

February 14, 2017

[Original]

## Jobs

**Mr. Higgs:** On Friday, Statistics Canada reported that New Brunswick lost another 3 000 jobs in January. Statistics Canada also reported that our labour force shrank by 5 000 people. If we look back to October 2014, the month that the Gallant government insists upon using as the benchmark for its performance, here is what the Gallant government has accomplished—a net loss of 1 400 people from the labour force and a net gain of 100 jobs. Would the Premier classify this as an economy that is soaring and an economy that is growing or an economy that has been held back by poorly considered and politically driven policies? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Despite the fact that today is Valentine's Day, I am certainly going to get no love from the opposition. That is fine.

We are very happy to get up at any point to compare the economic record that our province has seen under our progressive policies, our policies that are focused on growth, to when the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister of Finance, slashing into health care and education and, frankly, getting very dismal results with regard to economic growth. We grew the economy by 2.3% in 2015 by working with New Brunswickers. It was the best economic growth rate in New Brunswick since 2004, and it was the third best in the country. The economy is estimated to have grown again in 2016, and it is estimated to keep growing in 2017. During the four years of the Leader of the Opposition's Finance term, the economy retracted in the province. We will compare that at any moment.

**Mr. Higgs:** Once again, ignoring this past government's record, I can understand why this government would ignore its record, because it is dismal. The 10 000 jobs—whatever happened to those? Statistics Canada reports that, in September 2014, which was the last month of the previous government, the labour force in New Brunswick stood at 391 700. The jobs number stood at 354 100. When we compare these figures with January 2017 under the Gallant government, as recorded by Statistics Canada, we find that the labour force has shrunk by 5 100 people, and we observe that there are 2 200 fewer people working. Would the Premier care to admit that the economy is neither soaring nor growing when we express it in terms of people, the only expression that really counts? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** The economy of our province grew in 2015 and is estimated to grow in 2016 and 2017 for an impact of 3.3% growth over those three years. Under the former Leader of the Opposition's term as Finance Minister, the economy in the province grew by 0.2% in 2011, retracted by 1% in 2012, retracted by 0.3% in 2013, and retracted by 0.1% in 2014.



I am very proud of what New Brunswickers have done over the past three years, working very hard to create jobs and opportunities. We are going to do what we, as a government, can to support them in a positive way.

If the Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about the records of our respective governments, I ask him to answer this: What does he think of the GDP growth that he was able to not create when was the Minister of Finance? How many jobs did his government increase in the economy—a net gain? It would be great to hear from the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, Premier.

## Budget

**Mr. Higgs:** Once again, the Premier will not answer a question. He will not deal with the issues of his government and the performance of his government. I can understand why. I guess that I would not talk about it either.

The budget speech delivered Tuesday spoke of a growing population in New Brunswick. The census results released on Wednesday prove that New Brunswick is the only province with a shrinking population and the first province since 2006 to see a population decline. The budget speech was prepared by the Gallant government spin doctors. The census for the population was prepared by Statistics Canada. In light of the facts, would the Premier care to make a statement revising the impression given in the budget speech? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** The Leader of the Opposition does not recognize that the people listening see that he does not want to talk about his record. From 2006 to 2010, we actually saw some pretty good growth when it came to the population. From 2010 to 2014, it was abysmal. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition still does not recognize that it was because of his approach as Minister of Finance to cut in education and cut in health care. This, in turn, hurt our economy.

Luckily, we are focused on investing and growth. We are focused on making record investments in education and health care and making investments that will stimulate the economy. Although it has been a rough ride in the province over the past decade, as we have had to go through four years of the Leader of the Opposition's cuts to education and health care, we are gaining momentum as an economy. We are gaining momentum as a province. New Brunswickers should be proud of what they have accomplished up to now.

**Mr. Higgs:** It seems that the only one who believes that the province is gaining momentum, gaining and soaring, is the Premier. When he looks in the mirror, he keeps telling himself that every morning.

In a published commentary, Fredericton Chamber of Commerce CEO Krista Ross wrote: "our members are experiencing tax fatigue and the costs of increases in recent budgets continue to



accumulate and act as a drag on the economy”. In another commentary, Carol O’Reilly of the Moncton chamber wrote: “Business has been hit by a raft of taxes: the HST, gas and diesel taxes, property tax increases, the minimum wage, Workers Compensation rates, and soon a carbon tax and higher CPP premiums”.

