

December 13, 2017

[Original]

## Health Care Services

**Mr. Higgs:** The Premier stated in his talking points yesterday that the largest challenge facing our province is an aging population. The Premier has also stated that our largest challenge is climate change. I guess that the largest challenge changes as the Premier gets fresh talking points.

I submit that the largest challenge facing New Brunswick at this moment in time is the Premier and his government's many failures—failures in health care and failures in education and jobs and, worst of all, failure to plan and failure to be straightforward with the people of our province. When New Brunswickers look beyond the spin, what do they see? They see a government trying to change the Extra-Mural Program, the one thing that is working very well. I will begin question period again today by asking once again whether the Premier will cancel his plans to privatize the Extra-Mural Program. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I certainly want to join everybody in this Legislative Assembly in celebrating Brenda Robertson and her accomplishments, not only for the province as a very effective elected member but also, of course, for all women in New Brunswick and, frankly, across Canada for what she was able to accomplish. We are very pleased to be celebrating her and to see generations moving forward being able to see and hear of her accomplishments with the plaque and the photo that will be put in the Legislature.

When it comes to accusing us of using talking points as the Leader of the Opposition reads Dominic Cardy's notes on his page, I find that quite ironic. I have to say that the largest challenge facing this generation across the globe is indeed climate change. The largest challenge facing New Brunswick specifically is indeed an aging population. I can tell you that we, as a government, are acting on both.

**Mr. Higgs:** Now that the Premier has indicated a willingness to rise in the House this morning, I will ask the question again. We see that the government is trying to change the Extra-Mural Program—the one thing that is working well in this province. I would like to know this: Will the Premier, at this point, cancel his plans to privatize extra-mural services, explain the rationale for doing any of this, and let us all be part of the solution? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I am very disappointed to hear the Leader of the Opposition use these words: the only thing that is working well in New Brunswick. I do not understand why he would become the Leader of the Opposition and think that his job is to drag down the morale of New Brunswickers. There are good things happening in this province. Do we have challenges? Of course. We also have many opportunities that we have to work together to seize.



I can tell you that, as a government, we are going to take those challenges very seriously and work with New Brunswickers to overcome them. Also, we are going to celebrate when we overcome those challenges, and we are also going to work hard to seize opportunities to advance economic growth, strengthen education, and improve health care in this province. Again, we will celebrate each step of the way with New Brunswickers and not drag them down, as the Leader of the Opposition is doing.

### Property Tax

**Mr. Higgs:** That is good. Let's celebrate today by getting this issue out of the way. The Premier and the Attorney General spent the month of March denying that there was a problem with property taxes. While the Premier and the Attorney General denied and deflected, we learned from New Brunswickers that there was a huge problem with property taxes.

At the end of March, we learned from a whistle-blower that the Gallant government caused the problem and deliberately sent out falsely inflated bills. In early April, we learned that the Premier and his Chief of Staff were both involved. Their conflicting accounts and changing stories led to our call for testimony under oath. Tomorrow, we will debate a motion calling for that testimony. Today, as I do every day, I will ask the Premier to tell New Brunswickers whose story they should believe about the fast track: the story told by the Premier or the story told by his Chief of Staff. Thank you.

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Mr. Rousselle:** I have said this and I reiterate: Since 2011, thousands and thousands of property tax errors have been made in this province. Whether it be as Minister of Finance or Leader of the Opposition, the member opposite has never proposed any solution to the property tax problems New Brunswickers are facing.

Again today, it is discouraging, even embarrassing, to see a Leader of the Opposition who called for an Auditor General's report . . . This is an independent report that has gotten to the bottom of this issue. The Auditor General herself said that there is nothing outstanding or any issues that have not been analyzed and reviewed. The Auditor General made 25 excellent recommendations about this, and we are going to follow them in order to have a system that is fair and just for New Brunswickers.

*[Original]*

### Government Finances

**Mr. Higgs:** Well, that response was as expected.



In a politically motivated and hastily written letter to the Mayor of Saint John last Friday, the Premier erroneously claimed that New Brunswick was close to defaulting on its financial obligations in 2014 and that Ottawa had prepared a contingency plan for how to deal with bankruptcy. Former Finance Minister Joe Oliver stated this yesterday: "I was never presented with a formal contingency plan nor did I ask for one." When asked if his department was preparing for the possibility of New Brunswick's insolvency during his term, he said, "I'm not aware of any specific contingency plan prepared by the department." So the question is this: Where did the Premier get his information? Is it fabricated, or is it from some fact source that we cannot identify? I would just like a response to that. Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** Yes, indeed, we had intel that said that this type of analysis was done regarding New Brunswick. With that said, Joe Oliver says he does not remember that being the case, and we will certainly take him at his word.

