

December 21, 2017

[Original]

NB Power

Mr. Higgs: It is hard to get serious in question period after all that frivolity and all the abuse that one takes through this process. Nevertheless, we shall forge ahead.

On October 23 of this year, NB Power entered into an agreement to install an electric vehicle charging station at a St. George service station, at 254 Main Street, Upper Letang, to be precise. The site was prepared, and power poles were installed. All was proceeding as expected. Then, one week ago, on December 14, out of nowhere, NB Power terminated that deal and moved the charging station to another business. This smacks of political interference. The MLA for the area also happens to be the minister responsible for NB Power.

Will the Premier or his minister explain to the House why this cancellation occurred? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I am sure that the member opposite is probably drawing a little attention because I am sure that there will be a few people watching. I think, at the same time, there might be a slight touch of amnesia. Unlike the previous minister, Craig Leonard... I believe that he had an office downtown at NB Power. Sitting in that office, he told them when to change the lightbulbs, when to flush the toilets, when to change the wallpaper, and even where to put electrical outlets.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I have to tell you something. Going by the *Electricity Act* that these people put in place, we do not do that. We do not interfere. We do not touch that stuff. I have to tell you something. Going by the *Electricity Act* that these people put in place, we do not do that. We do not interfere. We do not touch that stuff. The member opposite should know better on that.

Mr. Higgs: Deflect, deny, and push stuff outside the question, so the question comes back very clearly. We have learned that the businessman who had this deal cancelled is not a supporter of the local Liberal MLA. Over the last three years, the Gallant government has turned the clock back to the middle of the last century when old-time political patronage was rampant. Pulling a charging station out of a business that does not support the Liberals is just what we have come to expect. It looks as though one project got past the prying eyes of the Liberal patronage machine, so they had to deal with it.



How much money had NB Power already spent in preparing the site? We know that the power poles were already installed, just a few weeks ago. We know that the contract was signed just a few months ago. Now we know that they will likely have to be removed—more money spent, more money wasted. It is only the tip of the iceberg in the spending spree of this government, but I would like to know this: Would the minister say categorically right here in this House that he played no role in having this decision reversed?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: Just to set the record straight, I do not have an office down in the NB Power building. I do not intend to have an office down in the NB Power building. That is interference, such as they did before the *Electricity Act* came into place.

Maybe we will talk about the *Electricity Act*. We can get into the details of the *Electricity Act* very quickly. I do not think the members opposite read Bill 39 very thoroughly or went through the information that was in Bill 39. Bill 39 was set in place by the previous government and came into effect in 2014 after the provincial election. We can see what took place.

I think the member opposite should realize that there are some very capable people down the street who run NB Power. They do not need me to interfere in what is going on in their day-to-day operations. I think they can handle things quite well. For me to meddle in something as small as that, I think, would be pretty wrong.

Mr. Higgs: Do you know what I did not hear? I did not hear a yes or a no. What I did not hear was an answer, not that I would ever have expected one, but let's see anyone dance around the question. The question is clear. Did the minister play any role to influence the decision to cancel that contract at one location, to remove the poles, and to have the station moved to another location in his riding? Was the minister directly involved in reversing the decision that NB Power made on this project? Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. As I said before, they did not read Bill 39. They were not briefed by Craig Leonard on all the aspects of that. I did not run any interference with NB Power. The people there can do things on their own. They are very capable of doing things on their own. They can make decisions on their own on an ongoing basis.

If the members opposite would like to talk about Bill 39, I would love to talk about Bill 39. Section 68 of Bill 39 increases the power rates. They suppressed the power rates for three years prior to the election. In September or October of 2014, the rates went up. Why? Because the *Electricity Act* came into place.

Now, there is no interference with NB Power. Before, that was their mantra—to interfere with the operations of NB Power on a constant basis. The members opposite suppressed the rates for three years—0%. After the provincial election, rates went up by 2%. Why? Because the *Electricity Act*...



Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Higgs: A contract was signed on October 23. It said it was a great site. It was visible from the highway. There were all kinds of room and all kinds of areas for parking for people. It was agreed that it was great. It was moving forward, and poles were installed. Then, on December 14, it was this: Sorry to advise the owner that it would not be proceeding and that, according to clause 9(c), it would be cancelled.