This is not me talking. These are people in trade and commerce. These are people who know business. Does the Premier feel that the chambers have raised legitimate issues? If he does, why does he not listen to them? How can he continue to ignore them?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Our government is focusing on economic growth. We are making strategic investments in education and the health care system, not only to improve people’s quality of life in the province, but also because it is important for the economy.

In fact, we are attracting investments and start-ups here in the province, because entrepreneurs know we are investing in education. They know their children will have opportunities here. They also know the province will have a strong and skilled workforce that will assist them in growing their businesses so they can compete internationally.

Moreover, these entrepreneurs know we are also making investments in the health care system, ensuring their employees are healthy and their businesses are competitive internationally.

What is obvious is that the Leader of the Opposition does not understand the importance of investing in education and the health care system to grow our economy.

[*Original*]

## **French Immersion**

**Ms. Lynch:** On September 30, 2016, the Premier announced the reinstatement of Grade 1 French immersion. In that same announcement, the Premier promised that the government would seek to improve access in rural schools. My question to the Premier is this: How far is his Liberal government willing to go to provide more access to French immersion in rural New Brunswick?

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** It was a historic day when we announced that we are going to go back to Grade 1 French immersion in our education system. It is our government that is investing the most in education moving forward. We are going to put the right tools in the right places.

Right now, we feel that we are on par with the enrollment in New Brunswick. Over 1 800 students have enrolled in French immersion. We are going to be making sure that we can



deliver these services over the years to come and make sure that we have accessibility in the rural areas. Throughout New Brunswick, we have some rural areas that may not have the uptake that we would like to see. However, we will work together with those communities and those schools, principals, and districts to be able to allow these programs to come in.

We are very proud of the record that we have in education, unlike the previous government, the opposition, which cut in education. We are making record investments in the right places. We believe that what we are doing in education will really bear fruit in the years to come.

**Ms. Lynch:** We can all agree that the demographics here in New Brunswick have changed significantly over the past 20 years and that what may have worked back then may not be the answer today. My question for the Premier is this: Will he have his government officials review the minimum enrollment quotas for Grade 1, Grade 3, and Grade 6, which are the entry points for French immersion, and lower them based on today's demographics?

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** As the enrollment numbers come in, we are dealing on a daily basis with the Department of Education and working with the districts to see how the enrollment numbers are coming in throughout the province. That is why we are working very diligently with our educators, with the districts, and with the Department of Education to make sure that we have the proper resources in place for the upcoming September year.

We have to realize that this initiative is going to be one where we all understand that earlier is better. Even the former critic for Education said the same thing. What we have to do is continue to work with our districts, work with our parents, and work with the educators in our system to make sure that we have a good program in place. That is what we are going to do with the proper resources in place. I am very happy with our record on education. I am very happy with our government. We are putting the proper resources in the proper place and making sure that we have the best education system moving forward.

**Ms. Lynch:** In my riding, a group has been formed with the goal of bringing back French immersion for the students of the Grand Lake area. This group has advocated, primarily through social media, for the return of this program, and it believes that the support is there for the program. With the growing efforts of these parents, will the Premier commit to reinstating the French immersion program at Minto Elementary Middle School and give the students of the Grand Lake area the same opportunities as students in our urban centres? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I just have to point out a few things. As we know, earlier is better. That is why the former critic for Education said it when he was questioning the government a few months ago. That is probably also why he is the former Education Critic. It is because he said that.

Second, we are very proud of the fact that we are basing this on a report that was done in a nonpartisan way, with a former Minister of Education from a Conservative government and a former Minister of Education from a Liberal government going around the province and



listening to experts, parents, and the children themselves and coming up with the recommendation to restore French immersion in Grade 1.

I have to say this. I have to get up... I debated as to whether I should, but I have to get up and point out the irony. We have a member of the opposition getting up and advocating that French immersion should be in Grade 1 in her community while the Leader of the Opposition thinks it is a lightning rod that has ruined the province, even though it has not been in place for some years. The irony is beyond me. The Leader of the Opposition needs to figure out whether he is coming or going.

### Route 11

**Mr. Jeff Carr:** The Premier is pretty quick to twist somebody's words around. That is for sure. It is a common theme that we have been hearing from the Premier of late.

