

**October 25, 2017**

[Original]

**Mr. Savoie:** May I have permission to speak from a seat other than my own?

**Mr. Speaker:** Do we have consent?

**Hon. Members:** Yes.

**Mr. Savoie:** Since a substantial amount of time has passed since our last question period, the opposition requests an extended 45-minute question period, as has been traditional.

**Mr. Speaker:** Do we have agreement?

**Hon. Members:** Yes.

### **Natural Gas Pipeline**

**Mr. Higgs:** It is good to be back in the House. A lot has happened since we were last here. The Energy East Pipeline project is gone and, with it, thousands of jobs and millions of dollars of private investment in our province. The success of this project depended on strong leadership, and that is where the Premier failed. The Premier failed to stand up and speak out when regulations were changed on the Energy East Pipeline project.

Rather than take responsibility, he is resorting to deflection, trying to blame market conditions on the death of this project, but TransCanada blamed changing regulations. Donald Savoie, the former head of pipelines for TransCanada, blamed changing regulations and politics. Senator Joe Day, Frank McKenna, and countless others are all contradicting the Premier.

Meanwhile, the Premier has been repeating the same old message as all the federal MPs. Are the Premier's reading and speaking notes provided from Ottawa today? Is the Premier ready to admit that changing regulations killed the Energy East Pipeline project and that this Premier did not stand up for this province to make it happen?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** First, I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition and the opposition members for their well wishes toward Karine and me. We had a great day, about 10 days ago now. We are very lucky New Brunswickers and individuals, and I am a very happy person to have found her and to have such a wonderful partner.



I want to address, certainly, the question of the Leader of the Opposition. I think that he was in the Legislature and would remember that we passed unanimously, when he was in government and we were the opposition—I was the Leader of the Opposition at the time—a motion saying that we in this Legislature support the Energy East Pipeline project. We did so again—it was unanimous, minus one, with the leader of the third party not supporting it—not too long ago.

We have said loud and clear, across this country and across this province, that we supported the Energy East Pipeline project because it would create jobs for New Brunswickers and it would help spur economic growth in New Brunswick and in the country.

**Mr. Higgs:** It is not about saying something. It is about doing something. That is the issue. I would like to table that question, as I will be tabling most of my questions, because I want some real answers. I want the facts to come out, and I want the public to hear the real answers, the real facts, and the rest of the story.

How many examples are there of this Premier turning his back on New Brunswickers to stay in favour with Justin Trudeau, Bill Morneau, and the feds? Let's consider how the Premier is failing to stand up on the small business tax grab. I arranged for four Atlantic opposition leaders to join together and speak out, and since we spoke out, three out of four Atlantic Premiers have spoken up and spoken out. Who did not? The Premier's silence was deafening. When we look at his regional counterparts . . . He sided with Ottawa, just as he did on health transfers, carbon tax, marijuana, and the list goes on. Why did the Premier refuse to speak up for New Brunswickers? Why did he not speak up for our farmers, professionals, doctors, and small-business people when Ottawa was suggesting there were tax cheats and loopholes? Our Premier needs to stand up and speak up.

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** When we see the demise of a project like the Energy East Pipeline project, which would have created thousands of jobs for New Brunswickers, we should all band together. We should not try to place blame where it should not lie. It is clear that this was because of market conditions. Just to give you a few examples, Terence Corcoran of the *Financial Post* said that "Economic reality killed the Energy East pipe dream". In the *Globe and Mail*, Benjamin Dachis, Associate Director of Research at the C.D. Howe Institute, said, in an article entitled "Basic economics—not regulation—ended the Energy East pipeline", that "The case for Energy East was weakened by the decline in global oil prices since 2014". It was indeed market conditions that, unfortunately, led TransCanada to pull its application.

When it comes to Bill Morneau and the federal government's tax reform proposals, we, as a government, have raised concerns that we have heard from New Brunswickers several times. In fact, we have done so in front of the minister and the Prime Minister himself recently.

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



## Carbon Tax

**Mr. Higgs:** Another issue on which the Premier did Ottawa's bidding was carbon tax. Remember that, while negotiation was going on and Justin Trudeau announced that he was imposing his carbon tax on the provinces, other provinces protested. Did the Premier of New Brunswick? We learned recently in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts that the Environment Department has done practically nothing on climate change. When we asked about carbon tax, it would not answer any questions at all. We also learned that the Department of Finance knows the impact of a carbon tax on our economy, but it would not share this information with the committee. Will the Premier share with the House the expected impact of his carbon tax on New Brunswick and on our economy?