The principle behind the point is the same. The principle is that the finances of the province at that time were in crisis under the watch of the Leader of the Opposition, when he was Minister of Finance. I do not think the Leader of the Opposition would deny that. I really just do not. In fact, he spoke often about how the finances of the province during his mandate were in disarray. He would know this. In June 2012, we saw an article from CBC about the rating downgrade we had: "The rating downgrade means New Brunswick is seen as more of a risk and could result in banks charging the provincial government a higher interest rate when it borrows money." This is because the finances were in trouble under his watch.

**Mr. Higgs:** If only we could take all people at their word. That would be very helpful. In terms of this intel, maybe the Premier could produce a document that would suggest this. Was it another squirrel that was thrown out there in the hope that somebody would believe it?

The Premier talked yesterday about fact-based decisions, about facts that are very important. Here is a fact that was thrown out yesterday that had no bearing, and, oh, he will now agree that Mr. Oliver . . . He will take his word for it. Would you not think that if a fact is thrown out with this sort of implication, maybe the appropriate thing to do would be to check the fact? Call Mr. Oliver and say: Do you know anything about this? Maybe call somebody who was involved in the system at that time and say: Do you know anything about this? Where is the source of the intel? Let's have them come clean. Or was it a staffer in the night thinking of some creative letter to write? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** If the former federal Minister of Finance does not remember the document, we will take his word for it. With that said, the principle remains the same.

Let's look at the facts. Let's listen to the politicians and the government of the day. In January 2012, then-Premier David Alward said . . . I am referring to this article by CBC. The article says this: "The Premier said he's worried about the fiscal hole the province has dug for itself".



In February 2014 . . . I quote the Leader of the Opposition, the then Minister of Finance, directly: “‘New Brunswickers also recognize that our fiscal situation requires us to make choices based not only on what we want, but what we need and can afford,’ said Higgs.” I can only assume that when the Leader of the Opposition was making these claims, he was trying to defend how he was cutting into education and health care. When he was defending why he was helping the wealthy and the large corporations, he made these claims about the finances.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I can only assume that he said that because the finances were in disarray under the former government’s leadership.

**Mr. Higgs:** I can only assume. I will write whatever I need to because it fits my assumption. Yesterday, we were going to talk about facts—not about stories that were fabricated, but about facts. Here, we have a fabricated story.

Do you suppose the Mayor of Saint John felt any better after he received that letter? All you need to do is get a growth plan, a growth plan like New Brunswick’s—a growth plan that is taxing every man, woman, and child \$1 000 per year more than it was three or four years ago, a growth plan that calls for unprecedented spending that is three times what our current GDP rate is, a growth plan that is putting businesses out of business. Is that the growth plan—an economy based on taxes, an economy based on innovation through taxation?

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Order. The Attorney General will come to order.

**Mr. Higgs:** Is that the growth plan that he is suggesting to Saint John? That growth plan has one place to end up, and that is with New Brunswick being in the situation that we are talking about. I would like to ask the Premier this today: How does he think that this growth plan will be sustainable in the future with an increase in debt now of over \$2 billion?

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** At least the Leader of the Opposition is recognizing that we have a growth plan. Indeed, the growth plan is working for New Brunswickers. From 2011 to 2014, under the austerity plan of the Leader of the Opposition, the economy retracted. It got smaller. It shrank, and the Leader of the Opposition did not understand why. Well, it is very clear. It was because he was cutting into education, he was cutting into health care, and he was helping big businesses and the wealthy.



We, as the government, do indeed have a growth plan, and it is working. We are investing more in education, investing more in health care, investing in our infrastructure, investing in tourism, and investing in small businesses by cutting their taxes. Because of this growth plan, in 2015, the economy grew; in 2016, it grew again; and in 2017, it is expected to grow again. The Leader of the Opposition does not seem to get it. A growth plan helps to grow the economy.

