

December 15, 2017

[Original]

Health Care Services

Mr. B. Macdonald: While the Gallant government has been negotiating the deal with Medavie to privatize extra-mural care, there have been grave concerns around the province about the standard of ambulance care. It started when we pointed out that this government cut the ambulance in Minto. It continued when someone had to be loaded into a car in Saint-Quentin, and sadly, it ended with a fatality in Saint-Quentin.

So there are grave concerns around this province about ambulance care, yet at the same time, we learn, not through the goodwill of the Gallant government but, indeed, through investigative journalism, that ambulances had been off-road some 14 000 times. That means that for 50 000 hours, ambulances had been out of service. Will this government at least fix the problems with Ambulance New Brunswick before it charges into a deal to marry it to the Extra-Mural Program?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I am glad to be getting questions today. Yesterday, I felt ignored. I did not have one single question on this issue, and I appreciate that, finally, I am getting well-deserved attention for this valuable partnership. More and more, New Brunswickers are finding out that this partnership is going to be a great thing for home care services here in the province.

On the note about Ambulance New Brunswick, we have to say that Ambulance New Brunswick has met all its contractual obligations under our government. Yes, there are numbers that are significant, but when we look at the greater context, those numbers are not that high. When we really look at the issue of those numbers, it has to do with recruitment and retention issues. That is where it starts, and I would be happy to elaborate more in further questions.

Mr. B. Macdonald: I know that the minister wants attention, but I want him to focus on the facts. The disconcerting fact here is that the Gallant government has never acknowledged the problems with Ambulance New Brunswick. We have not heard from the government regarding the 14 000 times the ambulances were off the road, and we have not heard from the government that ambulances were out of service for 50 000 hours. We had to wait until investigative journalists dragged it out of them.

I wonder if the minister would at least now, in the House, acknowledge these grave concerns with Ambulance New Brunswick. At least put it on the record that these are facts and that the government is responsible for them.

Hon. Mr. Bourque: As I was saying, when we look at the situation with Ambulance New Brunswick, we have to put things into perspective. If we look at 2016-17 in terms of hours due



to lack of staff, we are looking at 21 270 hours. If we look at the total scheduled hours for deployment, we are looking at 789 264 hours. We are talking about there being not any staffing issues during 97.3% of the time, so we have to put things into perspective.

As I said, this has to do mostly with recruitment and retaining, and, yes, we have been taking concrete measures toward that. We now have three training programs instead of the one while the members opposite were in power.

Mr. B. Macdonald: I am glad that the minister is finally starting to acknowledge some of the facts here, and I am glad that he is taking a little bit of responsibility for it. In fact, recruiting and retention are direct responsibilities of the province of New Brunswick in this case. The government cannot slough it off on Medavie.

However, my concern is for the Extra-Mural program deal. We have discovered through investigative journalism—not through the largess of the government but through deep dives into the facts here—that ambulances have been off-road for an incredible amount of time. My question is simple. Will the minister now take this opportunity, considering the grave concerns about Ambulance New Brunswick and considering the stats of its off-road time, to now reconsider the Extra-Mural Program deal? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Bourque: I appreciate that question because, once again, it goes to show the wonderful work that Medavie has done with Ambulance New Brunswick. It has met all its contractual obligations during the last 10 years while it was managing Ambulance New Brunswick, and that includes the four years while the members opposite were in power. We have to put things into perspective once again.

[*Translation*]

As I said, in this case, it is a matter of recruitment and retention. Previously, when the opposition members were in government, there was only one training program available, in English. Now, under our governance, we have three programs available around the province, including one in French at CCNB Campbellton. Obviously, there is some catching-up to be done, which is normal, but we are confident that the steps we are taking will enable us to fill this gap.

[*Original*]

Mr. B. Macdonald: The minister is hung up on contractual obligations, and our concerns on this side of the House are for the safety of New Brunswickers. These concerns have been raised across the province, yet this government is determined to push forward a bill to marry the problems of Ambulance New Brunswick with the good service that is provided through the Extra-Mural Program. We know where that is going to end. It is going to end with a watered-down extra-mural service. We have been advocating on that on this side of the House for as long as possible.