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Climate change is the biggest challenge facing humanity right now. Everybody in this province and in Canada, as well as everyone everywhere in the world, needs to be part of the solution. However, I can guarantee New Brunswickers that our government will work tremendously hard to ensure that carbon pricing here in this province respects New Brunswick's economic realities, opportunities, and challenges.

We have worked very hard. A committee of this Assembly listened to the people of this province to hear their ideas and suggestions about how to fight climate change. We are working with other Canadian provinces in order to understand how best to implement, here in New Brunswick, a carbon pricing mechanism that will indeed ensure that we are participating in the fight against climate change. We want to do this while making sure we continue to grow the economy here in New Brunswick, as we did in 2015 and 2016, and as we will continue to do as the government of the people of this province.

*[Original]*

**Mr. Higgs:** I will be tabling that and the previous question as well. We are starting on a trend, where we left off in the last sitting. In this case, it is three questions, zero answers.

When the Premier first began supporting Ottawa on a carbon tax, he was repeating the federal sticky notes regarding how it would be revenue-neutral. We later came to learn that, just like the 5 000-job promise that did not mean 5 000 jobs, when the Premier said revenue-neutral, it did not mean revenue-neutral.

Winter heating season is almost here. Whether people heat with oil, natural gas, or electricity, they are understandably worried. They are worried that the Premier's carbon tax is going to force them to pay more to heat their homes. The throne speech referred to minimizing the impact on consumers. Will the Premier be up-front with New Brunswickers and explain exactly what the impact of this unnecessary carbon tax will be? It is an unnecessary tax because New Brunswick is meeting its current environmental regulations and is currently ahead of the game.



We do not need a carbon tax. We need a Premier who will stand up and fight the government in Ottawa.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Again, climate change is the largest challenge facing humanity. We all have to chip in, and we recognize that in New Brunswick, we need to do our part to combat climate change, all the while ensuring that economic growth and job creation are at the forefront of all our efforts.

I can tell this House and the people of New Brunswick what I said yesterday and what the minister has said: There has not been a mechanism for putting a price on carbon chosen yet for our province. There will be one.

What I will suggest to the Leader of the Opposition is this: Instead of fearmongering, instead of trying to deny that we, as New Brunswickers and as Canadians, have to step up to fight climate change, why does he not take this time, since there has been no decision made, to give his input on what that should look like? What should the price-on-carbon mechanism look like to ensure that we continue to grow the economy? I can tell you that on this side of the Legislature, that is what we are focused on.

**Mr. Higgs:** What is our goal? Is our goal to meet our targets in environmental emissions, reducing emissions, meeting great standards, and being the leaders in the province, the country, and the world? That is our goal. New Brunswick is ahead of those goals. Why would you target and why would you penalize people in this province if you are meeting and exceeding your goals? The only reason that you would do that is that this government continues its thirst to tax every citizen in this province and continues its thirst for more money because it cannot spend it fast enough. The government has to get more tax to allow for more spending and try to buy the next election.

The issue that I would like to address right here is this: Would the Premier agree that we, indeed, are meeting our current targets and are well ahead of the targets that are laid out for the next 20 years? I would just like a clear answer. Are we ahead of our targets? Are we on target? Yes or no?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I am certainly going to take the time to address the preamble—the very long preamble—of the Leader of the Opposition. He, again, is choosing to fearmonger instead of participating constructively in the conversation that we should be having, as a province and here in this Legislature, about how we are going to play our role within this country to fight the climate change crisis, all the while growing the economy and creating jobs and opportunities for the people of our province.

Not only is he choosing fearmongering, but also he is choosing the word “fighting”. He wants to fight Ottawa and fight the Trudeau government. We want to do the opposite. We want to work with our federal government. We want to work with the Trudeau government so that we can create jobs and opportunities. The Trudeau government is focused on growth, focused on



investing in infrastructure, and focused on helping our people across the country develop the skills that they need to be significant parts of our economy. Like us, the Trudeau government is focused on taxing the 1% richest in this province so we can help workers in our province, unlike the opposition.

### Government Agenda

**Mr. Higgs:** The carbon tax will tax every living soul working in this province and paying tax—everyone who is driving a car, everyone who is paying a fuel bill, everyone who buys anything. It is all going to show up on a carbon tax, and all because of the thirst of this government to spend money as fast as it possibly can.

