

November 15, 2017

[Original]

Health Care Services

Mr. Higgs: I hope that the Premier is feeling better today and is more talkative. Yesterday, he did not rise to answer any of my questions regarding the Extra-Mural Program issue. I must say, however, that I actually received the same level of information or degree of answers with the Premier speaking or with him staying silent. He stayed glued to his seat, but today, I will again ask the Premier this: Will the Premier press pause on the Extra-Mural Program until next September or whenever the election is called and take the Extra-Mural Program question to the ballot box? Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, because it gives us the opportunity to promote this partnership, which deserves to be better known. It will lead to an improvement in the quality of services provided to the people in the province who receive home care services from the Department of Health.

This is a partnership that will improve integration of three unquestionably important services, which work very, very well individually, but will work even better together, when they are integrated. I am talking about Tele-Care 811, Ambulance New Brunswick, and the Extra-Mural Program. So, these three services can be improved under the very competent guidance of Medavie.

I want to reassure people that there will be no cuts, so they do not have to worry about that. All services will be maintained, and we will eventually see some great improvements.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: Maybe I was not clear. There was no mention of privatizing the Extra-Mural Program in the 2014 Liberal election platform. The people were not given a chance to vote on it in 2014, but it is time to correct that. Let's let the future of health care in this province be decided by the people of the province. Does the Premier have the courage of his convictions? Does he dare face the people of New Brunswick in an election on the Extra-Mural Program? Will he press pause and make the Extra-Mural Program an election issue in 2018? Thank you.



Hon. Mr. Bourque: I would like to refer to a certain quote here:

“What’s key here is the funding remains public, the standards remain public,”... “There are no user fees here. Those who want to use the word privatisation—it’s really used to scare people when this is a form of insuring there is greater collaboration.”

Do you know who said that? It was a certain man named Bernard Lord—Bernard Lord, the current CEO of Medavie and former Premier of New Brunswick. I will say it again:

privatisation—it’s really used to scare people when this is a form of insuring there is greater collaboration.”

We are not saying it. Mr. Lord is, and I think that the members opposite have an idea who Mr. Lord is. Again, this is not the “p” word. The “p” word that we on this side of the House have is patient care, and we want to improve the level of patient care in this province.

Mr. Higgs: The Vitalité Health Network, the New Brunswick Nurses’ Union, CUPE, and Égalité santé en français N.-B. have all condemned the Gallant government’s plans for the Extra-Mural Program, and those are only a few. All across our province, people are coming out to meetings with a common message: Do not mess with the Extra-Mural Program. Will the Premier face the people of our province in an election on the Extra-Mural Program? Will he press pause and wait until the people are able to vote on it in 2018? Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Bourque: The question is the same, so the answer will be the same. We are glad to be implementing this partnership, and we have allies; we are very glad to say so. They include the New Brunswick Medical Society and the Nurses Association of New Brunswick. A past president of a Canadian medical society also supports our initiative, because he sees its benefits. Moreover, last week, we also received the support of Ability New Brunswick.

These people see the benefits of this integration, which will lead to better coordination, greater efficiency, and increased capacity, so that the number of visits to these patients is increased. These patients will be able to receive quality services, even improved services. We will also be able to increase capacity in the system. We are therefore very proud, and we are moving forward.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: Since the Minister of Health is speaking on behalf of the Premier, I will quote something the Minister of Health said yesterday in committee. He said: People vote for a change in government to make changes, but they do not really want changes.



In that statement, I guess he is recognizing that this is a change that people do not want. He is basically realizing that he is getting all this backdraft from all these different groups. The experts are against the changes to extra-mural services. The people are against the changes to extra-mural services. The Minister of Health recognized yesterday that people really do not want changes. Would not the only way to confirm whether a change should be made be to present it at the ballot box and let people have a chance?

It is such an emotional issue, Americanizing or privatizing our health care without the defined benefits being understood. The root of the problem is that we do not know what benefits this brings to the table. We have a bonus program in place that is defined outside the contract. Will the Premier press pause? Will he run an election ...

