

March 15, 2017

[Original]

Property Tax

Mr. Higgs: It always pays to read the fine print when it comes to this government. The extension for repealing large, unjustifiable assessment increases does not apply to all New Brunswickers. That is no good. The government keeps coming up with excuses, but it has yet to come up with an explanation. We do not believe the figure of 2 400, and we can prove false the claim that all properties with assessments over 10% had renovations or improvements.

It is time that we heard from the Minister of Service New Brunswick. Will the minister promise a full and open examination of this issue? Will the appeal deadline be extended for all New Brunswickers? Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I want to start by thanking the Leader of the Opposition for his question, since it will give me the opportunity to look directly at the facts. You know, opposition members are mentioning a lot of figures, but it is interesting to look at the real data. Yes, there were about 2 400 errors this year. However, in 2014, the last year that members now in opposition were in government, 8 941 errors were made. What did the Leader of the Opposition have to say when he was Minister of Finance? I am quoting an excerpt from an article in the May 7, 2014, edition of the *Telegraph-Journal* in which he said:

[Original]

I would say that we have a system in place that's fair and equitable and follows the market as it should

[Translation]

The former Minister of Finance said that after 8 941 errors were made.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: Maybe I am confused, but it seems as though we have the wrong minister standing on the questions.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.



Mr. Higgs: I have provided several assessments as proof for the minister that some assessments over 10% were applied to homes that had not been recently renovated or improved. These homes are located in my riding. I would be happy to show them to the minister. I know that many of my colleagues can do the same. Right now, we are trying to get the word out to all New Brunswickers that there have been major issues with assessments. Will the minister—the minister responsible—agree to help publicize the fact that many New Brunswickers might overpay their property taxes by many hundreds of dollars and that the deadline should be extended for all?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: As we very clearly said over the last few days, we will inform all the people who received an inaccurate assessment, and they will have extra time to present an appeal.

You know, we are not proud that errors were made with regard to 2 400 properties; our goal is to fix this problem and to make sure this does not happen again in the future.

That being said, the Leader of the Opposition keeps on saying that we must always look at our errors to learn and find ways to improve. I would like to know why, when 8 801 errors were made in 2011, 9 472 errors were made in 2012, 7 791 errors were made in 2013, and 8 941 errors were made in 2014, the former Minister of Finance did nothing. Today, he would like us to act very quickly.

[Original]

Water Quality

Mr. Higgs: It seems as though the “ministers responsible” have all shifted from Minister Arseneault to Minister Rousselle. We have had some various speakers for this government. All seem to say a lot and say nothing at the same time.

In question period yesterday, the Premier said that the Health Minister had been in constant contact with the conflict commissioner and had everything cleared at every step. My question now is to the Premier, or maybe someone else who is speaking for him as well. When the Minister of Health loudly dismissed concerns about water quality at Parlee Beach in a public interview with CBC New Brunswick four days before the Shediac council approved to extend the campground development, did he have those comments cleared by the conflict commissioner? Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have a commissioner for conflicts of interest. This is an important role. It is a legislative officer. This person fulfills a function that is vital to ensure accountability and to ensure transparency. All MLAs have to ensure that they provide the right information to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner to be able to have the advice of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner on whether they should recuse themselves or whether there should be any



action taken to ensure that we are as accountable and transparent as possible. That is exactly what the Minister of Health did on this file.

We, as a government, ensured that we were always in touch with the Conflict of Interest Commissioner so that we could have that person's advice. I say "that person" because there were three commissioners during the dealings on this file that went through the office. Indeed, the Minister of Health was given the advice recently that he should recuse himself from this file. That is exactly what the Minister of Health and our government have done.

Mr. Higgs: The Premier clarified yesterday that when the Minister of Health stated that there had been no reported incidents of swimmers getting sick at Parlee Beach, he was referring only to incidents officially reported to the Department of Health. However, I believe—and I am sure the Premier would agree—that a good government should not just react to a crisis. It should take proactive steps to prevent one from happening. My question to the Premier is this: What proactive steps has the Health Minister taken to find out if swimmers at Parlee Beach were getting sick from the poor water quality? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Of course, the Minister of Health will not be answering these questions because he is recused from the file. I think that it is very important to note that we have now been made aware. There has been light shed on a problem, and we are fixing it. This is a problem that has existed, unfortunately, for too long. Our government is going to ensure that we work in a collaborative manner with all departments and that we work in a swift manner as well to ensure that we address this issue in the right and appropriate manner.