By the minister's own admission, he has not fixed the problems with Ambulance New Brunswick, yet the government is still looking forward to closure to make this deal happen. It is time for the holidays. It is time to put this on pause. Will the minister take this opportunity to consider the safety and concerns of New Brunswickers first and to make sure that this extra-mural deal is not forced through?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: When the contractual obligations were developed, we made sure that the health and safety of New Brunswickers were the primary consideration.

I can tell you that we will ensure that Ambulance New Brunswick meets its contractual obligations. Yes, of course, there are still challenges. We will never be completely satisfied, because we always want things to improve.

As the minister mentioned, there are challenges with recruitment and retention. However, as he did say, we are in the process of taking concrete action to deal with these challenges.

[*Original*]

What I have to say is that I have yet to hear the opposition admit and acknowledge the benefits of the contract and the deal that we are negotiating—the benefits of ensuring that we increase the number of visits by 15% in homes across the province where we give care. The quality will stay the same, and the number of times extra-mural patients go to the ER will be reduced.

Mr. B. Macdonald: What we get consistently from the Gallant government are simple assurances and no proof. We hear the Premier today assuring us that the extra-mural service is going to be better, that the horizon is bright. The reality—the reality that the members opposite will not acknowledge—is that there are grave concerns already with Ambulance New Brunswick.

We know that those things exist, not because the government has been honest with us, not because it has been declaring them, but because investigative journalists have had to find out that ambulances were off the road 50 000 hours. Yet, this Premier wants to assure us that when he marries the good system of the Extra-Mural Program with the flawed system of Ambulance New Brunswick, the result will somehow be better for everyone.

We can no longer accept the simple assurances of this government. Now is the time to put this program on pause. Will the Premier take this opportunity, acknowledge the problems that he has with Ambulance New Brunswick, and fix those first before he marries it to the Extra-Mural Program?



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Once again, we have not heard the opposition admit that this agreement will bring very significant benefits to New Brunswickers. In fact, we will see the number of home visits increase, and people will consequently receive the home care they deserve.

We will not only ensure that the quality of care stays the same but also ensure that Extra-Mural Program patients receive more visits, which will reduce the number of visits to the ER.

[Original]

I want to repeat yet again that the members opposite have not acknowledged any of the benefits that this deal will bring to the people of New Brunswick. They have not acknowledged that the employees will still be publicly funded, that this will be a public program, and that the management will simply be done by a nonprofit organization.

We are working very hard to ensure that we have high-quality care for the people in our province, including all seniors who are living in their homes. We want it to be as accessible as possible in every region of this province.

Mr. B. Macdonald: Again, all the Premier has to offer this House are assurances. We have heard those assurances. We heard those assurances with the 10 000 jobs promise. We heard those assurances with the Energy East Pipeline project, and we heard those assurances with the property tax scandal. All of these point to the Premier's assurances in this House, and guess what! Delivery is zero on those.

This government has identified 15 key performance indicators in this contract. That is what the Premier has been bragging about, but we cannot get even the baseline from the government. It will not even tell us, for those key performance indicators, what the status is right now. If the Premier wants to offer us real assurances, will he now give us the baseline on those KPIs?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: As the opposition member knows very well, when we are negotiating contracts with certain organizations, confidentiality must be maintained.

[Original]

What I can tell you, though, is that the assurances by the Leader of the Opposition when he was the Minister of Finance that everything was under control were certainly not very reassuring.

When the member opposite was in the previous government, that government was slashing into health care and it was slashing into education. It presented an austerity plan to the people of New Brunswick, and despite our saying, in opposition, that it was the wrong approach, the



previous government was surprised when the economy of New Brunswick, during its mandate, retracted.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: The member for Southwest Miramichi-Bay du Vin will come to order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Well, we are not going to take lessons of austerity from the Leader of the Opposition. We are going to invest in growth. We are going to invest with our partners, the Trudeau government and the community leaders throughout the province, in education and in health care and, yes, grow the economy of our province year after year.

Mr. B. Macdonald: It is easy to see when you have this government on the ropes because, when it is in a bit of a tough spot, it transitions to its fictional story about economic growth. We know that this government is hemorrhaging cash into fictional job creation programs that have not manifested any real jobs. We know that this government failed the province on the Energy East Pipeline project and on export and resource development around this province. Those are the failures that we know. When we go around this province, we know that real New Brunswickers are still suffering. They are suffering under an additional billion dollars of taxation that this government has put on their shoulders and that they are struggling to bear.