Mr. Speaker: Time.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Bourque: The question from the Leader of the Opposition gives me the opportunity to set the record straight on performance indicators, which he says are not included in the contract; that is not the case. The contract does include performance indicators.

Here, I am reminding you once again of the five most important indicators, which are tied to financial penalties. So, we could not be more transparent and accountable than that. I would remind you that we are aiming for a 15% increase in visits to Extra-Mural Program patients, we are aiming for a 15% reduction in the number of emergency room visits by Extra-Mural Program patients, we are aiming to maintain the level of satisfaction at over 95%, we want to bring the wait time down from three days to one day between the referral and the time Extra-Mural Program patients are first treated, and we want to achieve a 20% increase in patient referrals by physicians.

[*Original*]

Mr. Higgs: The controversy arises when we cannot get details of the contract. We cannot get details of whether the performance clauses are within the contract or outside the contract. We know that the government has sole-sourced an agreement here—sole-sourced it to Medavie. What we want to understand is this: In terms of the performance clauses that the minister has outlined, are they indeed within the \$80 million? That means that we could pay \$75 million or \$70 million and get better service at the end of the day. Or, does it mean that the bonus program is outside the transfer of \$80 million per year and is basically a bonus that Medavie may not get if it does not achieve those benefits?

We are just trying to get to the bottom of what the agreement actually is, and for some reason, the government refuses to share the actual details. Are the performance issues that are being touted here outside the \$80 million? It is a bonus program that exists if the targets are met, or is it, below the \$80 million, a cost that Medavie incurs if the targets are not met?



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Bourque: The answer to the question from the Leader of the Opposition is no. Anyway, we are committed, as a government... As Minister of Health, it is my role to constantly provide better-quality health care services to all New Brunswick patients. That is what we continue to do, because we are about to announce many initiatives. We have already announced several, and this initiative is one of several components of our commitment to improve the quality of services. Since we are talking about improvements here, we are talking about measurable key performance indicators.

[Original]

We talk about smart objectives—specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. Well, these key performance indicators are exactly that—smart objectives.

Mr. Higgs: I think I need clarification. What did that “no” mean? Does “no” mean that it is not within the contract—that it is a bonus program outside the transfer of \$80 million per year? That was what I was asking. The minister answered no. What does the “no” refer to?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Bourque: Once again, I appreciate the questions from the Leader of the Opposition, since they give me the opportunity to clarify this wonderful agreement. Yes, obviously, this is part of the contract. There is the answer. I am very proud that this is part of the contract, because it shows...

We are talking about imposing penalties if the company does not achieve very clear and specific results relating to the performance indicators. So, we are talking about a total amount and penalties here if the company does not achieve the anticipated results. I have been talking about this for several days, even weeks. I am willing to continue talking about this, because we are talking about accountability here. As a government, we are accountable and responsible, and we always will be.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: In an effort to really nail down what the minister is talking about, is it a case that, where we have an \$80-million contract and a \$4-million bonus program, if these soft targets set by Medavie are not actually achieved, then that will cut into the \$4 million so that Medavie will not achieve a \$4-million bonus program? Is that what the minister is referring to? Is that what we are trying to say here, from the government side?

That is all that I am trying to ascertain here: What is the bonus program? What do the targets relate to? It would seem that they relate to \$4 million over and above the contract. The contract is an \$80-million sole-sourced transfer of services, and this applies to a bonus program



only. Is that the case? Yes or no would be very, very nice to hear so that we know for sure.
Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I have already answered this question. As I have said, everything is in the contract. I also want to note that these performance indicators are tied to penalties. There is a total amount, and if the company does not achieve the goals set, not by Medavie, but by the Department of Health, it will have to be accountable, and it will receive a penalty. Again, we are talking about very, very clear indicators here.

The most important indicator for me, as Minister of Health, is maintaining a level of satisfaction of over 95%. This will ensure that New Brunswickers... This level will be determined by an independent firm that has nothing to do with the New Brunswick government or Medavie. This is an independent firm that will measure results to determine if the quality of services is the same.

Mr. Higgs: Is the Premier willing to wait until next September to think about this and take the Medavie issue to the ballot box?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: You know, I appreciate these questions that give me the opportunity to reiterate yet again the extent to which our government is committed to ensuring the quality of home care in New Brunswick.

