended a couple of times. Is it the intention of the government to renew these agreements, and, if so, when does the Finance Minister expect the agreements to be reached?

Hon. Ms. Rogers: As a new Minister of Finance, I would like to say that I have not had the opportunity to meet yet over these issues, but we have discussed this briefly. I am happy to speak with the member opposite privately at any time, but I will be informing myself on this file shortly.

Mr. Higgs: I can appreciate that the new minister is getting up to speed on this, but it is a file that is dragging on. Certainly, fair taxation is a big part of this situation—and how to get back to fair taxation. I know that, just yesterday, it was referenced that the Conference Board of Canada had previously assessed... Yesterday, 1.6% growth for 2016 was talked about. Well, there is a news flash. It is now assessing a 0.4% shrinkage. Fair taxation—or unfair taxation—is often implicated as a major factor in economic decline, and, certainly, the HST increase is not going to promote economic development in our province.



Since the tax revenue funded for First Nations bands will reach almost \$50 million this year and it is growing at a rate faster than all other government spending—surprise—will the minister ensure that the New Brunswick taxpayers are being protected in this negotiation?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: For the past few months, we have been in discussions with First Nations, with whom we are discussing several issues. We make sure that, as much as possible, we are available at any time to meet with First Nations representatives. I can tell you that the dialogue is going quite well.

I think it is no secret to anyone that relations between the previous Conservative government and First Nations did not really move forward much. The same is true for files. We are doing the best we can; when there are any new developments, we will make sure they are public so that opposition members and New Brunswickers know what is going on.

[*Original*]

I would ask the member opposite, who is the critic for Finance, if he would maybe clarify for the people of New Brunswick where the Conservative Party sits when it comes to the enhancement of the CPP. Do the Conservatives support it or not?

Also, as the member opposite would know, we need to grow our population. Does he support the immigration program that we have gotten from the feds for Atlantic Canada?

Mr. Higgs: There is certainly a new twist now in question period. Not only do we have questions that are not answered, but we now have questions that are being answered with questions. We are really recycling New Brunswick now at a rapid pace.

The minister or the Premier will know that other retailers near First Nations communities are being hit really hard by unfair, unequal, and imbalanced competition from reserve retailers. One group, the independent gasoline retailers of New Brunswick, has repeatedly asked to be consulted during these negotiations. The requests would appear to have fallen on deaf ears. Will the Finance Minister commit to meeting with the independent gas retailers to ensure that their valid concerns about the revenue-sharing agreements distorting the marketplace are heard?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The Minister of Finance and our government are always open to meeting with the various stakeholders. I can tell you, though, that we did receive a great deal of correspondence from people who have an interest in this file and that we are reading it. We are ready to listen to people's ideas.



[Original]

Again, especially coming from the member opposite, I am surprised to hear what I am hearing this morning. It is one thing for the Leader of the Opposition, who believes his only role is to come in here and criticize everything that moves...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: You would think that the member for Quispamsis, who is aspiring to be the leader of the Conservative Party of New Brunswick, would be able to take some positions. You would think that he would not be insulted if we asked him where he stands on the CPP enhancement. You would not think that he would think that it was an affront to democracy if we asked him whether he is for or against the immigration pilot project for Atlantic Canada that we got from the federal government. I ask that at least the member for Quispamsis show some leadership today because his leader is not doing it.

Electoral Reform

Mr. Fairgrieve: Apparently, the electoral reform document has been in the works for several months. It is over 45 pages, and it was written, translated, printed, bound, and distributed to the media before it got to the opposition benches. I would like to ask the House Leader opposite to please help the opposition and the people of New Brunswick understand. If the government is truly sincere about wanting cooperation and input, why did it wait until the last week of the legislative sitting, after invoking closure, to introduce this issue?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I will gladly answer that question. The setting up of a select committee on electoral reform and the release of a discussion paper have absolutely nothing to do with the sitting schedule of the Legislature. It is an exercise that goes beyond the four walls of this building.

