

February 10, 2017

[Original]

Emergency Measures

Mr. Higgs: I would like to give the Premier another opportunity to accept our offer of assistance in examining the response to the ice storm. Now that he has had a couple of days for reflection and to receive feedback, will the Premier change his mind? Will he accept the offer of the official opposition and the other party leaders? Will he strike an all-party committee to examine the response to the ice storm so that we, indeed, can get better for the next event? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I thank the Leader of the Opposition, the other members of the Legislature from the opposition, and the third party for their concern about the well-being of those who went through the affected storm. It was a very tough time for the province, and I was so pleased with how New Brunswickers rallied together. Communities within the affected areas and regions without power were really resilient. They were inspiring, and they had a strong sense of community. People from outside those regions donated and came to go door-to-door. They did everything that they could to assist those who were affected by the ice storm.

We have made it very clear that we are very impressed with the response from volunteers, from all the instances—the Emergency Measures Organization, NB Power, the crews that came from outside the province, and the contractors that came from within the province to the region. However, we are going to do a review to make sure that we understand what went well and what can be done better next time. I look forward to the results of that review.

Mr. Higgs: The Premier is using the excuse that politicians will not be involved by using the Executive Council Office, but everyone knows that the office answers to the Premier. Once already, the Gallant government has used the Executive Council Office to interfere politically with an inquiry. I refer, of course, to the Auditor General's first Atcon report, where she found that the current Health Minister did not have the authority to sign over \$50 million worth of creditor status to the Bank of Nova Scotia. Even though she had expert legal opinion backing her findings, the Gallant government disagreed with her findings via the Executive Council. What would the implications have been had the Auditor General's findings been allowed to stand? Can the Premier answer that?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have requested that a review be done because we know that we were put to the test. We know that this was certainly one of the worst natural disasters that we, as a province, had to go through, so we owe it to ourselves to review, to see what went well, and to see what could go better next time.

I really hope that the Leader of the Opposition is not questioning the credibility of the most senior civil servant within the government. She is a woman who has been working in the civil



service for many years now. She has done a great job. She has worked under different governments. We believe that she is going to do a great job in making sure that we analyze what went well and what could go better next time with regard to the response to the ice storm that we recently went through.

I do have a question for the Leader of the Opposition, though. What response did his government put in place—or what review did his government put in place, I should say—when Arthur came to town? I would like to know what review it put in place and how it differs from ours.

Jobs

Mr. Higgs: The latest embarrassment for our government from the soaring-economy, 3 000-jobs ad campaign landed on social media again yesterday. It was the picture of a sign in a Toronto airport bathroom saying: Wash your hands of any doubt. New Brunswick is on the move—3 000 jobs.

On Wednesday, the Premier admitted that the jobs Web site is flawed and inaccurate. Will he immediately order the suspension and cancellation of this false and ridiculous advertising campaign before he causes further damage to New Brunswick's credibility? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Every day, I cannot understand the words coming out of the Leader of the Opposition's mouth. It was his government that put <www.nbjobs.ca> in place, so all the words that he just used...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: He should look to his right and talk to the MLA for Oromocto-Lincoln and say that his program, <www.nbjobs.ca>... I was there when he launched it, and I congratulated him. When I became Premier, I said that I thought it was a good initiative and a good program and that we would continue it. The Leader of the Opposition should turn to his colleague and say that it is a ridiculous program and initiative.

In fact, it is not. It is very helpful. It is helping us to make sure that we have a strong workforce by trying to fill gaps, giving employers a way to communicate where there are opportunities, and giving those who want to stay in the province or come back to the province a chance to see what opportunities are here for them. We have made improvements—we will continue to improve <www.nbjobs.ca>—but we are proud that the word is getting out across the country that there is opportunity here in New Brunswick.