Indeed, the art of governing involves making choices. Our government is choosing to improve the quality of health care for people still living at home. This agreement will lead to improved services. It will ensure there is communication between these three integrated services; they will no longer be silos, but communicators. By doing this, we can only improve things.

Everyone—including opposition members, who have said this openly—knows that integrating services is the right thing to do. I can share quotes with you, because I know this is indeed true. The opposition is asking these questions to score political points, and I can understand that, but we are moving forward because it is the right thing to do.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Economy

Mr. Higgs: I am going to ask another question. Maybe the Premier will respond. Maybe the Minister of Finance will respond because it seems as though the Premier's goal is to have closure when there is no rebuttal.



Kevin Lacey has a letter out to different supporters of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. In it, he says that \$900 million more is being spent by the current government and it is collecting over \$700 million more in income tax and HST. This is on an annual basis. In the letter, it said:

To put that in perspective, it means the government is spending about \$1,200 more for every man, woman, and child in the province and taxing us about \$1,000 more for every person.

I would like to ask the Premier whether he agrees with Kevin Lacey's assessment that we are being taxed more in order to spend more and whether he agrees that these numbers are correct. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I appreciate the question, and I can tell you that our government is very proud of the fact that since we have taken the reins of government, we have cut the deficit of the provincial budget by more than half, all the while investing more in education, all the while investing more in health care, and all the while growing the economy year after year by working with the people of our province and getting things done.

[Translation]

We are very proud to be investing in programs to help our young people with literacy.

[Original]

We are very proud to be investing in things that will help put trades into our schools.

[Translation]

We are proud to be investing in order to provide a high-quality, accessible provincial health care system.

[Original]

We are proud to be investing in our infrastructure—our schools, our hospitals, and our roads—to help the quality of life of the people of our province and to grow the economy at the same time.

Mr. Higgs: I can only take that as a yes. He agrees with the numbers that are being put out. The government is taxing more in order to spend more.

I would also like to ask another question, another economic question, because often, the Premier talks about GDP growth and accumulates it over the years. Of course, we know how it is actually reported or analyzed. Nevertheless, GDP growth in this province has been cut in half since 2015. Could the Premier explain why that has happened?



(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is interesting because there is actually GDP growth, which was not the case when he was the Minister of Finance. The economy of New Brunswick retracted when he was the Minister of Finance because he was helping his big business friends. He was helping the wealthiest, and he did not understand why all his cuts in education and health care were hurting the economy.

In 2015, when we came to power, we worked with community leaders, we worked with New Brunswickers, and we worked with our workers and our businesses. We invested in our infrastructure. We invested in our children through education—historic investments in education, I might add. We have invested to improve and to ensure that we are sustaining our health care system so that it is high-quality and accessible for all. Because of all these investments that are strategic, we have seen the economy grow in 2015, at the third-fastest rate in Canada, only behind British Columbia and Ontario. That is why, with a record, banner year in 2015, we have seen the economy continue to grow.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Mr. Higgs: Once again, speaking without coming clean on the full details seems to be the basis of any sort of response.

Will the Premier confirm this list of cuts and closures that his government has made over the past three years: the bookmobile; the Gagetown ferry; SNB offices in Saint-Quentin, Port Elgin, McAdam, Saint-Léonard, Hopewell Cape, and Gagetown; courthouses in Grand Falls, Sussex, Grand Manan, St. Stephen; and schools in Browns Flat and Pennfield as well as Lorne Middle School, Coles Island School, and Saint-Paul School. Will the Premier confirm all these cuts that were made under his administration so that now he can just tax more and spend more to buy the next election?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The logic of the Leader of the Opposition is not meshing together here. He is right. We made some tough choices, and we made those tough choices so that we could be responsible with the taxpayers' money. We made those tough choices so we could invest more in education, so we could invest more in health care, and so we could invest to grow the economy.

I have a list of things that I am very pleased that our government did. I know that the Leader of the Opposition does not support them because he does not want us to be investing in infrastructure. We have Bathurst Regional Airport, the revitalization of downtown Moncton, and \$4 million for water and sewer in Grand Falls.