This is something that we committed to as a party and as a government—to review electoral reform. It was talked about during the campaign. It was in our platform. It is something that we want to do, and we would love for the opposition to be a part of it. For the opposition to come out against the discussion paper before even seeing it, to be against naming members to the committee before even knowing what the composition of the committee is...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Order.



Hon. Mr. Boudreau: We are prepared to give the opposition a working majority on this committee. Still, the members opposite are not satisfied, and they do not even want to participate in a process that could possibly bring electoral reform to New Brunswick.

Mr. Fairgrieve: The Chief Electoral Officer, the man in charge of elections in New Brunswick, will complete his 10-year term during this mandate. Can the minister opposite detail for us what role the Chief Electoral Officer played in the crafting of this document? Further, Elections New Brunswick maintains two standing committees, one on election procedures as well as one on electoral finance. Were either of these committees, which represent all registered parties in New Brunswick, consulted during the process of developing this document?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: It is a discussion paper. It does not provide any direction, recommendations, or decisions—it is a discussion paper to stir up public interest. What we want to do now is create a committee with four government members and four opposition members, so the same number from each side.

If the committee chose a Liberal member to chair the committee, this would give the opposition a clear majority at the table to have discussions with New Brunswickers about the kind of reform that should be carried out in the province.

Do we want to lower the minimum voting age? Do we want to be able to vote online? Do we want proportional representation? These are all issues we could study. Recommendations would be made by the committee and submitted to the government for a final decision.

[Original]

Mr. Fairgrieve: In New Brunswick, we have a Premier who took responsibility for job creation even though he had never created a job or met a payroll in his life. He passed that responsibility off to another minister when it was not going so well. Now, he is a self-proclaimed expert on electoral reform.

The electoral system that we have in New Brunswick has served the people of this province well for over two centuries. Will the Premier or his designated minister commit to going to the people of New Brunswick in a referendum before he imposes any changes on our democracy system?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: There were a couple of statements that were made there. First of all, on this side of the House, we can multitask. Maybe the other side of the House cannot do that, but we, as a government, can focus on job creation and economic development and still do other things. We are able to do that.



Second, the opposition is asking for referendums on issues for which we do not even know what the recommendations of the committee would be. What happens if, at the end of the day, the committee recommends the status quo? Are we going to have a referendum on whether or not we should keep the status quo?

We need to allow the committee to do its work, to go out and hear what New Brunswickers have to say, to come up with recommendations, and to file a report. Then the government will decide, and we will act on those recommendations.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: We will respond to those recommendations. However, we have to stop trying to prejudge the work of this committee. Appoint your members, and let the committee do its work.

[*Translation*]

Air Quality

Mr. Savoie: This morning, I have questions for the Minister of Environment and Local Government about the Energy East Pipeline project.

[*Original*]

I have constituents in my riding, the Saint John Citizens' Coalition for Clean Air, who are looking for information concerning the air quality measurement reports. According to the *Clean Air Act*, these reports are supposed to be released yearly, but they have not been released for the years 2014 and 2015. I am wondering whether the minister could please let the House know when the reports will be released and on which date they can be released.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I thank the member for his very important question. We indeed have an obligation under the *Clean Air Act* to release a report on air quality each year. This report includes information on VOC samples.

[*Original*]

In English, that is "volatile organic compounds".



[Translation]

It is our department that collects and interprets the data, but it is analyzed in Ottawa under an agreement with Environment and Climate Change Canada.

What is happening this year is that the federal government has fallen a bit behind. Since this data is very important, we have a policy to publish it in our annual report. We will only be receiving the data next month, according to the information we have from Ottawa, and it will only be then that we will be able to complete the report. Obviously, we would be pleased to release this data as soon as possible. In fact, as soon as the federal government releases it, it will be available...