**Mr. Higgs:** Well, mirror, mirror continues. What about the report from CFIB that says that we are now taxed \$1 000 more for every man, woman, and child? What about the report that says that 78% of businesses are going in the wrong direction? What about the Fraser Institute—the longest waiting list in the country? What about the lost equity—the lowest values in the country?

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Higgs:** What about the lost jobs? What about those actual results? What about the fact that in the case of education, there were no real results, just record investment? Anyone looking from the outside, analyzing the activity and the results of this government, does not see the same picture that the Premier tries to continue to paint.

I suggest that the rose-coloured glasses have to come off. The reality has to be what people see happening. We talk about businesses, and over 50% cannot even qualify for the business tax reduction. People outside do not see it. Do those facts mean anything to the Premier—what he is reading from the people who really know it?

**Mr. Speaker:** Time.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I can agree with one thing that the Leader of the Opposition said. When it comes to economic growth, education, and health care, we are indeed making record investments. That is because we have a growth plan that is working and helping all New Brunswickers.

Let's look at the track record of the Leader of the Opposition with his austerity plan. When he was the Minister of Finance, this is what happened. And he wants to talk about job losses. It was the first government since records began to have a net loss of jobs over its mandate. We had the first population decline in six years. We had a credit rating downgrade in 2012. We were rated the worst economy in the country in 2014 by the Conference Board of Canada, and GDP growth was last in Canada in 2013 and 2011 and second last in 2012. Since then, we were the third best at growing our economy in 2015, and we will continue to grow the economy—yes, with our growth plan.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.



## Health Care Services

**Mr. Northrup:** A lot more rhetoric from the other side.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Northrup:** There are many, many offices in the Extra-Mural Program in this great province of New Brunswick. In talking to constituents, seniors, and stakeholders, I heard that they are concerned about which ones will stay open and which ones will be locked up. Can the Premier tell the people of New Brunswick what will happen? Has this been decided yet, or will this remain as some of the unanswered questions with the fast-tracking of the Extra-Mural Program?

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I have to get up on this one, because if the member opposite wants to ask questions of someone in this Legislature about things that will close, he should be looking to the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition said, when he was Minister of Finance, that there were too many hospitals in this province, that there was no doubt in his mind that we have to consolidate the hospitals. If the member opposite has questions about what could potentially close in the future, he should look to the Leader of the Opposition. I can tell you that one of the first ones that would be looked at by the Leader of the Opposition would, indeed, be the hospital in Sussex.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Portland-Simonds will come to order. The member for Moncton Southwest will come to order. The member for . . .

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I think that New Brunswickers have spoken loud and clear. They want us to invest more in education. They want us to invest in economic growth. They want us to invest in health care and keep all rural hospitals open, including in Sussex.

**Mr. Northrup:** It would be over my dead body that the Sussex Health Centre would ever close.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Northrup:** I want to ask the Premier up front: Who is fearmongering now? Who is fearmongering now?

(Interjection.)



**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Shediac—Beaubassin—Cap-Pelé will come to order.

**Mr. Northrup:** We are about telling the truth over on this side. Too bad it did not resonate over on the other side.

With reference to the questions of last week, has the plan been put in place with the EMTs representing the extra-mural service in the homes, for those who are receiving great care in their homes now? Why try to fix something that is not broken? The Extra-Mural Program has done a phenomenal job in years past, but now, it is in jeopardy. How does the Premier plan on satisfying the seniors and the handicapped children that nothing will change after January 1? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I want to be very clear: We support the member opposite in his claim that the Sussex hospital would close only over his dead body. We feel the exact same way about every rural hospital in this province. I commend the member opposite on that claim and on saying that here in this Legislature, but I have to ask him this: Has he had a conversation with the Leader of the Opposition?

It is not fearmongering when you take a quote from a person and you repeat it, asking the person to clarify. He said it himself, unprompted, as the Minister of Finance. In his opinion, there were too many hospitals in this province and, in his opinion, we had to consolidate. Well, if there is going to be consolidation and if there is going to be fewer hospitals, as the Leader of the Opposition would want, the small hospitals in rural New Brunswick, such as in Sussex, would be the first ones that the Leader of the Opposition would touch.

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

**Mr. Northrup:** I stand here as the member for Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, and I am very, very proud of the Sussex Health Centre. In fact, in a recent survey, it was noted that it is the cleanest hospital in the province. That is a great model to go by. I stand here today promoting the Sussex Health Centre, and I will do that, either in Fredericton or back in my home riding of Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, every day that I am an MLA.