[Translation]

There is the amphitheatre in Edmundston and the centre of excellence for youth mental health in Campbellton.

[Original]

There is the Chaleur Regional Hospital, the Moncton Hospital, the Dr. Georges-L.-Dumont Hospital, the DECH, the Perth-Andover hospital, and the Miramichi Hospital.

[Translation]

There is \$11 million for Université de Moncton and the Shippagan campus of the Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick.

[Original]

There is \$12.2 million for a new 30-bed nursing home in Grand Manan, and there are educational investments on the Miramichi. I have more after the next question.

Mr. Higgs: The Premier could talk about cutting 302 teachers and education assistants in 2015. Can the Premier also confirm the day care quality improvement funding cuts that he made in 2015 that filled the lawn of the Legislature with daycare operators and parents and children? Maybe you could talk about how 1 800 people lost their jobs, including 250 teachers and 52 educational assistants. In 2016, New Brunswick saw the lowest average number of jobs in four years, 351 500. In 2016, New Brunswick was seventh in the nation—seventh in the nation—in economic growth. The numbers do not add up, do they? You can spin them any way you like, but the facts speak for themselves.

When is the Premier going to come clean with the fact that the tax-and-spend policy of this government is not working? People do not feel better about their home. They do not feel better about their quality of life improving in this province. What they do know is that taxes are driving them into the ground, and that is because of a government that has a thirst to spend and spend and spend. It is as simple as that.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am not sure where to start, so let me finish off my list from before: the Miramichi Airport, the Centre for Environmental Innovation at Mount Allison, the improvements to Highway 11, \$13 million for the Chris Saunders Memorial Elementary School in Quispamsis, Two Nations Crossing in Fredericton, \$4.8 million for a permanent location for the Fredericton Downtown Community Health Centre, the Centre for Healthy Living at the University of New Brunswick, \$50 million for the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John, Port Saint John, a new trade school for the New Brunswick Community College Saint John campus, Saint John City Market, the Imperial Theatre in Saint John, and the first new school to be built in Saint John since 1984.



This doom-and-gloom Leader of the Opposition has to start looking at what is happening around the province. New Brunswickers are doing great things. In fact, the Conference Board of Canada gave New Brunswickers, in its evaluation, an A+ when it comes to life satisfaction, so I do not know where he has his head.

Mr. Higgs: There have been enough scandals to go around, with property tax certainly at the top of the list. We will hear more about that soon and about the Premier's duck-and-hide policy in facing up to the reality of the province. We are talking about people in this province, and we are talking about people who are coming to us and saying: We are being taxed too much in this province.

Once again, let's talk about an independent group, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB). I know that the Premier's only philosophy on business is that everybody pays, because the Premier decides who wins and who loses and everybody is taxed accordingly. We know that is the philosophy of this government and the Premier does not much appreciate private sector business of any size. But CFIB says that 78% of its 5 000 members in this province either are against what the government does or say that we are going in the wrong direction. All those businesses cannot be wrong: 78%. Does the Premier put any stock in an independent review of just how bad his government is performing?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Small businesses are very important for the New Brunswick economy, and that is why we have introduced several programs and made a lot of investments to support them.

[*Original*]

Whether it be enhancing the small business investor tax credit from 30% to 50%; cutting small business taxes not once, not twice, and not three times, but yet again, with the introduction of the Minister of Finance's law yesterday, to cut them by 44% since we have been in government; supporting the Youth Employment Fund; offering free tuition; enhancing the SEED program to provide a skilled workforce for our small businesses; reducing and harmonizing red tape within the Maritime Region and thus helping small businesses to be able to sell their products and services in this region; investing in infrastructure so that our small businesses have the roads, bridges, ports, and airports that they need to get their products and services to market; or investing to foster innovation, we are helping and supporting our small businesses, and they are getting things done.



[Translation]

Student Aid

Mr. Coon: A large number of our young people are being crushed by student debt. When they graduate, young New Brunswickers end up with an average debt of \$35 200, which is 5% higher than the national average.