Mr. Higgs: Unfortunately, the Premier clearly does not care about accuracy. Again, on page 10 of the nonpolitical, fact-based *2017–2018 Economic Outlook*, we find a graph that indicates



three years of negative employment growth in the province—-0.2% in 2014, -0.6% in 2015, and -0.1% in 2016. Yet, on page 9 of the budget speech, we find the claim “By working together we have delivered on job creation”. Does the Premier not understand that all his government has delivered on job creation is spin? Does the Premier not understand negative employment growth, or are our suspicions accurate that the Premier does not really care about unspun facts and reality?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We are very proud that the New Brunswick economy grew very dramatically in 2015. In fact, we had the third-highest growth rate in Canada. Moreover, it is the highest growth rate we have seen here in New Brunswick since 2004. So, we are very proud that the New Brunswick economy grew dramatically in 2015.

Our economy grew again in 2016, perhaps not at the rate we would have liked, but, according to predictions, it will grow again in 2017. We are very proud that the economy is stronger than we have seen in a long time, or perhaps ever, here in New Brunswick. We are seeing a favourable climate for job creation. In fact, since June of last year, our economy has shown a net gain of over 5 000 jobs. So, there is a favourable climate, the economy is growing, and we are working hard on making more investments to maintain this momentum.

[Original]

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Higgs: On page 6 of the *2017–2018 Economic Outlook*, we see the graph on 2017 real GDP projections. Of the 10 provinces, New Brunswick is ninth. Only Newfoundland has a worse projection. Yet, the ridiculous advertising campaign that we were discussing earlier states that New Brunswick is a “growth leader”. Being one spot out of dead last in Canada is being spun as being a “growth leader”. Maybe we just set our sights too low. Does the Premier think that nobody else in Canada reads the growth projections? Does the Premier not think that the false advertising campaign will make us a laughingstock, or does he truly not care about accuracy and facts?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: In 2015, we were the third-best province in the country when it came to economic growth. In 2016, it is estimated that we grew again—not at the same rhythm, not at the same rate, but we grew again. It is estimated that we will grow again in 2017. On the back of a record-setting year in 2015, New Brunswickers should be proud of what they have done.

One person who should not be proud is the Leader of the Opposition. Let’s talk about his GDP growth when he was the failed Finance Minister. In 2011, the GDP grew by 0.2%; in 2012, it was -1%; in 2013; it was -0.3%; and in 2014, it was -0.1%. As much as I like to hear from the Leader of the Opposition every single day, we are not going to take any lessons on his approach to



growing the economy. He slashed education, slashed health care, and shrank our economy during his four years.

Budget

Mr. Higgs: Once again, we see the Premier throwing out numbers as though they are all true. I am proud to focus on our reality of facts. I will stand and go through the actual numbers any day. The reviews are in on the Premier's budget, and it is pretty much unanimous that increasing our net debt by another \$1 billion this year and \$2.4 billion so far in this mandate is absolutely irresponsible. That does not include the number of projects that will hit in later years and that are now on the books. Experts and editorialists alike also point out that, with this huge increase in taxes—over half a billion dollars per year—running a deficit is unforgivable. Again, the Premier does not seem to care. For him, the future ends at the next election date. However, I must ask: Does the Premier understand what will happen when the interest rates rise? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: There are many points that I want to cover here. The Leader of the Opposition is talking about alternative facts yet again. I think that we will have to have a ruling on how we are going to discuss this moving forward, Mr. Speaker.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: No, the Leader of the Opposition...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order. Honourable members, order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The Leader of the Opposition is accusing us of alternative facts. That is what I am saying, and I would like him to clarify the GDP growth that he thinks he had when he was Minister of Finance in 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014. I want to hear that, and I think New Brunswickers deserve that, because he is swatting it down as if it were not true. He is swatting it down as StatsCan not being true—0.2% growth in 2011, -1% in 2012, -0.3% in 2013, and -0.1% in 2014. I would like the Leader of the Opposition to get up and say categorically that it is false, that, when he was Finance Minister, he did not fail in growing the economy.

Mr. Higgs: Earlier this week, I asked how the government justified cutting the deficit in half and how the statistic that was put on the cover page would actually work mathematically. I was not given an answer, so I will ask again. Just give us the beginning and the end numbers that you used, with or without the contingency fund. How much information went in there that actually calculates the deficit cut in half, from the beginning of the government's mandate to today? Look at the numbers. We are spinning out the numbers.