We talk about working with Ottawa. I think what the Premier meant was obeying Ottawa, was obeying every last command of what is dictated to this province, because that is what we have seen. We have seen a province on cruise control, led by a Premier who is in full submission to the federal government in Ottawa.

On marijuana, that is our only economic hope that we seem to be seeing in this province—marijuana. Once again, siding with Ottawa . . . The leaders of other provinces are standing up and speaking out. Other Premiers say that Ottawa should share or bear the costs incurred by legalizing marijuana, but not New Brunswick. It is incredible that any Premier would not demand that the feds cover this cost.

This Premier has stood silently while taxes, marijuana, and everything come from Ottawa. I want to know whether Justin Trudeau will just keep . . .

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** All this rhetoric about fighting Ottawa from the former Minister of Finance, who did not say a peep when we had, in this country, the worst Prime Minister in the history of our country for Atlantic Canada and for New Brunswick.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Stephen Harper was one of the worst Prime Ministers for our economy and for our social fabric in this province and in Atlantic Canada, and we did not hear a peep from the Minister of Finance of the day.

We are working with the Trudeau government because we agree with its growth agenda and we agree with its agenda of helping the middle class. That is something that the Leader of the Opposition does not agree with.



(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** He does not agree with free tuition for those who need the most support. He does not agree with raising taxes for the 1% richest so we can help workers in our province. He does not agree with raising the minimum wage or CPP enhancements. He does not agree with funding to the New Brunswick Women's Council. He does not agree with free tuition for those who need the most support. He does not agree with raising taxes for the 1% richest so that we can help workers in our province. He does not agree with raising the minimum wage or with CPP enhancements. He does not agree with funding to the New Brunswick Women's Council. He does not agree with investing in infrastructure. He does not agree with our commitment to keeping rural hospitals open in our province.

**Mr. Higgs:** Well, the Premier was right on one thing: I was Minister of Finance, not the Premier of the province. I was not in a position to deal with Ottawa on what is important to New Brunswick. But he has been, and he has not done it. On October 4, Bill Morneau announced that Ottawa would take in half the tax revenue, and there was not a peep from this province. Other Premiers have spoken out, but not the Premier, not the Premier of this province. Does the Premier think that it is fair for Ottawa to just unilaterally announce that it is taking half of the taxes? Is that why he stands silent while Bill Morneau and Justin Trudeau continue to take more taxes?

There is a theme here. There is a theme of this government: I will tax every citizen. The Premier . . . I will tax all citizens in this province as hard as they possibly can be taxed, because I am going to buy your next vote. I am going to invest and throw your money all over this province. Am I going to be able to demonstrate one result from it? No, no, but that does not matter because I will just make announcements of how much money I am spending, not how much I am achieving.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** We do not agree with the Opposition Leader, because we are in fact getting results. The New Brunswick economy shrank from 2011 to 2014, when the Opposition Leader was indeed the Minister of Finance. However, in 2015, we managed to grow our economy at the third-fastest rate in the country. In 2016, by working with New Brunswickers, we again grew the economy. The economy is projected to grow once again in 2017.

We are getting results by investing record amounts in education and by establishing a program that makes tuition free for those most in need. The Opposition Leader does not support this program, incidentally.

We are getting results by investing more money in our health care system and by doing so strategically. We are getting results by helping our seniors to stay at home longer. We are also



helping people to lift themselves out of poverty. Of course, we are growing the economy in a way that benefits everyone.

[Original]

## Cannabis

**Mr. Higgs:** The Gallant government signed an untendered \$80-million contract to buy marijuana from two companies with Liberal connections. Let that sink in for a moment. It reminds me of Atcon, but \$10 million higher.

The untendered contract is only one problem. The government plans to set up another Crown corporation to oversee the sale of marijuana. The Gallant government is choosing bureaucracy over business and politics over profits. The NB Liquor Crown corporation model is being heralded as what not to do, yet the Gallant government is doing that very thing. I am sure that highly paid patronage jobs are the goal of the government.

Will the Premier share with the House today any evidence he has that the model his government is now proposing is following the right model for New Brunswick? What possible indication is there that this is the best model for the province to introduce cannabis into our marketplace?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Let's remember what the goal is here. The federal government is legalizing cannabis so that we can get cannabis out of the hands of our youth and we can ensure that we get the proceeds from selling cannabis out of the hands of criminals. With these goals in mind, we have been working with other provinces and with the federal government to ensure that we have the regulations and enforcement of those regulations to ensure that people will be safe when it comes to production, distribution, and sales.