We in the opposition are about telling it the way it is, and today I am telling it the way it is. I am asking the Premier and I am asking the Minister of Health this: When will this deal be signed? We are getting into the Christmas season now, and a week from this Friday will be December 22, when the House closes. Will this deal be signed before then, during the Christmas holidays, or on January 1? Thank you.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I have to sympathize with the member opposite. I can see what he is doing today, getting on his feet and talking about how the Sussex hospital is a great institution that is doing great things and providing great care to the people in that region of the province. I understand why he is doing that, because he wants to make sure that it would not be a hospital that the Leader of the Opposition would close if he were the Premier. That is what the Leader



of the Opposition has done to his own caucus. The members opposite are fearful that their own hospitals in their own regions may be closed.

This is not fearmongering. When he was the Finance Minister, the Leader of the Opposition said that in his opinion, there were too many hospitals. He said that in his opinion, we needed to consolidate. Well, if I were one of the members opposite, I would be very fearful for a hospital like the one in Sussex. However, I can tell you that the member opposite should not fear because we, as a government, are going to ensure that as long as I am the Premier and we are the government, no rural hospitals will close in this province.

[*Translation*]

### Climate Change

**Mr. Coon:** Last June, it was the federal government's turn to announce that New Brunswick would receive \$51 million from the Low Carbon Economy Fund to reduce fossil fuel dependency. Six months later, New Brunswickers still have no details about this bilateral agreement with Ottawa.

When will the Minister of Environment and Local Government finally table a copy of the Canada-New Brunswick bilateral agreement on the low-carbon economy in the House so that people can understand the goals, objectives, activities, and performance indicators?

**Hon. Mr. Rousselle:** I want to thank the member opposite for his question. You know, as we have often said, climate change is the greatest challenge for our planet, and we have to deal with it. We are proud to be working with the federal government. Last week, I had the opportunity to announce that, with the help of NB Power and the federal government, our province was going to invest \$234 million—\$234 million—in energy-efficiency measures in order to achieve energy savings and efficiencies.

As a responsible government, I think we are showing that we are dealing with climate change. Over the next few days or weeks, I will be proud to announce, with the federal government, the different things we will be doing.

Obviously, we have a lot to do and a lot to announce, and, in the very near future, I will be pleased to specifically respond to the question from the leader of the third party in the House.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Coon:** So the answer is, no, the minister will not submit the agreement with Ottawa on how we are going to spend the \$51 million to help New Brunswickers reduce their heating costs. You know, New Brunswick has a golden opportunity to be the first province to grow a truly green economy, to fuel it with green energy, and to base our prosperity on green jobs. That is a challenge for the future of New Brunswick that does not require timid action. It requires bold action, and this government is not taking bold action. It is being timid. I want to know, for





example, how much of that \$51 million is going to go to New Brunswick families and small businesses to help them reduce their energy costs, to help them reduce their energy needs, and to help them adopt renewable technologies.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Rousselle:** It would appear the leader of the third party in the House and I completely agree, and the government agrees too.

So, we are going to invest this money—I reiterate that the amount in question is \$234 million, of which \$51 million comes from the federal government—in different energy conservation programs and measures.

As a government, we are proud of everything we have announced and everything we will announce in the future. When we announced this \$234-million investment last week, we very clearly said we would provide details in the near future. I regret that the leader of the third party does not seem to understand that there is preliminary work to do, and we are doing it. I will be pleased to announce all the measures in the very near future.

I reiterate: We are a government of action that wants to fight climate change responsibly in order to protect energy consumers, meaning everyone in this province. We want to do this while being respectful of the environment and fighting climate change.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Coon:** Most of the money that the minister has announced to date is going to be spent on the government's own operations, not to help New Brunswickers reduce their energy costs, not to help families reduce their heating bills, and not to help businesses convert to renewable energy technologies and clean technology. In fact, there has been no money announced to help New Brunswickers who heat with oil, who heat with natural gas, or who heat with carbon-based fuels. You have to heat with electricity to access any money to help you reduce the heating bills in your home or in your business.