Hon. Mr. Gallant: With this whole new-politics approach that the failed Finance Minister says he wants to bring to the table, I would think he would want to clarify his numbers. He says he is bringing numbers. I am bringing numbers too. In 2011, the economy of New Brunswick, under the failed minister, grew by 0.2%. It retracted in 2012 by 1%, it retracted in 2013 by 0.3%, and it retracted in 2014 by 0.1%. How is it that the Leader of the Opposition thinks he can get up and lecture us when it comes to economic growth? He retracted the economy with his failed policies of cutting into health care and education.

[*Translation*]

Our government is working with New Brunswickers. In fact, we are working with businesses and people who really want to help regions and the province in order to move our economy forward. We are proud to have had record growth in 2015 thanks to our strategic investments. Furthermore, the economy grew again 2016, and it will continue to do so in 2017.

[*Original*]

Education System

Mr. Stewart: Last December, the PISA scores were released throughout Canada, and, in one section below the New Brunswick scores, there was something interesting going on that I do not think a lot of New Brunswickers knew. The Francophone sector of education in our province is the fastest-improving education sector in Canada and the eighth fastest in the world. These improvements have been over the last four years. I see this as an achievement, and I would like to ask the Minister of Education what the Francophone sector has bought into or has figured out that has helped it to improve at such a good rate?

Hon. Mr. Kenny: Thank you for that question. Yes, there are good things to talk about in education, and all we hear in this Legislature is doom and gloom from the opposition. Every day, it is trying to find something. Today, yes, it is good the member opposite is talking about the test results in the Francophone sector. Yes, they are doing some good work. Teachers are working hard, and our students are working hard. There are some good results, and we see some improvement. That is what we are trying to do here on this side of the House—to try for improvement throughout our whole education system.

With the 10-year education plans we are putting forward, we have a number of record investments compared to the opposition members, who cut and slashed education, when they were in government. We have a very good track record on spending and on putting the proper resources in place in our education system to move forward. In this year alone, our Minister of Finance has come out with increases of \$58 million to our education system moving forward.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.



Mr. Stewart: For the minister, I do believe that there is no politics in education. What I am trying to figure out here today is that we have two education systems and that it should be the goal of the province to get them both firing on all cylinders.

There is something interesting. The Francophone schools in New Brunswick, between 2012 and 2015, attained the highest improvement rate in the country. In science, the country improved by three points while New Brunswick's Francophone schools improved by 27. In reading, the country improved by 4 while New Brunswick's Francophone sector improved by 22. In math, the country decreased its score by 2 points while New Brunswick's Francophone schools improved by 5. I see this as an achievement. I believe it should be celebrated, and I am questioning why it has not been to date. I would like the minister to elaborate on what it is that they are doing differently in the Francophone sector so that everyone in New Brunswick can benefit from it.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: As the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, I take this role of minister to be the most important in our province. I have to say that, in working with the Francophone teachers and districts, yes, we have celebrated those accomplishments. With the role of Francophone education, they are taking a community approach to education. They are also looking at doing performance management. These are some of the things that they are doing in the Francophone sector. They are doing a very good job, and I want to commend everybody who is involved.

With our education plans moving forward, with what we are doing with preschool autism programs, with the Integrated Service Delivery provincial expansion that we are doing, with the Day Care Assistance Program, and with record investments in education, we are making sure that, yes, our education is going to be firing on all cylinders. We are working together. We are working collaboratively with everybody who is involved. It is a community approach, and I do believe...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Stewart: I think that we should raise the level of debate and discussion on this topic. Like the minister, I think that education is vital to the future of New Brunswick.

Right now, what I would like to ask the minister is the same question that I have asked with the past two questions but for which I did not really get an answer. I think that it is an achievement, and I am proud of that. I think that we all should celebrate the fact that they are getting something right and they are doing a good job.

In the Anglophone sector, with respect to its PISA scores, if you look very closely, you will see that they kind of went down. I think that it is very important for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development to tell the House and to tell New Brunswick what they are doing in the other sector so that both sectors can work together and we can learn from this. My



question is very simple. What have they been doing in the Francophone sector of education over the past four years that has them improving at such a fast pace? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Kenny: We are working together. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development along with all the stakeholders in all the sectors of education, both in the Francophone and the Anglophone sectors, are working together. We have had extensive consultation. It is the first time in history that the Premier and I, as the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, spent a full day with educators from around the province, from both the Francophone and the Anglophone sectors, to listen to some of the issues and to share those best practices that are taking place.