Yes, as the member opposite alluded to, once all of that is in place, this is an opportunity to create jobs in New Brunswick. We have a cost-competitive jurisdiction here in our province. If there is going to be cannabis produced, we believe that this is a good place to do it because of our cost-competitive nature and because of our strong workforce. Yes, we are going to keep New Brunswickers safe and, at the same time, make sure that we create jobs when the legalization of cannabis happens next year.

**Mr. Higgs:** I will table that question as well, Mr. Speaker.

Every other province has indicated concern about timing, concern about health, concern about regulations, and concern about whether this should slow down—but not this Premier, because we are forging straight ahead.

The other question, which was not answered there, is in terms of why we are spending \$80 million. Why are we giving \$80 million? The only answer I have heard is that we are afraid of



running out. This is weed. This is not food and water. This is cannabis. Why do we think that running out is such a big concern? Why do we think that we not only have to finance the companies—the Liberal-friendly companies that are going to be in this business—but also set them up and buy their two years' production? What possible logic is there in doing that and, once again, wasting taxpayers' money and taxing people more so that they can waste it more? Why would we invest in that?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** This summer, when the other Premiers and I met, we discussed the deadline for cannabis legalization.

Yes, we listed principles that have to be addressed before cannabis is legalized. For instance, how are we going to share revenues from the sale of cannabis? How are we going to raise public awareness across the country? How are we going to ensure that people are safe, whether it is on our roads or in terms of distribution of this product? How are we going to ensure that the demand is met?

I think people need to be reminded of the object of this exercise, and that is why it is necessary to be able to meet the demand. If we want to get the funds that will be raised by selling cannabis out of the hands of criminals, it is necessary to have the ability to meet the demand.

[*Original*]

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

**Mr. Higgs:** So I will table that question as well. Again, they have talked about it, but we do not have a regulatory regime in place. We do not know the safety issues around regulated and legal cannabis use, and we do not know how many other provinces are actually investing the kind of money that New Brunswick is investing. We do know that all other provinces are opening businesses at the same time, so this great windfall—this great economic windfall that the Premier likes to say is going to drive the economy in our province—is going to be in competition all around us. You have to wonder how this is coming about, where the money that is going to be generated from this is going to come from, and how much money it will be.

I have two questions. Has any other province invested in this business to the level of \$80 million, as New Brunswick has? What is the anticipated revenue stream that is going to come off of this model once it starts up and is running? Thank you.





[Translation]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** We are not investing in the industry; we are offering incentives to people who decide to invest in cannabis production. Yes, there are financial incentives for that. Yes, we are working with businesses to ensure that we will be able to meet the demand. It is important to do that. In fact, if we want to reach the goal of getting revenues from cannabis sales out of the hands of criminals, it is necessary to have the ability to meet the demand.

[Original]

We have been working on the legalization of cannabis so that we, as a province, can be prepared, since it was discussed in the campaign and since we knew that it was going to be happening. When we saw the election results and we knew that we had to start to get our ducks in a row, we formed a working group to ensure that we would have all the departments that need to be part of the conversation, making sure that we will be prepared for the legalization of cannabis. We believe that we are going to be able to do it, and we are going to keep people safe and get some of the economic windfall.

**Mr. Higgs:** I will table that as well. It is consistent that we not only do not get answers but that, always, something we have to watch very closely is the rest of the story. There is nothing that would be more relevant than the recent claim, over the past few weeks, about the reduction in the unemployment rate—the claim that it is going into the single digits. Of course, in that press release, there was not any mention of the fact that we have had thousands of people leave the workforce, that they have done exactly that. We have to beware of the rest of the story.

### Government Contracts

There are many issues revolving around the Extra Mural Program and ambulance contracts. Where does one begin? People are waiting for ambulances that are sitting empty because there are no people to staff them. ANB is refusing to give information to the standing committee because it is the intellectual property of that company. How is it that the Premier cannot understand the concerns of New Brunswickers when their health care becomes the intellectual property of a private company?

I would just like to ask one question initially. Why would we outsource this in an untendered contract with no real measurements defined and do so under the . . .

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I certainly want to take issue again with the preamble of the Leader of the Opposition during his question. He wants to talk about the economic record of our government. Let's talk about that, and let's contrast it with the economic record of the former Finance Minister, the now Leader of the Opposition. From 2011 to 2014, the Leader of the Opposition, as Minister of Finance, was slashing into health care, slashing into education, and making



statements that we had too many hospitals in the province. He wanted to cut into education, which we think is a crucial investment. He did all of this. He raised taxes, and he was still unable to hit his deficit targets.