We are very proud of the fact that we are now able to take action and ensure that this gem for the economy of our province, for the tourism sector, and for the quality of life of the people of the region and the province is going to be able to continue to do exactly what it has been doing, as a gem for our province, for many generations to come.

Mr. Higgs: On August 26, 2016, the Health Minister told CBC, in reference to the water quality at Parlee Beach: "If it ever was to a point where it would cause significant concern, then greater action would be taken, but so far that has not been required."

In January 2015, the minister received a letter from the Shediac Bay Watershed Association expressing concern about the collection of water quality information at Parlee Beach. That was in January 2015. The letter stated that the responsibility to mitigate water quality issues may require review. That was two years ago. Either the minister did not consider a letter from the Shediac Bay Watershed Association outlining the water quality issues at Parlee Beach to be a significant concern or he conveniently forgot about the letter. Could the Minister of Health tell us which it is?



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I am pleased to tell you that I saw a letter the Minister of Health immediately sent to advise the regional health organization and ensure that steps were taken, because we are taking this matter very seriously. However, I wonder whether the opposition members were taking this matter very seriously when they were in government.

Last summer, there was a lot of talk about errors that were made, and we acknowledged them. However, I have, in front of me, data on water quality and communications for 2014. I note that, in 2014, the water quality was rated good 52 times. However, this number should actually have been zero. I think some people will have to answer questions. We are not the ones, on this side of the House, who will have to answer, because I note that the discrepancy really comes from the other side.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: It appears that the letter was ignored. Two years later, on December 9, 2016, the Minister of Health told the CBC that development was not an issue at Murray Beach and that it was not contributing to water quality issues. Last Wednesday, concerned citizens at Murray Beach pointed out that there is a large campground nearby providing services to in excess of 150 recreational vehicles and the Department of Environment had never performed an environmental assessment on that development. I ask this question again. Either the minister was unaware of the campground developments at Murray Beach or he intentionally ignored the fact. Could the Minister of Health once again confirm which it is? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have to point out to the Leader of the Opposition—and I am surprised that I do—that the Minister of Health has been recused from this file. I am not one hundred percent sure why the Leader of the Opposition continues to ask questions of the Minister of Health. I think that we could all agree that the minister has recused himself from the file and that means that he will not be answering questions with regard to the Parlee Beach water quality issue.

I think that there has been a very important question asked by the Minister of Environment and Local Government. I think that the Leader of the Opposition owes it to the people of New Brunswick, if he wants to ask all these questions with regard to the water quality of Parlee Beach, to tell us this: What did his government do in 2014 to ensure proactively that the quality of the water at Parlee Beach was being looked after? The answer, I think, is nothing. If the Leader of the Opposition would like to confirm that there is another answer, he can certainly do so. If not, I suggest that he realize that we are taking action. We have realized that there is a problem, and we are going to ensure that this gem is there for generations to come.

Mr. B. Macdonald: The Premier has just told us that the Minister of Health will no longer answer questions on Parlee Beach, and we are gravely concerned about that. There is a difference between “recused” and “absolved”. “Recused” means the minister is no longer engaged in the file. “Absolved” means he is free of all the sins of the past. Well, there are a lot



of sins here, and we would like to hear from the minister about what he did in the past. Going forward is another matter.

I want to turn my attention to the Premier for this moment. The Premier, in December, denied that there was a conflict. Yet, last week, the Premier had to remove the Minister of Health from this file and recuse him. My question is simple: What changed in the intervening months so that the Premier now feels it is necessary to take the minister off the file?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I want to make it very clear. The Minister of Health will not be answering any questions because he will not be involved in this file moving forward. He has been recused.

What has changed? It is very simple. The Minister of Health has been in contact with the Conflict of Interest Commissioner here in the province throughout this file. He received advice only recently—only about a week or so ago or maybe 10 days now—to recuse himself. This was based on only a perception of conflict. The commissioner still said: You are not in a conflict, Minister of Health, but I suggest—and I am paraphrasing the commissioner, of course—that you recuse yourself because there could be a perception of conflict.

The member opposite wants to know what changed, and that is what changed. The commissioner said there was no conflict, but there could be the perception of one. He said: My advice to you, Minister of Health, is that you recuse yourself. That is exactly what our government has done. I appreciate the question. That is what has changed over the last few days.