We know the reality on the ground for New Brunswickers, but I ask this Premier a very specific question. He is bragging about how much better this system is going to be once the government rams through this deal next week. I want to know the baseline. Where are we starting from? Will the Premier at least give us the key performance indicators? If he is so proud of them, let's see what the status is now so that we have something to compare to his fiction when he comes in here next year and tells us how great it is.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Again, the opposition is not acknowledging the benefits that this deal will bring to the people of New Brunswick when it comes to home care. Its members are not acknowledging the fact that it will still be publicly funded and that the employees will still be public employees.

I have to take issue with the member opposite when he suggested that Statistics Canada's statistics are fictional. The member opposite's insinuation that he and the Leader of the Opposition are smarter than Statistics Canada is pretty worrisome. It is Statistics Canada that said that the government of the member opposite and the Leader of the Opposition, when he was the Minister of Finance, retracted the economy from 2011 to 2014. It is Statistics Canada that said that in 2015, the New Brunswick economy grew at the third-fastest rate of all provinces in the country. Statistics Canada said that it grew again in 2016, and, yes, it is estimated to grow off all that growth yet again in 2017.



[Translation]

Mrs. Dubé: People in the Restigouche region, especially in the Saint-Quentin area, are pretty worried about their health care options under the leadership of the Gallant government. They submitted a request to the regional minister and the government because they are sick and tired of fighting to maintain their services. These services are essential, since these people live in a region that is far from any large urban centre. This is what I am asking the Premier this morning: Will he respond to their request and grant special status to the Hôtel-Dieu Saint-Joseph de Saint-Quentin, since these people live in a remote region?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I can tell you that our government is prioritizing our health care system to make sure it is a high-quality system that is accessible in every region.

[Original]

The audacity of the opposition to get up today to raise that point is quite ironic in our opinion. Just two days ago, the Leader of the Opposition denied that he talked about wanting to consolidate the number of hospitals in our province. He denied in this Legislature that he said that there are too many hospitals in his opinion, and now, we have the member opposite getting up and asking about rural hospitals.

We do not have to have the word of Leader of the Opposition on this because we have his word. In 2015, he said:

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 understand the passion. I do not deny that we have too many hospitals. I realize we can be much better if we consolidate.

That is what the Leader of the Opposition thinks.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dubé: The Premier will probably also deny hearing the Opposition Leader say that he would not close any hospitals in New Brunswick, and that includes the St. Quentin hospital.

Admittedly, people in Saint-Quentin live in a remote area and need excellent primary care. They have made the following requests to the Gallant government: Will the Gallant government give them special status? Will it preserve all services? Will it bring back the services that have been lost, and, certainly, will it preserve the actual hospital in future so that these people can stop endlessly fighting for each service and for the quality of service that citizens need and should have?



[Original]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Well, we certainly have conflicting accounts today. We have the member opposite saying that the Leader of the Opposition will not close rural hospitals, yet he said, in his own words, that there are “too many hospitals”. Those are conflicting accounts, and they both cannot be accurate.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have the member opposite saying that the Leader of the Opposition would not close rural hospitals, but the Leader of the Opposition said: “we can be much better if we consolidate”. That was while he was speaking about our hospitals and schools. We have other conflicting accounts, of course, from the Leader of the Opposition. He said that he did not support and promote a tax break to the LNG terminal. Then we have proof, an ad—a letter that he signed indeed supporting and promoting the tax break that the LNG terminal received. It cannot be both for both those situations, so could they please clarify?

[Translation]

Mrs. Dubé: Our leader was clear: He will not close any hospitals in New Brunswick.

[Original]

End of discussion.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dubé: I now have a question for the Premier, because the people of Restigouche are waiting for an answer. Will the Premier give the Saint-Quentin hospital special status in order to preserve its services? The question is for the Premier and requires a yes or no answer. It is not enough to say, yes, everything is hunky-dory and the sky is blue. People are waiting for an answer from the Premier about the status of their hospital and the preservation of services. Will the Premier give them that, yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I can tell you that we have a special designation for all rural hospitals. When the opposition said it was necessary to listen to Vitalité Health Network, which said that chemotherapy services should be taken away from Grand Falls and Saint-Quentin, it was our



government that stood up and fought to ensure that, yes, chemotherapy services would be there for people in the Saint-Quentin and Grand Falls areas.