He was, during that time, hurting our economy, and he does not understand why. It is because we need to invest in our people. We need to grow the economy strategically, in a way that helps as many people as possible. As the government of New Brunswick, that is what we have been doing. We have been raising taxes on the 1% richest so that we can invest in workers, and we have seen our wages go up in record amounts in 2016 compared to the rest of the country.

**Mr. Higgs:** The only things that are going up are our taxes, in record amounts. There are many issues revolving around the Extra-Mural Program. I do not think you heard the rest of that question, so I am coming back to it.

Where does one begin around the Extra-Mural Program and ambulance contracts? People are waiting for ambulances that are sitting empty because there are no people to staff them, and Ambulance New Brunswick is refusing to give information to a standing committee because it is the intellectual property of a private company. How is it that the Premier cannot understand the concerns of New Brunswickers when their health care has become the intellectual property of a private company? Does the Premier have any issue with providing the health records of New Brunswickers to a private company that sells life and medical insurance?

Between the ambulance, the Extra-Mural Program, and Tele-Care contracts, how does the Premier explain \$2 billion of untendered contracts for Medavie? Let's start there. Some \$2 billion worth of untendered contracts while privatizing health care—how does the Premier square this with the citizens of this province?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I am going to focus on that preamble again because I am not going to let the Leader of the Opposition get away with saying what he said. When he was the Minister of Finance, we had one of the largest tax increases that we had seen in decades in this province. He did that, all the while cutting into education, all the while cutting into health care, and all the while telling people that we had too many hospitals in our province. Then what happened? The economy retracted when he was the Minister of Finance. He thought we could cut our way to prosperity. Well, we do not share the same agenda.

We are investing in growth. We are taxing the 1% richest among us so that we can invest in our workers. We are investing in infrastructure to create jobs and to give solid environments for our children to learn in our schools and for seniors and families to go into our hospitals. We worked with the federal government to enhance the CPP—something that they did not support. We introduced Family Day for our families in our province, and we are going to continue to work with the people and the workers by raising the minimum wage to help them.

**Mr. Higgs:** I will be tabling the same question, I guess, three times.



Again, there are many issues revolving around the Extra-Mural Program and ambulance contracts. Where does one begin? People are waiting for ambulances that are sitting empty because there are no people to staff them, and Ambulance New Brunswick is refusing to give information to a standing committee because it is the intellectual property of a private company. How is it that the Premier cannot understand the concerns of New Brunswickers when their health care has become the intellectual property of a private company? Does the Premier have any issue with providing the health records of New Brunswickers to a private company that sells life and medical insurance?

Between the ambulance, the Extra-Mural Program, and Tele-Care contracts, how does the Premier explain \$2 billion of untendered contracts for Medavie? Let's start there. Some \$70 billion—\$70 billion worth of untendered contracts while privatizing health care—how does the Premier square this with the people of this province? How can he explain this in any way, shape, or form, handing over and privatizing health care to a private company?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** We are working tremendously hard to make sure we are able to deliver a high-quality health care system to New Brunswickers in all regions of our province.

[*Original*]

Health care is crucial to the social fabric of our province. We are investing strategically to ensure that we will have a sustainable, high-quality health care system in our province for generations. We have made some choices that ensure that we are going to innovate and that we are indeed going to be able to provide sustainable and high-quality health care to all New Brunswickers.

That is more than I can say for the Leader of the Opposition when he was in government. I would like to quote what he thinks about our schools and our hospitals: "I do not deny that we have too many schools and that we have schools in rural areas that are the only things left in those areas. . . . I do not deny that we have too many hospitals. I realize that we can be much better if we consolidate." That is what he thinks of our hospitals and our health care system. Luckily, we do not agree.

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

**Mr. Higgs:** New Brunswick's Extra-Mural Hospital is the crown jewel of our health care system. It is a shining example of something done right by government. Since 1981, the New Brunswick Extra-Mural Program has been cited nationally and internationally as an example to follow when providing public health care.