I want to know from the minister when he intends to help those families who do not happen to heat with electricity but use carbon-based fuels, which we are supposed to be getting rid of, to reduce their energy costs and to reduce their heating bills. What is the answer?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Rousselle:** It would appear the member opposite is taking a full page from the Official Opposition Leader's book.

We are also proud that the investments we are making to conserve energy include investments for the schools and hospitals of this province.



That being said, the \$234 million that was announced includes \$82 million from NB Power, and most of this money will be invested in assistance to energy consumers in this province. We very clearly made that announcement, and I regret that the leader of the third party in the House does not seem to have noticed.

However, I want to reiterate: We are going to invest in the schools and hospitals of this province. We are going to help energy consumers in this province by ensuring we are fighting climate change while being mindful of our regional economy and the economic realities of our province.

[Original]

### Health Care Services

**Ms. Wilson:** With the news this week that Ambulance New Brunswick had ambulances out of service 14 000 times, it is time for the Premier to cancel this extra-mural deal. With all the secrecy surrounding NB EMS and the so-called intellectual property, the Premier's refusal to make details of his extra-mural deal public is even worse. It is time to shelve the whole idea. Why will the Premier not let everyone see the details of this contract that he is signing? What details in the deal are so bad that he is afraid to make them public?

[Translation]

**Hon. Mr. Bourque:** I can reassure New Brunswickers that they have nothing to worry about concerning the Extra-Mural Program. There will be no cuts; rather, services will be maintained. The quality of services will be maintained, even improved.

As for the contract, I can also reassure people: They will be fully entitled to see it after it is signed. This contract will be signed very soon, because, as we know, the agreement takes effect on January 1, 2018.

So, in this regard, people will be able to see exactly what we have been saying for several months now: The whole point of this agreement is to improve services. We are talking about having more home visits for New Brunswickers, having fewer emergency room visits, and maintaining the quality of care and the level of satisfaction for New Brunswickers.

[Original]

**Ms. Wilson:** The Extra-Mural Program cannot become the intellectual property of any outside company. The Extra-Mural Program is the property of the people of New Brunswick.

My colleague was told by the Health Minister last week that emergency medical technicians will not be part of the extra-mural picture for years. That is as close as he could come to an answer. This is the level of detail that has gone into the planning for this extra-mural deal. We have



heard that Sussex will be served out of Moncton, but how would we know that for sure? The government is not answering any questions.

I would like to ask the Premier whether he will tell us how many extra-mural buildings will close under this new deal.

**Hon. Mr. Bourque:** The answers to that question and to the previous question are very simple. We are talking about the status quo when it comes to infrastructure and the people working within the Extra-Mural Program. All the health care providers will remain to provide the same quality of care that they have been providing since 1981, when Brenda Robertson created the program. It is a tribute to her for creating such a wonderful program.

The thing is, we want to ensure that the Extra-Mural Program maintains the high level of service, the high level of satisfaction, and the high level of quality that it has been providing for the past 36 years and that will continue to be provided for the next 100 years. Those are the pillars that we are building on right now to ensure that more New Brunswickers will be better served through the Extra-Mural Program and that they will remain at home, thankfully, because of the Extra-Mural Program and other programs that we are putting forward.

**Mr. Higgs:** We learned today that the letter that was sent to the Mayor of Saint John actually had information in it that was not factual. This is not the first time that we have heard that sort of thing. I want to go back to a statement that the Premier made here this morning. He made a statement. We may need to go to Hansard, but I think I have it correct. He said this: No doubt in his mind that rural hospitals need to close.

Now, that is a quote the Premier referenced to me. I have no recollection of ever saying that, and I do not believe that. I would like the Premier to produce the information that has me saying that.

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I am very excited to provide the quote to the media. It says, in the words of the Leader of the Opposition, that there are too many hospitals and that we need to consolidate. He talked about there being too many schools in this province as well. I would be very happy to provide that to the media.

(Interjections.)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mr. Gallant:** I want to reassure the people who are listening to us right now—while the opposition tries to score political points day after day during question period—and tell them we are focusing on their priorities. We are focusing on growing the economy so that it works for all



New Brunswickers. We are focusing on investing more and investing strategically to improve the education sector and the health care system in our province.

In fact, our growth strategy is working: We are getting results. I am very proud of our economic growth. I am proud to say that we are prioritizing the education sector and the health care system and that our government will continue to do so.

[*Original*]

**Mr. Speaker:** The time for oral questions has expired.