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Savoie: I understand that the federal government had a retirement at Environment Canada and that is part of the reason for the delay. However, the issue for the citizens in my riding is that the regulatory review for the Energy East Pipeline project is going to be taking place. Unfortunately, because of the timing of all of this, the issue is that the information for the air quality measurement reports is not going to be available on the volatile organic compounds (VOCs), the benzene, until after this process has taken place. What that is going to do is to handcuff them and to make them unable to understand what the levels are currently and to talk intelligently during this review process, to make sure that the companies are going to be responsible for those compounds during the project.

Can the minister please give us any sort of indication? Can he move the federal government to speed up its process so that we can get this done for the process?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I thank the member for his question, since I understand his very legitimate concerns. I must admit that I greatly appreciate the class with which the question is asked, because the concerns are real. Fortunately, we sometimes get very interesting questions from the opposition, but this is not always the case.

So, I clearly understand the member's concerns, and, with that in mind, I will be pleased to check and see if there is some way to speed up the process. However, based on the information I have here, since many specific studies were conducted by the federal government, there has been a little delay, and I am told that we will only be receiving the data next month.

I can assure the member that I am prepared to see if there is a possibility of receiving the data as soon as possible, since I clearly understand the concerns of people affected by this issue, given the upcoming consultations with Energy East. Thank you.



[Original]

Mr. Savoie: I appreciate that the minister is going to do the best that he can. This is a very large issue for people in my riding. The Champlain Heights area has an air quality monitoring station nearby. The tank farm is going to have something in the realm of 13 million barrels of crude oil lying inside those tanks in the tank farm. This is something that is very important. The refinery is right there. It is very much on top of this, so I can appreciate that the minister is saying that he is going to do the best that he can.

What I am really hoping is that the minister can intervene with his federal counterparts in Environment Canada and get this information to us as soon as possible, if not immediately. I know that it is under some delays. However, ultimately, we have the responsibility. I think that the minister recognizes that. We really would like to see this information by the end of this month, if possible. Can the minister please commit to trying to get the information by the end of this month?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: As I said earlier, I fully understand the concerns of opposition members. I can commit to checking again on what is going on, to get the data as quickly as possible, but I am told that it will be within the next month. That being said, I understand the concerns, and I will repeat this once again: I am prepared to see what can be done, but I would still like to say that my department does not intend to release a report without data that is this important.

I can say that, as soon as we receive the data, we will release our important report on air quality, given the concerns expressed by many people in the province. There are certainly a lot of people who care about the environment. This is why we must all work together. In fact, as you know, we currently have a group of members who will be working on the climate change issue. This demonstrates that our government is prepared to listen to what people in this province have to say. It is by working together that we will protect the environment.

Extra-Mural Program

Ms. Dubé: New Brunswickers are still worried about the discussions behind closed doors on privatizing the Extra-Mural Program. Once again, I will try to get an answer, because it is becoming increasingly clear that people do not necessarily want Extra-Mural Program services to be privatized. They actually want the program to remain under the two health networks.

I am asking the minister once again: Since the message is quite clear, will he end the discussions on privatizing the Extra-Mural Program?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: It seems that we have struck a nerve with the member for Edmundston-Madawaska Centre by pointing out that, on six of seven consecutive sitting days, she rose and asked 18 questions about the Medavie EMS file, but she has not asked a single one since



Bernard Lord was appointed CEO of this company. She found the topic very interesting, but now the member has no other choice but to rise and ask a question.

The answer to the member's question is the same: We continue to work with Medavie EMS, because we believe in this project. We continue to negotiate with the company, and we continue to involve all health sector stakeholders in order to get their input and reach an agreement that makes sense. If we get there at some point, I would be happy to share the information with the member opposite and everyone else.

Ms. Dubé: It is unfortunate to see the Minister of Health playing petty politics. Everybody in the province knows that Bernard Lord has been on the Board of Directors of Medavie EMS for a very long time. This will absolutely not stop me from asking questions. However, we are not getting answers; I have not yet received an answer.