[Original]

It is great that the Leader of the Opposition has taken a political position, saying that he will not close any rural hospitals, but he is not fooling anybody. Everybody knows what he really thinks. When he was the member for Quispamsis, he said that there are “too many hospitals” and “we can be much better if we consolidate”. That is not our view, and I guarantee, as I always have, that rural hospitals will stay open in this province.

Carbon Tax

Mr. K. MacDonald: I would like to congratulate the Premier on finding both his voice and his feet today. Oh, that his federal cousins would come more often so that he could show off.

The government has refused to give any details on its deal to privatize extra-mural services. I wonder whether the government will be kind enough to share details on its carbon tax script. So far, we have a no-tax tax announced on Tuesday, followed by the Premier flying to Ottawa for a party on Wednesday. By the way, the opposition stopped the Premier from billing it to the taxpayers. Then on Thursday, we had the federal minister saying on Facebook that the Gallant carbon plan may be a low bid. We cannot help but wonder what is coming next. Will Ottawa be cast as the bad guy in this play? Is that the next page of this carbon tax script?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Climate change is indeed the biggest challenge faced by humanity at this time. Yes, Canada and every other country in the world need to do more to fight climate change, and that includes New Brunswick.

We are very proud to have introduced a plan that will actually help us to achieve this.

This plan includes 100 concrete actions to make sure that we fight climate change in this country while also ensuring significant economic growth.

Right from the start, we said that our carbon pricing plan here in New Brunswick would respect the economic realities of our province. I can tell you that we have worked hard and that we will make sure big business pays its fair share, without this having any impact on consumers in this province.

[Original]

Mr. K. MacDonald: The federal minister may have a slightly different take on the Premier’s statements.



The Gallant government put out Act 1 of its carbon tax script on Tuesday without even announcing that it was going to do it. Then the Premier flew off to Ottawa for a Liberal holiday party. Again, I will mention that the opposition stopped him from billing his party plane to the taxpayers of New Brunswick. On Wednesday night, the federal Environment Minister tweeted a picture of herself with the Premier at a party, and then on Thursday, the same federal minister posted that the New Brunswick plan may be not acceptable—may be not acceptable. Did the Premier help her write her Facebook post before he flew back from Ottawa?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The logic of his argument makes no sense, so what I will do is talk about how we have worked hard to have a made-in-New Brunswick price on carbon that respects our economic realities, challenges, and opportunities. I can tell you that our plan is well thought out because we worked with New Brunswickers to develop it. We are going to ask large businesses that are the larger emitters in the province to pay their fair share. We are going to ensure that there is no impact on consumers.

We have already increased the gas tax, as you are aware. It is higher than the Alberta gas tax that is being used by the federal government to develop the backstop. We are going to be making major investments in energy efficiency so that we can continue to play our role in fighting and combating climate change. Also, we will dedicate parts of the gas tax, in increasing amounts over time, to energy efficiency investments that will help to ensure that we are reducing our emissions in the province.

Yes, we will phase out coal by 2030, ensuring that we still have jobs in the region.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Mr. K. MacDonald: The Premier certainly does know about taxes. Under his stewardship, we are now the highest tax jurisdiction in North America.

When we ponder what the next act in the carbon tax script will be, one possibility seems too ridiculous to even consider, but I must ask this: Is the next act of the carbon tax script going to be one where the Premier is standing up to Ottawa? We really have not seen any of that out of this Premier. If it is, let me just say, that kite will not fly and it will not fly on the taxpayers' dime.

The Premier was told by Ottawa to take the health transfer deal, just as he was told to do its bidding on cannabis. Is the final act of the carbon tax script one where New Brunswickers have less money in their pockets? Can the minister provide some information to this House, instead of outside the House, as he so often does, on what the next step will be?

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have known from the beginning that the federal government will assess all the price-on-carbon mechanisms that are being put in place across the country, and we very



much welcome that. Yes, we will stand up for this price-on-carbon mechanism during that process.