In September, the Gallant government announced it was handing over the management of the Extra-Mural Program in an untendered, 10-year, \$780-million deal with Medavie—10 years and



\$780 million, untendered. If certain targets are met, Medavie will even get a bonus. If targets are not met, it does not get a bonus but the people depending on the Extra-Mural Program will lose. Will the Premier reconsider? Will he put the health of New Brunswickers first? Will he stop the privatization of New Brunswick's Extra-Mural Hospital? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Health care is crucial to the families of our province, and that is why we are investing more in health care. That is why we are investing in the social determinants of the health of our families and communities—things that will help reduce poverty and things that will help our seniors live in their homes and in the communities that they helped build longer. That is why we are investing in infrastructure in our schools. Millions and millions of dollars have gone to the Saint John Regional Hospital, the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital in Fredericton, the Moncton Hospital, the Dumont hospital, the Bathurst regional hospital, the Perth-Andover hospital, and many others. We understand the importance of these hospitals to the quality of life of the people of our province.

Yes, we sometimes have to innovate and to do things differently. That is what we are doing. Yes, from 1981 on, the Extra-Mural Program has been seen as a great program, but we cannot be complacent. We always have to look to innovate and make sure that it is the best it can possibly be for the people who need the extra-mural services. We guarantee the people of New Brunswick that is what we will accomplish.

**Mr. Higgs:** An untendered contract with no commitment to be better will not get better. That is the issue—an untendered process to hand over a valuable asset of our health care system and privatize it.

## Health Care System

Staying with health care, let's turn to the Gallant government's tearing apart of the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Public health experts say that this is literally putting people's lives in danger. The senior editor of the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* calls it crazy, and he said that his senior public health colleagues across the country have been reacting with outrage. A former Chief Medical Officer of Health for our province, Dr. Wayne MacDonald, said: "I'm very concerned about the future of public health in this province".

Should we not listen to the experts? Is that not a better idea than gutting and cutting the office to free up money to spend elsewhere on issues such as Atcon, Atcon 2, Atcon 3, and Atcon 4, which we have seen from this government? Despite national and universal condemnation of the Gallant government's actions by health care experts, the Premier is moving ahead with this. Can he explain why he is ignoring the experts on the public health of New Brunswickers?

[Translation]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Indeed, the health of New Brunswickers is of primary importance. When someone is injured or ill, that person's health is the priority for his or her family. There is no



doubt about it. That is why we are working very hard to ensure that we are providing New Brunswickers with the best possible health care system. We will do everything in our power to ensure that people here, in this province, are in good health.

The Chief Medical Officer of Health will be independent. As you know, we put that in the throne speech, and we will be introducing a bill to that effect. Also, having people in government departments who ensure the health and safety of New Brunswickers is an approach that we think will work. Things are done this way in other provinces as well.

I can guarantee you that we take New Brunswickers' health seriously. That is why the bill ensuring the independence of the Chief Medical Officer of Health will enable us to protect the people of our province for generations to come.

[*Original*]

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

**Mr. Higgs:** Gutting the chief medical office comes on the heels of the firing of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Eilish Cleary. New Brunswickers learned that Dr. Cleary received a settlement of \$720 000 after the Gallant government fired her. Of course, this information became public only after the Gallant government was taken to court by the media. We have never yet learned why Dr. Cleary was fired, and perhaps we never will learn. We think of another case, which is when Rino Volpé was fired. He took his case to court, and he, too, got a settlement of \$700 000 for wrongful dismissal.

However, we do know who fired Dr. Cleary. It was the former Health Minister, a member of the Premier's Cabinet with a big public health conflict going on over Parlee Beach. Other people speculate that Dr. Cleary was fired over her study on glyphosate. The buck stops at the Premier's desk. Does the Premier know why Dr. Cleary was fired? Will he share that information, and did he agree with her dismissal? Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** The Opposition Leader, having previously been a minister, is very well aware that we absolutely cannot discuss a human resources case on the floor of the House or publicly.

So, I will remind the Opposition Leader that we are working very hard to ensure that we will have a health care system that is there for New Brunswickers. We want a health care system that is present in all regions.

That is not what the Opposition Leader said at the time. According to him, we have too many hospitals and too many schools. According to him, we should make cuts in the education and health sectors. According to him, we should not ask the wealthiest 1% of the population of our province to pay more. According to him, we should not increase the minimum wage to help



workers. According to him, we should not give free tuition to those who need it most. According to him, we should not invest in our infrastructure, our schools, and our hospitals. According to him, we should just help big corporations and not the workers and people of our province.

[Original]

## Jobs

**Mr. Higgs:** We will table that as well. Firing Dr. Cleary and firing Rino Volpé—for what reason? The firings were not justified because of their performance. They were political reasons, pure politics, at its worst.