During that time, something changed. Something changed that would lead to the minister being involved. Why are we putting it there? I will ask one more time. It needs to be just a yes or a no. It does not need to be a long preamble, not a long diatribe, just yes or no. Was the minister directly involved? NB Power can make decisions. I agree. It can, but it cannot make good decisions when the minister gets in the middle and puts forward his political will on destroying NB Power's initiative to do what is right. Once again, was the minister involved? Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I do not know what it is that I have to do to kind of frame it up to say this...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: NB Power can make its decisions on its own. I do not need to sit in the office and babysit it.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Members, order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: The *Electricity Act*—0%, 0%, and 0% increases for three years prior to the election. After the election, the *Electricity Act* comes into place. I have read the Act. As a matter of fact, I debated it on the floor. Before then, they were meddling in it, constantly meddling in it. You take 0%, and you do not allow it the revenue to grow, the revenue that it needs. They dug the utility into a hole, a very difficult hole for it to get out of. No signing of a proper contract for Point Lepreau, the refurbishment of Coleson Cove, and many other things that they have done to damage the utility and to set it behind... No, there is no meddling from this government and there is no meddling from this minister. I think that NB Power has...

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Higgs: It is vague at best, is it not? We talk about generalities, about being involved or not being involved. I was asking specifically about this project, a project with a contract signed in October and canceled in December with no apparent other reason of any kind. Yet it was



canceled. We did not get an answer. We got a lot of circle talk, a lot of process around, but no real answer yes or no.

Just so everyone is clear, because I think the minister deserves an opportunity to basically give a one-word answer, and then there will be no confusion. It is the last time that I am going to ask this question because I think it is clear from what the minister said so far that he was involved. All I want from him is a chance to clear his name in this regard. Here is a contract signed on October 23 and canceled in December. I want to know whether the minister played a role of any kind in reversing that decision and having that contract canceled. Yes or no?

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I said this at the front end, at the beginning: Unlike Craig Leonard, I do not have an office down at the NB Power building. I do not tell it when to change its lightbulbs.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Doucet: I do not tell the utility to change the colour of the entryway. I do not tell it to clean its toilets. I do not tell it how to decorate its Christmas tree. There are very capable people down at the utility who can do that. Therefore, we do not meddle in the day-to-day operations of things such as the member opposite is mentioning.

This is something that I found out about a couple of days ago. The meddling that he is claiming is going on did not take place. I think we should rest at that. I think the utility can take care of its own situation and its own issues that it is dealing with on a day in, day out basis.

Mr. Higgs: I said that would be my last question, but I guess the answer here would be “guilty”. Yes, he found out a couple of days ago that we found out and that there would be an issue. That is the part that he found out a couple of days ago. Now, it is an issue, and now, it is clear that somebody got in the middle, changed this, and made a decision different from the one that NB Power had already made.

Judges

The Premier has developed a history of disrespect for the judicial branch of the government. Those members rammed through a bill to gain control over where judges live. The Premier downplayed it by saying that it was not a priority and that he might never use the new power that he was granted, and then, at the first opportunity, he interfered with the judicial branch of government—quite the conflicting accounts. Even the retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is speaking out against government interference with the judiciary.



Will the Premier admit that his bill to interfere with the judges was a mistake, and will he commit to repealing it? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We will certainly be pleased to answer some questions about the *Judicature Act*, but I have two things that I would like to do first. First, I want to thank everybody for reciting their poems. To the member of the third party, if you get the chance to do this again, maybe you will want to sing. With the member for Fredericton-York, it is always a pleasure. He is very talented at giving these poems, so we thank him. Of course, it is great to see how multitalented the Minister of Health is. He can recite poetry, sing, act, and improve health care delivery for New Brunswickers.

The second thing I would like to say with regard to the member's preamble and with regard to his previous questions is that I could not just sit here. I had to stand and call foul when he was talking about patronage. It was his government that had a former leadership candidate for the Conservatives run Invest New Brunswick, had a former MLA leave this room to run Efficiency NB, and had a campaign manager run NB Liquor. That is patronage.