My questions today are for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure regarding the Miramichi Bypass, which belongs to Route 11. There seems to be some concern among some citizens of the Miramichi area—particularly in the Chatham area, with the businesses over there—as to why the minister wants to say one thing before, in the campaign, and then say the exact opposite now that he is the minister and in government now.

In the spring of 2014, when the plans to build the Miramichi Bypass were revealed, the minister said very clearly that it was going to have a negative effect on economic development in the riding. I am wondering if the minister still feels that way today.

**Hon. Mr. Fraser:** Yes, I did have concerns when they unveiled the plan back in the year that the member opposite just mentioned. I had real concerns because they did not do consultation with the business community. They did not do consultation with the community of Miramichi. I raised those concerns publicly. To its credit, I would say, the former government came back with a revised plan after that consultation was done. It did not cover all the facts and all the things that the communities were concerned with, but it did change the off-ramps at the Miramichi end, where the business community had concerns. I applaud the former government for that.

What the former government was not able to do was to get the federal dollars that were required to get the job done. We are at a point right now where we are not just talking about Route 11 and the bypass at Miramichi. We are actually getting it done, and I am proud to be part of a government that is actually looking out for the best interest and the safety of New Brunswickers and of the people in my community.

**Mr. Jeff Carr:** I think that the logo and the slogan for this government should not be “Listening and Getting Things Done”. It should be: “Saying One Thing and Doing Another”. I think that is what the logo should be. The minister was very clearly against the bypass of the Miramichi. He was very clearly against this. He talked extensively.



*He said it's counterproductive to spend so much money building a road that stands to take money out of the pockets of Miramichi's small and medium-sized business owners.*

One of the other things that he said is this:

*"One of the major reasons for the (upgrading) of Highway 11, aside from safety because safety is one of the major ones, was to create economic development and to help the north—so it's kind of ironic the plan they're going to bring forward is going to drastically affect upwards of 20 businesses that operate along that stretch."*

Is the minister going to stand up for those 20 businesses that are screaming for help? Will he stand up for the businesses, or is he going to let them close?

**Hon. Mr. Fraser:** I find it a little ironic coming from the member opposite, speaking about things that are going on in the Miramichi riding.

I am very proud of the work that we are doing in the community of Miramichi and all across this province to create economic development. The Highway 11 project is going to create over 2 500 jobs over the four-year period. It is a \$272-million investment. It is money that we, as a government, are able to invest based on our priorities of investing in health care and education, growing the economy, and creating jobs.

I will tell you that it is something that would not have been possible under the opposition's leadership. In fact, the opposition members talked about it. They did not get it done. On our side, we are actually getting the work done. Shovels are going to be in the ground next year. The planning is already under way.

In terms of businesses that have some concerns, I have met with them individually. I will continue to meet with them and to work with them. We are doing this for the right reasons. We are going to save lives. There have been 275 collisions just on this stretch in Miramichi, with eight fatalities. We are going to get this done.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, minister.

**Mr. Jeff Carr:** He is the minister of say one thing and do another. I am going to do another little flashback, a flashback to the spring of 2014. The right-to-life protests were going on on the Legislature floor, and the minister talked about this: There is nothing more precious than the life of a child. It just goes along with the theme that the minister is willing to say one thing before an election but say the extreme opposite afterward. We have to wonder this: What are the priorities for Miramichiers and those who live in the Chatham area? Is the Anderson Bridge up there on top of the list for them, or is the Miramichi Bypass a priority for them?

The businesses have acknowledged that the minister has extended the olive branch to have a chat about it, but they are not very optimistic that they are going to get any results. Is the



minister going to speak in favour of the businesses, as he did before the election, or is he going to leave them hanging after the election now that he is sitting in Cabinet?

**Hon. Mr. Fraser:** I will tell the member opposite what I am going to do. I am going to continue to work with our leader and our team on this side of the House to continue to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in the Miramichi region. That is what I am going to do. I am going to continue to get the job done, whether it be opening a new school in Miramichi East, which will open this fall for the children... When that party was in power, it cancelled that project. It cancelled that project. We are getting it done, and it will open in September. A new school in Miramichi West, Max Aitken Academy, is already open. Children are already in it. Highway 11 is a \$272-million project for our province. A 240-bed, state-of-the-art nursing home will be under construction very soon under the leadership of the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care, who is also from Miramichi and who does a great job representing the people of Miramichi.