In 2014, when he faced his very first questions as Premier, the broken promises began. Pages started falling out of the Liberal platform. The 5 000-job promise that was so clearly stated by the Premier on the campaign trail was changed. It was revised. It was denied. The Premier told the House that they did not really mean 5 000 actual jobs that could be verified by any statistical means currently in use. The Premier explained that he said something else, but we have him on tape.

What New Brunswickers know for sure is that there are no more actual jobs now than when the Premier took office. Statistics Canada figures show us this fact and also show us that the labour force has shrunk since the Premier took office. No job growth in three years and people leaving the labour force are not directions in which we need to go. Will the Premier confirm the Statistics Canada figures that indicate no job growth and a shrinking labour force since he . . .

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I am very pleased to have the opportunity to talk about our economic record, and I am very pleased to have the opportunity to contrast it with that of the former Finance Minister, the now Leader of the Opposition. When he was the Finance Minister, he was cutting into education and health care and helping big business. Where did that get us? We had an economy here in New Brunswick that retracted from 2011 to 2014.

Since then, we have been working with the Trudeau government, we have been working with municipal governments in our province, and we have been working with workers and businesses. By doing so, we grew the economy in 2015 at the third-fastest rate in Canada. In 2016, the economy grew again by working with those people at a pace faster than the Canadian average. In 2017, it is expected to grow yet again. That economic growth is being shared with the people of our province, not just with big business, as the Leader of the Opposition would have it. We had one of the largest increases in wages in 2016, putting more money in the pockets of the people of our province.



## WorkSafeNB

**Mr. Higgs:** I will table that as well. I know that the 5 000- or 10 000-job commitment and promise is a sore point, and it just reflects the truth of the situation that it did not happen.

The Standing Committee on Crown Corporations heard from WorkSafeNB regarding several reports and studies that are expected over the next several months. New Brunswick businesses were being prepared for another massive increase in premiums, as high as 50%.

Understandably, they were somewhat relieved at the headline that rates were going up by 15% rather than 50%. However, we learned in committee that WorkSafeNB was urged by the government to make the announcement of the premium hike that went from 50% to 15% long before the studies were complete.

Since the press release came out the day before the Atcon report did, can we see why pressure was asserted over the Crown corporation over that announcement? Did the order to fast-track the WorkSafeNB rate announcement come from the Premier's Office? Was this another property tax issue when, only in this case, we cannot afford to have the reality show up in the public again? We need to have announcements that we want . . .

**Mr. Speaker:** Time, member.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I am very pleased to talk about the preamble of the Leader of the Opposition, again, about our economic record. We have worked with the people of our province. We have worked with the Trudeau government and community leaders in every region of our province to grow the economy in 2015, to grow the economy again in 2016, and to grow the economy, as projections tell us, again in 2017. Contrast that with the former Minister of Finance, the now Leader of the Opposition. When he was cutting and slashing and helping big business, we saw the economy retract—retract—from 2011 to 2014.

I would like the Leader of the Opposition to recognize that this is the last session before the election. He has taken the view over the past three years that all he should do is criticize. He is getting to the point when he has to ask New Brunswickers to put confidence in him and talk about what he would do, because if he is not going to do it, we will tell them. He is going to help big business, cut into education, cut into health care, and shrink our economy.

## Jobs

**Mr. Higgs:** Well, there is fearmongering at its best, or at its worst. I would like to table that question, Mr. Speaker, because, as I am sure you know, the question was about WorkSafeNB.

Let's examine the year 2015 from the perspective of real people, everyday New Brunswickers. In 2015, 1 800 people lost their jobs and 1 600 people left the labour force. Corridor Resources



opened a new office in Calgary after the Gallant government killed the natural gas industry. Shutting out Corridor Resources cost jobs in the Sussex area. The Gallant government cut over 300 teaching and education support jobs in 2015. In May 2015, cuts to day care cost more jobs. Service New Brunswick offices closed. Courthouses closed by the Gallant government in 2015 cost even more New Brunswickers jobs. While the Premier crows about statistics, 2015 was not a great year for a whole lot of people.

When will the Premier face reality? Will the Premier admit that no gains in jobs have occurred during the mandate and that the lives of people in New Brunswick are not better as the result of this government?

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** From 2011 to 2014, the economy of our province shrank. Why did that happen? It happened because the then Minister of Finance was cutting into education, cutting into health care, and helping big businesses. That is what he thought would grow the economy, and we saw that he was dead wrong. Since then, we have been working with community leaders, the federal government, and the people of our province, and we have been investing in growth. We have been investing more in education. We have been investing more in health care. By working with the people of our province, we have been growing the economy.