Legislation

Mr. Higgs: The question was not even addressed in any way, shape, or form, really. But let's talk about the issue around what we went through this week, closure. The member in the back row there would think that closure is a routine business. Well, it is for this government, but closure was not routine for every other government. There may have been closure. We had closure when we were there. It was on pension reform. It was one time—1 bill. This government has brought closure forward seven times, but it has not been on 7 bills. It has been on 24 bills. It has been omnibus bills on each and every occasion or at least on most of them, so it amounts to 24 bills. That is bringing closure to a whole new level.

We can talk about patronage and throwing money around, but then the democracy, the Act, here in the House is really disturbing. Regarding the whole issue, would the Premier agree that his government has invoked closure as never before, has threatened democracy through less time in this House, and has threatened democracy through the autocratic behaviour of closure on 24 bills?

Mr. Speaker: Time. Time, leader.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I am not on the right rhythm, but I will try to catch up. I do want to address the *Judicature Act*. It is important for the member opposite to know that there is a law in place and, yes, we believe that the law should be respected. We, within the Department of Justice and Public Safety, are certainly looking at the matter about which the member opposite was insinuating. I also want to make it very clear that we respect the judiciary. We want to respect all judges and the work—important work—that they do on behalf of New Brunswickers. However, we do have the ability, as you know, to pass laws, and of course, we would expect that those laws would be respected.



[Translation]

That being said, with regard to the motion for closure, I want to quote the Deputy Premier of the previous government, who said: “The opposition members decided not to use their time appropriately to debate the bill in Committee of the Whole.”

[Original]

The previous Conservative government brought in closure and used the exact same argument that we are using this week.

Mr. Higgs: It is not about whether closure can be used as part of the legislative process. It is about abusing the legislative process and using an Act or a rule to an extent that is beyond what is comprehensible. One might compare it to the situation in which we found the former minister of PETL in relation to a situation that was kind of beyond what one would consider as being possible, yet it happened.

I want to go back to the point. Would the Premier agree and would he acknowledge that using closure in this House 7 times for 24 bills would far exceed any normal behaviour that this House has experienced in the past? That is not unique. We have seen 17 000 repeals of property tax assessments. This government is setting new records and new standards that are lower than ever before.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The time-allocation motion that we have put forward allows for predictability and allows for the opposition to be able to plan what it would like to discuss and debate. I believe that the member opposite would agree that spending approximately 25 hours on one bill is a bit above the average. It is for the opposition members to decide whether it wants to spend 25 hours on a bill. That is certainly their prerogative. But they cannot then come and say that they did not have enough time for the other bills.

[Translation]

Again, I will come back to and continue the quotation of what the former Deputy Premier said:

The opposition members decided not to use their time appropriately to debate the bill in Committee of the Whole. If we find ourselves in the situation that the opposition members are condemning, it is because of what they decided; there is no other reason.

[Original]

That was the previous Deputy Premier under the Conservative government explaining the same argument that we are using. We are working hard to advance things that will help education, health care, and the economy, and we are happy to have passed them.



[Translation]

Health Care Services

Mr. Higgs: Could the Premier rise in the House today and address the fact that the Extra-Mural Program file is before the courts and that he should therefore wait before going ahead?

[Original]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We have yet to hear the opposition admit the following things, even though we have repeated them time and time again within the 25 hours of questioning and within all the question periods that we have had over the past few weeks. They are as follows. This is going to be a publicly funded program, with employees who work with the government and who go into the homes of our seniors and those who need the Extra-Mural Program. It would be a nonprofit organization helping with the management. There would be conditions with regard to increasing the number of visits that we would have in homes across this province and decreasing the number of times extra-mural patients have to go to the ER because they cannot get the care they need in their homes, all the while ensuring that we have the same quality of care. I would ask, on the last day of the Legislature in 2017, that the opposition admit these things.