Mr. B. Macdonald: As usual, the Premier has an answer that he is giving. I respect that, but the logic does not follow. The Minister of Health has already been involved in this file. That is the whole issue here. The issue that we are asking him to answer to is what he has done, not what he is going to do going forward. He needs to answer in this House for what he has done.

The Premier has also said that the Minister of Health has always been in contact with the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. The minister has been engaged in this file for three years. He has been in contact with the Conflict of Interest Commissioner for three years. What changed in the last few months that made it necessary for the minister to recuse himself?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am pretty sure that I just answered that, but I will do it again. The logic is this. We have a commissioner who is responsible for navigating conflicts of interest with regard to MLAs. The Minister of Health, with regard to this file, has been in contact with the office of the commissioner to ensure that he is doing everything that he can to be as transparent and accountable as possible. The advice from the Conflict of Interest Commissioner throughout the file has been that there has been no conflict, and that is still the case today. However, the advice of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner was that the Minister of Health should be recused from the file because there could be a perception of conflict.



What has changed? There are two things. The advice from the Conflict of Interest Commissioner has changed. I cannot speak for him, but I can only assume that it is because we have been made aware that there may be a potential recommendation with regard to development. That is what has changed. It is as simple as that. What has changed is the advice of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, who has now advised the minister to recuse himself. That is what we have done as a government.

Mr. B. Macdonald: The logic does not flow here. If the Minister of Health, as the Premier suggests, had been giving full disclosure to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner for three years, and if the rules remained the same, the advice would be the same. If the advice has changed—and the Premier now tells us that it has—it means that something else has changed. The Premier is now hinting at the fact that the question of development is on the table. I would submit to the Premier that this, as well, is nothing new. In fact, the issue of development was up last summer when Camping Shediac was an issue at Shediac town council. Why was the minister not recusing himself when the issue of development was on the table last summer?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: These are good questions because they demonstrate that the member of the opposition does not understand this at all. What is happening is this: The Conflict of Interest Commissioner has given advice to the Minister of Health throughout the file that there was no conflict. We have a task force of government internally that is looking to act very swiftly to ensure that we are going to address water quality issues at Parlee Beach. That committee and that work will come with recommendations, and it is possible that there will be a recommendation on having development cease for a period of time in that area.

The minute that happened, that we found out that there may be that recommendation, the Minister of Health went back to the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. The Conflict of Interest Commissioner said: You are not in a conflict; however, there could be the perception of one, and my advice to you and the government is that you recuse yourself from the file. That is what has changed over the last few days.

Mr. Keirstead: One thing that we have learned from this government is that everything that it says—every word, every syllable, and every letter—must be examined very carefully.

It would be wise for the Environment Minister to advise the House in precise detail as to what responsibilities have been taken away from the Health Minister and passed over to him. We need to know whether the Environment Minister will oversee everything and anything related to Parlee Beach from a public health perspective. We should know whether there are any other responsibilities that have been taken from the Health Minister and passed over to the Environment Minister. Water quality at Murray Beach, for instance—who will oversee the water issues at Murray Beach? Has the Minister of Health been recused from all water quality files or just Parlee Beach?



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I thank the Environment Critic for his question. To start with, I would be pleased to tell him what the responsibilities are exactly, but in general, I am now responsible for any health-related issue at Shediac Bay, meaning all public health matters.

In addition, I also want to take this opportunity to continue answering questions that were asked. I am very surprised to see how much opposition members are now interested in Parlee Beach, since they were not when they were in government. In fact, all one has to do is to look at the fairly disturbing data from their years in government. In 2014, they rated the water quality as being good 52 times, but, in reality, this should have been zero.

I cannot help noticing also that if there is, according to the opposition, a problem at the Murray Beach campground, it did not magically appear in 2017. So, I would be interested to know what the former government did during that time.

[Original]

Mr. Keirstead: In October 2016, the Shediac Bay Watershed Association collected samples from five spots in Shediac Bay for DNA analysis. Dog DNA was found at all sites. Human feces were found at Parlee Beach, Pointe-du-Chêne wharf, and Shediac Bridge. Cow feces were found at Scoudouc and Shediac Bridge. Pig DNA was found at Scoudouc.