I have no lessons to learn from the member opposite, who just wants to play politics. I will continue to work with this team to get things done.

### Sexual Assault

**Mr. Coon:** Last week, the *Globe and Mail* revealed that New Brunswick has the highest rate of sexual assault complaints that police consider unfounded, at 32%. The national average was 19%, while, in Saint John, 51% of sexual assault complaints were dismissed as baseless. This is extremely alarming, since sexual violence is already underreported in our province. The New Brunswick Women's Council is calling on the government to take immediate action. My question is this: What is the Minister of Justice and Public Safety doing to resolve the injustice to women who come forward to report sexual assault to the police, given the low conviction rate?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I hope that the member opposite does not mind my getting up on this, as the Minister responsible for Women's Equality and also as Premier. This is very troubling, and it is something that is alarming and that we are very much aware of. I just want to let you know and update the members of the Legislature on what has been done since this report came out.

We have actually had a meeting and conversation with the ministers responsible for women's equality in the Atlantic Canada Region, with Newfoundland and Labrador sending the Deputy Speaker, whom you introduced just last week. We discussed this very issue of how we can coordinate a response that is appropriate, to make sure that we look into this very troublesome situation. We also had a conversation with the minister responsible federally. The same message was given to her, that we wanted to work with the federal government as well on any response that it would see forthcoming, based on this report.

I thank the leader of the third party very much for bringing this to the attention of the Legislature.



**Mr. Coon:** All New Brunswick police forces have committed to reviewing the sexual assault complaints they have dismissed, but the New Brunswick Women's Council wants the case review process to involve experts from sexual assault crisis centres. The question is: Will the minister ensure that our police forces include those with the frontline expertise and direct service experience with sexual violence in these case reviews?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Again, I will get up just to mention quickly to the member that we, as a government, are taking this very seriously and want to work with our Atlantic Region counterparts as well as with the federal government in any response that we would all deem appropriate. Officials have already been asked to discuss exactly what this could look like and how we could coordinate our efforts to analyze this situation and, ultimately, rectify it.

To the point about the Women's Council, just to let the member opposite and all the Legislature know, I did meet with the Women's Council this weekend, on Saturday. We discussed this very topic. I let the council know that we are working with our counterparts in the region and federally to make sure that we have a response and analysis and that, of course, we rectify this situation as soon as possible. Exactly how we will go about that does remain to be seen, but, at this point, I can tell you that we are taking this very seriously and working with our colleagues to make sure that we move this file forward as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Coon:** It is great to see the Premier taking this as seriously as he is in his responsibility for women and as Premier. I do want to ask, though: Given the need for better and more consistent oversight of how our police forces deal with sexual assault, will this government investigate why 10 out of 12 New Brunswick police forces classified complaints of sexual assault as unfounded at rates higher than the national average? Will the government then report those findings back to the House?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** For us, this is a very serious issue, and we think it is very important to analyze the situation to come up with a response fairly quickly. In order to do so, we have already begun discussions with other governments, more specifically with ministers responsible for women's equality in the Atlantic Provinces and with our colleague from the federal government. We want to be sure to coordinate our respective responses and analyses. This work will perhaps be done as a joint effort, or we will perhaps all bring our own analyses of the situation to the table to coordinate our actions.

At this time, I can tell you that our government is treating this issue very seriously. We will have a response, but the exact way in which we will work with the federal government and other provinces remains to be seen. Very soon, we will update the House on this very important topic.





[Original]

## Education System

**Mr. Stewart:** Last December, the PISA scores were released throughout Canada. 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 about. The Francophone sector of education in our province is the fastest-improving education sector in Canada and, some research suggests, 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 again today: What did the Francophone sector do, or what did it buy into, that has helped it improve at such a rapid pace? Thank you.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** I applaud the Francophone education sector, which is doing good work for New Brunswick students; the results are very good. However, some explanation is required for the member for Southwest Miramichi-Bay du Vin.

[Original]

PISA provides a tool that is used for current practice to be able to have informed decisions going forward and continuous education and improvement. In reading and science, New Brunswick ranked specifically above the average for participating countries, and, in math, the average is equal to that of the participating countries.