We had to make some tough choices. The Leader of the Opposition is right when he says that. However, we are proud to have cleaned up the mess that he left us by making strategic investments and decisions, investing more in education, investing more in health care, and growing the economy, all the while doing something he was unable to do—cutting the deficit by more than half.

## Paramedics

**Mr. Higgs:** Our paramedics are in a state of crisis. Morale is at an historic low.

By the way, I want to table the previous question as well.

Overwork, stress, and PTSD are taking their toll in lives. In the past three years, at least three of the first responders have taken their lives. The most recent one was just last month. I say “at least” because Ambulance New Brunswick has declined to provide any information on suicide incidence among its 950 paramedics or any statistics related to the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder or treatment. We know that we have a terrible problem, but we do not know how widespread it actually is.

Does the Premier agree that the situation is crucial? Will he direct the Health Minister to compel Ambulance New Brunswick to share the statistics on suicides and PTSD among our paramedics? We have a problem. We need to address it.





[Translation]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Of course we agree that it is necessary to help workers in the province so that they are able to work safely and meet any challenge they may face, whether in terms of mental health, addictions, or anything else. That is why we, along with the Trudeau government, are investing in areas like mental health. That is also why we are helping people with addictions. That is why we also want to work with workers in the province to ensure that there is a balance as regards their safety.

[Original]

We are also going to ensure that we help workers in our province by introducing first contract arbitration. We are going to ensure that we show our workers that we know that they are important to the social fabric and are obviously very important to our economic growth agenda, which we all share. We are going to work very hard to ensure that our workers are safe and that our workers are able to be happy and have a good quality of life, which will ultimately help our economy.

### Government Funding

**Mr. Higgs:** The Premier continues to defend his irresponsible decision to give money to Sears despite overwhelming warning signs. Earlier this month, we learned that the inevitable had occurred and that Sears will close and cease to exist. People have lost their jobs at the many stores in our province as well as at the two government-supported call centres. We have also recently learned that Sears' pensioners stand to see large reductions in life, health, and pension benefits. The Premier had plenty of money and time to give to the company or to give to cannabis research, development, and products. What is the Premier prepared to do now to support the Sears' pensioners who have been impacted by this closure?

The second question would be, I know we hear a lot that Opportunities New Brunswick did not actually give any money, but how much money did the government give as a whole? Let's take ONB, the Regional Development Corporation, and all the other little holes that money can come out of. Was any money of any kind given to the Sears operation to set up its call centres, from any source within government revenue?

[Translation]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** As a government, our priority is economic development. Yes, when we try to ensure that individuals and businesses invest money in order to set themselves up in New Brunswick, it is necessary to compete with several other provinces and states in North America and around the world. So, yes, it is necessary to have an opportunity to provide or suggest financial incentives to these businesses. We do this so that we can stimulate the economy and increase the number of jobs in the province. We actually do all this in order to protect



taxpayers' money. We do so by providing payroll rebates. This means that a business only receives the financial incentive if it creates jobs over a specific period.

As for the Sears employees in particular, they are in our thoughts. We will work to give them an opportunity to get other jobs in the province.

*[Original]*

**Mr. Higgs:** I think I should go back, to understand, because my question was, Was any money of any kind given to Sears, from any—any—pot in the New Brunswick revenue stream and how much money? I guess ONB will come out and say this: Oh, we didn't invest. But what about RDC? What about other avenues of revenue?

I think I get from that answer that there was some. I think that the question then becomes, How much? How much did we give to a company that had no other financial direction that was being put out in the public than that it was going down, yet we would give money? How much money did we give this company from the resources of New Brunswick?

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Here is the answer: None. We provide financial incentives to enable people to start or expand their businesses, here in the province, but we do it in such a way as to protect taxpayers' money. This file is a fine example of how we are able to manage that.

*[Original]*

By providing payroll rebates as the financial incentive to have businesses start up or grow in the province, creating jobs, we are able to put a financial incentive on the table while protecting taxpayers' money. That is exactly what the payroll rebate that was offered did in this case. None of the jobs were created for the time that was agreed upon, so none of the payroll rebate was disbursed.

I think it is very clear that there is a stark difference between the opposition and ourselves. We are focused on growing the economy by investing in our people, asking the 1% to pay more so that we are able to invest in workers and in free tuition, raise the minimum wage, enhance the CPP, and do all these things when the opposition has been saying nay.

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