As we are aware, Shediac Bay touches on a wide area of our east coast. We also know that water does not stay in one spot. Will the Environment Minister advise the House on what is being done to address this far-reaching issue over water quality testing, reporting, or decision-making in any part of Shediac Bay?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: I am sure the member opposite would be glad to be in my place, to be able to say that, at least, his government is doing something and is working hard to ensure the safety of the people from this area.

That being said, I will repeat what I said yesterday: We are taking action. There is a reason we established a working group that is looking at improving public notices at the beach and improving the water quality system. Also, we are doing an in-depth study of what is causing this pollution so we can stop it. When I have recommendations on a new water classification system, you may rest assured that we will make sure it is established in the rest of the province.

I want to repeat the following: Our government is doing something, whereas the former government members, who—thank goodness—are now in opposition, did nothing.



[Original]

Mr. Keirstead: Can the Minister of Environment please provide the House with the results of the environmental impact assessment that was done on Shediac Camping Ltd.?

A joint press release was sent out on February 17 from the Department of Health, the Department of Tourism, and the Department of Environment regarding Parlee Beach. For some reason, only the Environment Minister was quoted in the release. There was no quote from the other two ministers. Of course, this was a few days after the political hot potato was tossed to the Environment Minister, who was sent out to advise the public that the Health Minister's claim that staff had followed the guidelines of 2016 was completely untrue. The press release also stated that a project manager had been hired by the government to oversee these initiatives. Will the Minister of Environment please advise the House of the name and qualifications of this project manager?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Rousselle: As I said earlier, I am proud to be part of a government that is taking steps to resolve a situation at Parlee Beach that has lasted for too long.

Yes, we hired an outside expert who is incredibly qualified, has extensive experience, and is well respected. I will be more than happy to provide the member opposite with this person's résumé, since we are proud of the people we hire to do independent work.

This work will be well done, since we know how important water quality is in this region. This is a priority for people's safety, but also because this is a major tourism region in New Brunswick. So, rest assured that the person responsible has an impressive résumé, and I will be pleased to provide it to the member opposite.

[Original]

Children at Risk

Mr. Coon: The CBC has been running a series recounting the invisible stories of children who have died in the province and on the work of the Child Death Review Committee. Little is known about the children or about the work of the committee. The committee publishes recommendations, but the circumstances of the children's deaths and their names are withheld.

Bernard Richard, our very first Child and Youth Advocate, has concerns about this secrecy. In fact, 10 years ago, he wrote a report on the circumstances surrounding the death of 28-month-old Juli-Anna, which was entitled *Broken Promises*, because he was convinced that her death was entirely preventable. He worries now that the recommendations of his report have been left untouched. My question is for the Minister of Families and Children. Will he table in this



House a report indicating how his department has implemented the 16 recommendations contained in the report called *Broken Promises*?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I appreciate the question from the member of the Green Party. Losing a child, no matter what age, is devastating to a parent, and we realize that. Our government's top priority is protecting families and children. The coroner in this province reviews all deaths of children under the age of 19, whether they are unexpected or all of a sudden. All of that has been done. We have reviewed it. The Child Death Review Committee talks about this. This government and the Canadian Paediatric Society have reviewed the child death review committees across Canada and have given New Brunswick an excellent rating, meaning that we look at all of those.

We at Social Development have been working hard. We have hired more social workers—59, to be exact—in the past few years. We continue to work hard with families. We give them more training to make sure that they are on the ground and doing... For those children who are vulnerable, we work with those children, and we will continue doing that. Our priority is for families and children, to make this the...

Mr. Coon: The report should just be tabled then.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard, the Child and Youth Advocate, is not the only one concerned by secrets surrounding the Child Death Review Committee. According to our current advocate, Norman Bossé, in the case of preventable deaths, the people of the province have the right to know how they can be prevented. Will the minister commit to releasing the full report from the Child Death Review Committee, so we know how to prevent such deaths in the future?

[*Original*]

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I want to make sure that the member opposite and everybody in the House know that the Department of Social Development has addressed 100%—100%—of the recommendations of the Child and Youth Advocate, and we continue to do that. There were 16, if not more, and we have addressed all of them. The members opposite should know. Five years ago, they revamped the child services Act. So, we are continuing to do that. We are continuing to work with you.