The education systems are working together, and they are sharing best practices. I want to say that, going through the tour of the province, meeting with educators, seeing some of the great things that are happening in innovation and digital literacy, and seeing the competitive nature of our students in the province who actually want to strive and move forward, there are a lot of good things happening in education throughout the province. I want to ask the opposition to continue to actually talk about the good things in education and not to point out all the negative things.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

[*Translation*]

Hospitals

Mr. B. Macdonald: The media have indicated that Vitalité Health Network presented the Minister of Health with a plan to maintain the level of service while reducing costs, without jobs being lost. This plan should also save New Brunswick taxpayers millions of dollars. Has the minister read this Vitalité Health Network report? If so, did he take it into consideration before deciding to privatize?

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I can assure the opposition that, yes, we did in fact take everyone's opinion into consideration before deciding to sign a contract with Sodexo.

The goal of this initiative is to improve the quality of care offered to patients in our hospitals and to do so consistently across the province. This is the ultimate goal, to provide better service to everyone, regardless of which New Brunswick hospital they are in.

We can reach this goal while saving money and then reinvest this money in our health care system. Let's take the example of our \$200-million announcement made yesterday by my colleagues, the Premier and the Deputy Premier, about the regional hospital here in Fredericton. This is a \$200-million investment over the next eight years.



Mr. B. Macdonald: According to the Vitalité Health Network report, jobs could be saved, New Brunswick taxpayers could save millions of dollars, and we could maintain or even improve services currently provided.

Is the minister ready to table and to release the Vitalité Health Network report?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Again, this whole objective... This initiative, by the way, was started under the former government and was simply continued by our government because it was an initiative that we felt made sense and was going to provide positive results. It is there to improve the quality of service that patients receive when in hospital in New Brunswick. Whether it be environmental, such as cleaning and the cleanliness of the hospitals, the portering services, or the food services, it is to make sure that there is a consistent quality of service around the province.

Sodexo is going to be able to do that while actually providing savings, which are going to be reinvested into the system. Those savings are guaranteed by the company. That is something that the Vitalité proposal could not do. It could not guarantee that we were going to get these savings. Sodexo, however, is able to provide that guarantee that we are going to see those savings, and those savings are then going to be...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. B. Macdonald: As we have seen a lot from the Gallant government, it is saying one thing and doing another. In this case, the minister is on his feet and he is telling us that the goal of this project is to improve services yet we know that the goal actually is to save money.

The Vitalité health board has come forward with a proposal that allows it to maintain jobs that are present, to improve the quality of service, and to do it at a lesser price. I have asked the minister twice about this report. Will he now acknowledge this report, acknowledge what is contained in it, and present it publicly—at least to the public—or table it in this House? We want to know what is in that report, and we want to know why the minister is not taking the option provided by the Vitalité health board.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: I have acknowledged the report. We looked at the report, and we did not agree with the findings in the report.

Again, I want to remind everybody listening and everybody in this Chamber that this is an initiative that started under the former government. It started when the member for Rothesay was the Minister of Health. An RFP was released in July 2013. The top-ranked supplier was chosen in January 2014. A letter was then sent to all bidders in March 2014, informing them of whom the successful bidder was and starting the negotiation process.



(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Boudreau: Then, of course, there was an election, and Tories, being Tories, decided that they were going to toss this aside because they did not want it to become an election issue. However, they never canceled the process. They never canceled the RFP. It was simply tossed aside, to be resumed after the election.

We see the benefits, and we did continue on this initiative.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Forestry

Mr. Coon: It was three years ago this week that the former government signed a contract with Jim Irving to provide his company with a guaranteed supply of wood from Crown lands for 25 years—an amount of wood that undermined the integrity of our public forest management system. In return for our sacrificing the public interest in this way, J.D. Irving would modernize its mills. This included a major investment in Phase 3 of the Irving Pulp & Paper modernization in Saint John, at a cost of \$263 million. Can the Minister of Energy and Resource Development tell this Legislature whether, in fact, J.D. Irving has invested that \$263 million in Phase 3 of the mill modernization in Saint John? How many permanent jobs did it create?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: It is certainly a pleasure to stand in the House to talk about the forestry sector. The forestry sector is very vital to the economy. It is a very strong component for job creation, for helping us get our fiscal house in order, and for helping us pay for the things that are priorities, such as education and health care.