Unlike most provinces, there is no significant difference in science and reading between Francophone students and Anglophone students. However, the Francophone sector did have better results in math, and we want to congratulate that sector on that. Math is one of the areas that we are now focusing on in Year 1 of the Anglophone education plan. The Francophone sector does an excellent job of taking a community approach to education, and we are now doing that with our Anglophone sector. We are putting the proper resources in place to be improved.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Mr. Stewart:** My point in the question is that, across the board, the sector is improving. It started four years ago, and it is still not where it would like to be.

My question is this. It is obvious to me that the two sectors, I am guessing, are doing different things. My question here again today is this: What did the Francophone sector do—it started this four years ago—that has had it improve across all areas? I think that it is very important that the Minister of Education share that information, because, if the two sectors are doing something extremely different from each other, they might work together and learn from each



other, and we might bring up all scores across the board in New Brunswick. Today, I would like to ask this again: Specifically what is the Francophone sector doing that has it improving in all those areas? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** We did extensive consultation over the past couple of years, working with the education sector and our communities. The Francophone sector is doing some great things, working on a community-based approach. Now, with our two education programs moving forward with 10-year education plans, we are also going to be doing those best practices in the Anglophone sector. We are learning from one another. That is the difference between this government and the other government. When the members opposite were in, they were putting up silos and they were not communicating. What I see today is our education systems working together and sharing best practices.

When a community takes ownership of education, good things will happen, and that is what is happening right now. Good things are happening in education. We have record investments in education. We are working together with our districts. We are working together with our teachers. We are working together with our communities. We are working together with our families. We are working together with everybody in the province. It takes the province to put this together. I am very glad that we on this side of the House will have one of the best education systems moving forward. I hope that the opposition will join and try not to...

**Mr. Stewart:** It is an answer that I seek. Between 2012 and 2015, the Francophone schools in New Brunswick attained the highest improvement rate in the country. In science, the country improved by 3 points while New Brunswick's Francophone schools improved by 27. In reading, the country improved by 4 points 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. As you can see, it is not so much that I am comparing both sectors to each other. It is just that the Francophone sector is improving rapidly.

I think that it is very important that we... The minister talks about sharing best practices and community involvement, but what is it that they are sharing? What knowledge can we in the Anglophone sector gain from the Francophone sector, which seems to be hitting it out of the park?

**Hon. Mr. Kenny:** I think that we are going to hit it out of the park. We are going to have a home run through working together.

In the Francophone sector, we see a community approach, and the community is getting everybody involved. The Francophone sector also does what we call performance management to identify the challenges and track the progress. We are going to use those tools and opportunities in the Anglophone sector, as is clearly identified in the education plan moving forward. It is important that we continue to use these best practices from each sector to improve the system as a whole.



Unlike the opposition members, who are trying to find a wedge issue again here today, we feel that we want to be able to extend the olive branch to the opposition members to have them work with us and our communities to be able to make sure that we can identify all the positive things that we have in all sectors of our education system. With the record investments that we are making in the right places, with the proper people getting involved, and with the community as a whole working together, we will hit it out of the park.

## Taxation

**Mr. Fitch:** On Friday, the Gallant government made a pair of announcements, one regarding the Sisson Mine and the other regarding First Nations gasoline and tobacco taxation. It has been reported that the two agreements were connected. However, I would like to focus on the taxation agreement first.

Could the minister explain what consultation was done and what consideration was given, if any, to the concerns of the independent gasoline retailers, such as decoupling from HST or providing a cap? Again, in this province, retailers need to know that their consultations were heard and some consideration was given to how they feel. It makes a difference for them with regard to their remaining in business and continuing to employ New Brunswickers in the province.

I know that the minister is going to talk about the 70-30 split going down from 95-5, but the fact of the matter is that the actual revenue from the budget is increasing by \$7 million. What consideration did the minister give to the independent gasoline retailers?

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Ms. Rogers:** I have to say, first, that I am a little disappointed that, a week after the budget, I still have not had a question on the budget.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The member for Riverview will come to order.

**Hon. Ms. Rogers:** However, I want to reiterate that, indeed, we listened to New Brunswickers. Indeed, we are honouring our commitments, and we are investing strategically for the good of New Brunswick, all the while protecting what New Brunswickers told us is very important—health and education.



We are so proud of our budget. However, we are also very proud of the new taxation agreements that we were able to collaboratively develop with our First Nations neighbours. These are collaborative arrangements. As we always do, we took into consideration all the stakeholders that are involved.

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