We continue to do that, and we are going to keep on doing better, as we have on many other projects, such as impaired driving. We are making sure that bicycle safety is important with Ellen's law. We will continue to work hard with New Brunswickers, and we are open to suggestions. The doors are always open to our department, and we will continue to work with New Brunswickers. If they have better ideas, please come see us. I have yet to see any members from across the floor approach the members of Social Development to put in their recommendations. We will continue working hard with the province. Thank you.



Mr. Coon: This is the Legislative Assembly.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Coon: This is the Legislative Assembly, where we are to hold the Executive Council accountable for its actions. Clearly, we need a mechanism here to hold this department and this minister accountable for implementing the recommendations of the Child Death Review Committee. I want to see this Legislature establish an active standing committee on child and youth that would have the mandate to ensure that the recommendations of the Child Death Review Committee are implemented and to ensure that, in fact, all recommendations the Child and Youth Advocate makes to this Legislature are implemented. The standing committee should have the power to call persons, papers, and records given to it by this Legislature. Let's have the people's House serve the youngest people of this province to protect them. Will the minister support the creation of a standing committee of the Legislature on children and youth?

Hon. Mr. Horsman: I want to point out that New Brunswick is one of five provinces in all of Canada to have a Child Death Review Committee. We feel that committee is more suited to answering those recommendations. We will see that it is done. There are privacy laws that we have to abide by.

Every time an unfortunate, tragic accident takes place, the coroner's office looks at it, the Child Death Review Committee looks at it, and the Child and Youth Advocate looks at it. They make recommendations, and we look at those recommendations. The committee looks at those recommendations, and, if we can do better, we will certainly do better. We do not want to see this happen again. For things that happened 13 or 20 years ago, I cannot change the past and it is unfortunate. However, going forward, we will make sure this is the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

Government

Mr. Fitch: The member opposite said that there were no ideas coming from the opposition. However, I can tell you that the member for Moncton Northwest brought forward the idea of interlock to the government, and that was a great idea. He also brought forward ideas on adult autism to the minister opposite. Where is that? The member for Gagetown-Petitcodiac brought forward the ideas on PTSD. I am going to give the minister an opportunity to withdraw that remark here in the House because what he just said here in the House is not the case. I will give him an opportunity to withdraw that remark.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: If we are going to list ideas, I want to list one that we heard from the opposition. The member for Moncton Northwest has suggested that the Sisson mine should not move forward. He has suggested that it is not safe.



(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: He has suggested that we are putting false hope out there. The Leader of the Opposition does not agree with the member for Moncton Northwest, but that is one of the ideas that we got from the opposition. I can tell you that our government does not agree. We think the Sisson mine could help create good jobs for New Brunswickers. The Sisson mine could help grow our economy, and the Sisson mine could put good, hardworking New Brunswickers to work, making sure they advance an important project for the economy.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I think that the ideas of the opposition members are not always on point, although we appreciate that they try. I think that New Brunswickers want us to focus on economic growth, and they want us to be creating jobs through projects such as the Sisson mine.

Mr. Fitch: The Premier jumped up here to try to bail out one of his ministers yet again. The statement was made on this floor that there have been no ideas coming from the opposition, yet the Premier got up and said that there have been ideas coming from us. I am going to give the minister from Fredericton North, the Deputy Premier of New Brunswick, an opportunity to retract his statement. The Premier has already said it is inaccurate because he said that they have received ideas from the opposition. I am going to give the minister a mulligan. I am going to give him an opportunity to get back a shred of the decency that he has lost, a redo. I will give the minister an opportunity to withdraw that statement here in the House today.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I want us to mark the day. The opposition members do not want me to get up as Premier. The next time they ask that I stand up, I hope that they will remember this.

I think that it is really important to recognize that we, as a government, are working on the priorities of New Brunswickers. We are advancing the economy. We are ensuring that we are investing more in education and investing more in health care. The ideas of the opposition that we get...

By the way, I think that the Deputy Premier was trying to say that he would like to have people come to his office and to the Social Development office to have a real discussion—not on the floor of the Legislature, trying to score political points and headlines.

As a government, we have worked very hard on the economy, education, and health care. Unfortunately, the opposition members are trying to say that they have ideas where they do



not want us to invest in infrastructure, but they want us to invest in infrastructure in their ridings.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order, member from Miramichi.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: They do not want us to go ahead with the Sisson mine, yet they want us to focus on the economy. They want to cut into health care and education so that they can balance the books. That is not what we are doing. Education, health care, and the economy are what we are focused on.

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