Mr. Higgs: Since the Premier would like to have admissions, I would ask the Premier whether he would admit that this whole contract between Medavie and the Extra-Mural Program is in the courts right now. It is being challenged. Would it not make sense that a contract would not be signed until the actual court hearing has been held and the results have been heard? There are a lot of concerns from a lot of people across this province, and that cannot be denied. I would ask this: Would the Premier stay the signing of this contract until the court has had these hearings, has heard the arguments, and has made a decision? Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The deal has not been signed yet, and I cannot make any comments about a file that is before the courts.

However, I can tell you that it is unfortunate that the opposition has yet to admit that the Extra-Mural Program will remain public and that the employees who provide home care will be working for the government. Indeed, management will be carried out by a nonprofit organization. The opposition has yet to admit that there will be conditions to be met, even though we have said so many times.

This deal will allow for an increase in the number of visits to homes throughout the province for the provision of home care. We are going to reduce the number of times people who receive care through the Extra-Mural Program have to go to emergency instead of being cared for at home. We are going to do that while maintaining service quality.



On this last day of session before the holidays, I would like the opposition to recognize those things.

[Original]

Mr. Higgs: These decisions could be made very, very quickly. Even before the end of the year, we could understand the status of the injunction. We could understand the status of the court hearings in January. Would it not make sense to know exactly the status before signing the agreement? The Premier said that he is going to sign the agreement before the end of the year. A lot of people are concerned about this. A lot of people across this province have voiced their opinions in rallies and in outcries throughout the province, in every corner of the province.

Doing the right thing means listening. Doing the right thing means acting appropriately—acting appropriately. Let's at least hear the outcome of these challenges, and let's at least have an understanding of what this contract is going to bring forward for the benefit of this province, neither of which is known at this time. Would the Premier hold off on signing any agreement until these facts are known? Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The deal is not yet signed. Again, I cannot discuss something that is before the courts. What I can say is that we have, time and time again, described the benefits. The Leader of the Opposition just does not want to admit them. He just said: Can we not hear and see what the benefits are? Well, we are telling him what the benefits are. We are going to increase the number of visits we see across this province, which will allow for more home care. We are going to ensure that extra-mural patients do not have to go to the ER as often as they do because they will be able to get the services in another way. We are going to maintain the same quality.

I would really appreciate it, if the Leader of the Opposition still wants to have a debate and a discussion about this, if we can at least agree on the facts. We are telling him what the benefits are. He asked for them. We just gave them, yet again. So, on this final day, will he please admit that he recognizes now the benefits that we are trying to bring forward for the people of our province?

Mr. B. Macdonald: For the past two questions, the Premier has put forward five different facts, and I would like to look at those for a minute. First of all, he asked us to acknowledge that it is publicly funded. Yes, the Medavie deal is publicly funded. In fact, we are paying an additional \$4.4 million to hire 21 administrators and not one single nurse. That is why we are concerned about the public funding. He said that it is not for profit. Last year, they did not spend \$3.5 million because the ambulances were off the road, and they split that with Medavie. That sounds pretty profitable to me. He said that this is going to increase visits to extra-mural patients, but we know that ambulances were off the road 14 000 times last year. That means that people cannot even get the care that they need. Further, he said that this is going to decrease ER visits. We know that those ambulances spent 50 000 hours off the road, so it is no



wonder that people are not getting to the ER. Finally, he says that it is going to improve the quality of care.

We want to see some facts. Will the Premier at least establish for us right now what he considers the quality of care to be? Give us the baseline for the KPIs.

Mr. Speaker: Time.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: At least I am, for the first time, hearing opposition members admit that they heard us talking about the benefits of the program we are trying to put in place. So, I appreciate that.

However, it is ridiculous for the opposition to question the fact that Medavie is a nonprofit organization, and, frankly, it drags our current debate in the House down to a very low level.

During every question period, the opposition wants to deny the facts and replace them with alternatives. This worries us, because New Brunswickers deserve a debate on the substance of the deal. The truth is this: The conditions included in the deal will ensure that the number of home visits increases, which will decrease the number of times people have to go to emergency, while simultaneously maintaining the same quality of service. Those are the conditions that are part of the deal.