When the government introduced the Tuition Access Bursary in 2015, it eliminated programs that reduced the debt of graduates. It then raised the debt limit for students who finish their program in a timely manner to \$32 000. Is the Minister of Post-Secondary Education willing to lower this limit to \$22 000, as requested by the New Brunswick Student Alliance?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: I thank the leader of the third party for his question. You know, we have ongoing discussions with the different post-secondary student associations here in New Brunswick, and we have a very constructive ongoing dialogue with them.

Last week, we again had the opportunity to meet with the New Brunswick Student Alliance, and we had a very good discussion. However, I want to remind the member opposite that it was our government, under the leadership of Premier Gallant, that introduced free tuition for post-secondary education and that we also enhanced it by introducing a program to lighten the burden on middle-class parents of post-secondary students by providing a tax credit. We are doing a great deal, and we are going to continue working with New Brunswick students to improve the situation.

[Original]

Mr. Coon: Last year, only 350 graduates were able to take advantage of the Timely Completion Benefit to help ease their debt burden. The average completion time for a 4-year bachelor's degree in New Brunswick is actually 4.8 years, but the debt relief from the Timely Completion Benefit is restricted to students who finished their degrees in 4 years. As this is now the only student debt relief program offered by this government, will the minister help ease the debt burden for our students by extending the Timely Completion Benefit to include students who take an additional year to finish their degrees?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Melanson: Again, thank you for the question. You know, the programs we have put forward provide free tuition in our public post-secondary institutions and assist families with children attending post-secondary institutions by providing a tax credit to lighten their financial burden. So, we are convinced that, over the medium and long term, these programs will lighten the student debt burden.



Last year, 5 800 young New Brunswickers benefitted from these programs, which helped them get free tuition. These programs will reduce debt for people attending our post-secondary institutions.

We are being very progressive and very active in making post-secondary education more accessible and affordable for our students.

[*Original*]

Mr. Coon: The thing about tuition is that it represents only about one third of the cost of attending university. Even those students who can take advantage of the Tuition Access Bursary will still be burdened by considerable debt when they graduate. The government has eliminated most of the debt relief programs that were once in place, and it has reduced the ceiling on the Timely Completion Benefit. Rent, for example, makes up 40% of the cost of attending university for the average student.

Interest on student debt adds thousands and thousands of dollars to the costs that recent graduates have to pay. I believe it is time, in fact, to stop charging interest on student loans. Will the Minister of Post-Secondary Education eliminate the interest on the provincial portion of student loans to provide some debt relief to New Brunswick students?

Hon. Mr. Melanson: We are working very hard with universities to come up with long-term, stable funding through memorandums of understanding, and the discussions are going really well. This will bring more predictability in terms of funding and how universities can plan ahead and how students can plan ahead when they want to register at postsecondary education institutions.

I want to remind the member that a lot of work has been done by this government to help students, both those who are in postsecondary education and those who did not consider postsecondary education because of the cost of going to these institutions. We have brought in the TAB program to bring free tuition to New Brunswickers who want to go to these public institutions. At the end of the day, it is going to be a huge benefit for them. It will reduce their debt load. We will have more prosperity and better-qualified people to go into the workforce in our province.

[*Translation*]

Health Care Services

Mr. B. Macdonald: The Minister of Health just wrapped up his tour of the province, and he says he received many positive comments about his plan to privatize extra-mural services. Can he tell us who supported this plan to privatize extra-mural services? Can he name these people or list these organizations, associations, or groups?



Hon. Mr. Bourque: Yes, these information sessions were very interesting and highly instructive. I appreciated them very much, because I learned a lot from them. We listened to what the people in attendance had to say. Contrary to opposition claims, it was not all negative; there were even a lot of positive things.

Quite often, people came with questions, and we were able to provide answers. Several people came out of these sessions with answers to their questions. These meetings were therefore very interesting, because people came out of them with clarification. What I heard most often was this: The situation is really not as bad as certain people, especially the opposition, make it out to be. It is not actually as bad as it is made out to be. When we properly explain things, people understand and agree with our initiative.

[*Original*]

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