The questions that the member is bringing forward are very important—very important to the people of New Brunswick. Yes, everything is on track. As I understand it, a number of sizable forest sector investments have materialized in the year since the strategy was released. A number of very significant investments have taken place in the province. With the Irving Paper modernization of \$202 million in Saint John, there have to be some jobs out of that too. At the Chipman mill, it is \$38 million—that is very significant. In Kedgwick and Saint-Léonard, there was \$3.9 million.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Coon: It sounds to me as though Phase 3 has not been completed, but let me press on. The former government signed on a contract that accepted that J.D. Irving's promised investments in its mills would be predicated on this and future governments assuring the company competitive wood costs on Crown land. Can the minister tell this House which steps his government has taken to guarantee competitive wood costs to the J.D. Irving company?



Hon. Mr. Doucet: Job creation and economic growth very much remain priorities of this government. The safe and responsible development of our natural resources has been identified as being a key growth opportunity. There are some challenges out there. We all know there are some tremendous challenges in all the sectors that we are dealing with, but, with the challenges, come some very significant growth opportunities.

As I mentioned just a moment ago, it is not only Irving but also what has taken place with AV Group. To finish, AV Group has had \$37 million in investments. Chaleur was \$5.5 million in investments, and Twin Rivers was \$10 million in investments. These are linked to the forest strategy. They have materialized and are on track. These investments continue to support employment opportunities and many of the forestry communities in the province. By the way, the fact of the matter is that many of those jobs are in rural New Brunswick.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Coon: When I asked questions such as these last year, J.D. Irving took out a full-page advertisement in the paper and answered them. Maybe it will do that again so that I can get the actual answers to my questions.

[Translation]

Under the contract signed by the former government with Jim Irving, this government and future governments are legally required to reduce the forest operation costs of the company in this province. Can the minister explain which steps this government has taken to reduce forest operation costs for Irving in this province?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Doucet: As I mentioned a few moments ago, job creation is the number one priority of this government. Getting our fiscal house in order and helping to pay for health care and education are priorities. I am very proud to say on the floor of this Legislature that the forestry industry is part of that plan, part of the economic development, and part of the growth in this province. It has been a pillar, a very solid pillar, for many, many years. It is part of our growth, and it is part of our economic development plans as we go forward.

As I mentioned, all the work is on track. All the investments are on track. I mentioned just a few of the mills, and that is not talking about the investments in the woods. That is not talking at all about the investments in the woods. Trees are everything. What is taking place? Trees are everything. The value that we can get out of our fibre is so very important. The mills that are producing in this province are creating some tremendous jobs, and they are also creating some very tremendous products. There are mills that are producing some tremendous fibre.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Opportunities New Brunswick



Mr. K. MacDonald: On January 18, Opportunities New Brunswick appeared before the Legislature's Standing Committee on Crown Corporations. This was the first opportunity to examine the performance of this particular Crown corporation. Unfortunately, the head of Opportunities New Brunswick did not provide the information we requested on actual jobs created. I am sure that the minister has been briefed on this and has now been provided with some real data on the performance of Opportunities New Brunswick. Can the minister advise the House as to how many companies receiving government assistance are behind on their commitments to create jobs?

It would seem to me that most departments are now specializing in alternative facts.

[Translation]

Hon. Ms. Landry: I am very pleased to rise to talk about the excellent results Opportunities New Brunswick achieved in 2015-16. Opportunities New Brunswick also had the chance to present its results. Our target was to create 1 500 jobs. Opportunities New Brunswick demonstrated that it had created 2 965 jobs, which is over 50% more than its initial target.

Following this, we saw \$288 million added to the New Brunswick economy. I think Opportunities New Brunswick has done excellent work all year long, precisely to have more jobs, which are the priority for our government, along with education and health care.

[Original]

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