Everywhere we go, as MLAs, we hear more and more people tell us they are worried; they do not want the Extra-Mural Program privatized. You told the House yourself that the health networks were in favour of the proposed change. Can the Minister of Health rise and say that he did not necessarily provide the House with all the actual facts? Vitalité Health Network has said very clearly and publicly: No, we do not agree with privatizing the Extra-Mural Program, and we want to keep it under our governance.

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: It is funny to see the member opposite accuse somebody else of being political. It is worth repeating. For six out of seven days, consecutively, there were 18 consecutive questions about the project that we were discussing with Medavie.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: All of a sudden, Bernard Lord, her former Premier, the former PC Premier, gets appointed as CEO of Medavie. All of a sudden, the questions stopped until we pointed it out yesterday, and, now, all of a sudden, there are questions again. I think that if people are playing politics on this file, it is the members across the way.

We are in negotiations, we are in discussions, we are involving all the health care professionals, and we are involving the two RHAs. No decision is final. We want to see if we can make this work. I have said many times that we are not privatizing the Extra-Mural Program. That is not correct information, and I would hope that the member would stop using...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.



[Translation]

Ms. Dubé: Many times, here on the floor of the House, I have asked the minister to say who supported him. During his budget speech, he announced with great fanfare that he was in negotiations with Medavie EMS and that a draft agreement had already been signed. Nobody in New Brunswick knew about it, except for the minister, the government, and Medavie EMS. Since then, we have heard more and more people grumbling; they do not agree with this approach.

The minister also said that it would take three to five months to reach an agreement. We are there already; the session ends tomorrow. I would like to get an official answer from the minister: Did you end the discussions? New Brunswickers absolutely do not want Extra-Mural Program services privatized.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Time.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The Minister of Health has provided very good answers to the question many times.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have to tell you that, not too long ago, I was in Edmundston. It was amazing and even inspiring to see how people in the community rallied to help Syrian refugees.

[Original]

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

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am asking the member opposite if she could tell us whether the New Brunswick Conservatives, her team, condemn the comments made by Michelle Rempel, Member of Parliament and Conservative federal Critic for Immigration. She criticizes the pilot project that will enable us to bring newcomers here to New Brunswick and to the Atlantic provinces. So I am asking opposition members whether or not they agree with the pilot project.



The member opposite is from a riding that did a very good job when it came time to help Syrian refugees. We can do more here in New Brunswick, because we are open to the world.

[Original]

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr. Northrup: Last month, a bunch of business leaders came together in the Sussex area to try to get the moratorium in the province lifted. It was not a political event, and it was not industry-led. They were businesspeople from the area who employ hundreds of people in that area. Their main message was: We want to speak to the Minister of Energy, and we want to speak to the Premier of the day. In their minds, all five criteria have been met. If the five criteria have been met, lift the moratorium. Let's produce jobs in New Brunswick and get this thing on the go.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As you know, we placed a moratorium on hydraulic fracking because New Brunswickers have questions and concerns. We set out some very clear conditions. We asked an independent commission to study the hydraulic fracturing file; we received the report and made a decision.

With regard to stakeholders, the Minister of Energy and Mines, other ministers, the Office of the Premier, and I met with several of them. If they ever wanted more meetings, we would be very open to meeting with them.

[Original]

However, I would take this opportunity... Maybe the members opposite, maybe the member for Portland-Simonds or the member for Saint John East—he did a great job during question period today—would get up and finally denounce the fact that Rodney Weston told everybody that the port of Saint John was going to receive an investment from the feds when it just was not true. I am still waiting, and it is unfortunate.

We see this with the Medavie project. We saw it with the port. The members opposite always allow politics to get in the way of what is right for the people of New Brunswick and what is going to help grow our economy. This side of the House will not let that happen.

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