When the federal government looks at the collective of carbon-pricing mechanisms across the country, it will see that we here in New Brunswick are getting our large emitters to pay a fair share. We are getting a price on carbon that will be dedicated to making major investments in energy efficiency that will help us to ensure that we meet our targets, which we have already met and which we hope to actually exceed. The federal government will see that we do indeed have a price on carbon to try to curb behaviour. We have a higher gas and diesel tax than Alberta, which was the jurisdiction that it looked at to develop the backstop.

Not only will we continue to exceed and hit the 2030 targets of the federal government in the Paris agreement, but also we will do so all the while growing the economy.

Natural Gas

Mr. Northrup: Could the Premier or the minister give us an update on the natural gas industry in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I really appreciate that question. It is certainly a good opportunity to talk about the other day when the Leader of the Opposition was pointing out that we are running out of natural gas. It is a typical scenario. The sky is falling. The sky is falling. There is no positive news coming from across the way. The sky is falling. Things are going sour in the province of New Brunswick.

The fact of the matter is that we dealt with this before with Sable Island when it went offline, when it was doing some repair work. Other gas came in from south of the border. The LNG plant was pumping up. We had no problem supplying natural gas to the people of the province. From Marcellus, from that line, there is more capacity going into the line, so there is more opportunity to have gas coming into the province. At the same time, we have a great LNG plant in the province that can supply lots of natural gas to the system and for export.

We will continue to work with the industry and work with the sector as we go forward on this.

Mr. Northrup: More spin, spin, and spin. We want to develop our natural gas sector in the province, and we have lots of natural gas. When the Premier goes to Alberta, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia, does he not ask his counterparts, the Premiers of those three provinces, what natural gas actually does for those provinces? It creates jobs. It fills motels. It fills restaurants. It helps to build schools, and it also means royalties coming back to the government of New Brunswick to pay for health care. Can the Premier stand today and tell us whether he has been talking to other Premiers across Canada about what natural gas really means?



Hon. Mr. Doucet: I really appreciate the questions that are coming forward. We talk about natural gas, and I know that his heart is set on natural gas in his region and on fracking. We have already gone through this. It is a discussion in which we have all debated. We have talked about this left, right, and centre, and the fact of the matter is that there is a moratorium on natural gas development at this point in time.

We have asked for social license, number one. That is a key item—social license. We need to have clear information on the impact on health, on the environment, and on water. That is number two. We need to plan to mitigate the impact on public infrastructure. We need duty to consult. That is a key element—duty to consult. We need to ensure that benefits are maximized for New Brunswickers. We have talked about ensuring benefits. What is the royalty regime? What is going to take place? What benefits are coming back to the province?

We have gone through this. We have gone through this, and we have rehashed it. We have talked to the stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Northrup: We know that those five conditions have been met. They were met months ago, if not a year ago. That is the reality. That is the truth on this side of the House—that those five conditions have been met. The only reason the government put that in place was to keep the moratorium in place until September 2018. I am standing here today, and I know that is going to happen.

Corridor Resources, which has been in business since 1999, has drilled 35 to 40 wells and has also partnered with the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan. They know what they are doing. They have \$30 million in their account that they want to bring to New Brunswick to do more wells and to promote this. Even in Boiestown-Doaktown, there is a big sign, 4 ft by 8 ft: We love natural gas. Does it not make sense to the minister and to the Premier that natural gas can be developed safely here in the province? We need it.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We note that the opposition again wants to keep on fracking. I think it is very obvious that this is not our position on that. This issue has been discussed at length, and I think that New Brunswickers are very up-to-date on this file.

[Original]

I do want to speak on a very important issue to the New Brunswickers who are listening. I want them to know that we have always known that, in fact, the federal government will look at all the carbon pricing mechanisms across the country. We will stand up for the carbon pricing mechanism that we put in place during that process. With our plan, we have beaten our 2030 federal and Paris Agreement emissions targets. We are committed to eliminating coal-fired



electricity generation by 2030, and we can find a new source of generation there. We have higher gas and diesel taxes than Alberta, which is the model province used to determine the federal backstop. None of the other provinces can say all these things when it comes to their plans to fight climate change. We stand by our mechanism, and by doing this, we are also going to grow the economy.

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