[*Original*]

Mr. B. Macdonald: The challenge is that for three years, we have been listening to the Premier's assertions. We have heard them, and New Brunswickers have heard them. The problem is that the facts and results do not bear up to his promises. That is our concern with Medavie.

We have been trying to establish the details of this deal for weeks, yet from the government, we get nothing. The Premier's arguments—his promises—hinge on the assertion that it will improve the quality of care. The Premier wants to talk about facts. Let's see the facts. For weeks, we have been asking for the key performance indicators. Right now, what is the baseline? What is the current report card? When this Premier stands up next year and says that things have gotten better, we want to compare them to the current status at least. The government has the KPIs and knows exactly what they are. Why will he not share them with New Brunswickers?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Let's go through some of the assertions of the Leader of the Opposition. He was going to balance the books in four years without cutting any services or raising taxes. He cut services, raised taxes, and did not balance the books. He asserted that he did not support or promote the LNG terminal tax deal. There is an ad that was put in the newspapers of our



province with the Leader of the Opposition's big signature saying that he supported and promoted the LNG terminal tax break. He said that he does not remember saying that there are too many hospitals and schools in this province, yet we have the Hansard quotes that clearly say that the Leader of the Opposition thinks that there are too many hospitals and too many schools. The opposition members say that there is no law in Saskatchewan with regard to special pensions and that they did extensive research. I heard them. It took us about seven minutes to find it.

The assertions of the Leader of the Opposition demonstrate that he does not know whether he is coming or going. All he knows is that he wants to cut with his austerity agenda, which will retract our economy.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Mr. B. Macdonald: As is not unusual, nowhere in that answer was there a reference to my question, which was about the key performance indicators for the Medavie deal. The Premier has stood up any number of times and told us how great the Medavie deal is going to be and how it is going to improve the quality of health care. What he will not tell us is what the baseline is now. What is he comparing it to?

The Premier wants to talk about facts. Let's see the facts. These government members have kept this deal secret from the very beginning. They have negotiated it behind closed doors with Medavie, and they have not been straightforward with the people of New Brunswick. Now is the time. The government brought in closure, and debate is going to end. Let's now see the details of the Medavie deal, and let's see the key performance indicators so that when this Premier gets up the next time, we can at least hold him accountable for something in here.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The deal is not signed yet, so we cannot divulge all the goings-on in the discussions. We did talk about what the KPIs are.

If you want to go back to the assertions argument, let's talk about Medavie, and then we can go into the other assertions of the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition thought it was bad that there was sole-sourcing going on with Medavie, yet when they were in the government, they sole-sourced Medavie and the drug plan. He said, when he was Finance Minister, that he would balance the books within four years—no problem—without any cuts or any tax increases. He raised taxes, made cuts, and did not balance the books. He asserted that he did not support and promote the LNG terminal tax break, yet there is an ad—and he has yet to explain it—that he has signed, where he is clearly supporting and promoting the LNG tax break for the terminal. He said that there were too many hospitals and schools. He denied that assertion, yet we have it in Hansard.

We see that the Leader of the Opposition does not know if he is coming or going, but he does know that he wants to cut. He wants austerity in this province to happen.



Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

Firefighters

Mr. Fairgrieve: There have been a number of questions recently about the operation of the Fire Marshal's Office. Earlier this year, in the public accounts committee, the deputy minister responsible for Public Safety indicated that it had been some time since senior officials within Public Safety had met with New Brunswick's fire chiefs. Most of these fire chiefs are volunteers. They serve their communities on a 24-7 basis. Can the minister confirm that his senior officials have corrected this and are in regular communication with fire chiefs and fire departments that provide such an essential service for New Brunswickers, protecting our homes and properties, especially at this time of year?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Landry: I welcome the question from the member opposite. As he said, at this time of year, it is necessary to make a point of thanking the Office of the Fire Marshal as well as all firefighters who are at work now and will be over the holidays.

That being said, in answer to my colleague's question, I wish to say that, when fires are being investigated, the Office of the Fire Marshal usually has to secure the premises. This can be done from the local fire station.

I know there have been problems with a few fire chiefs who did not necessarily agree with the idea of the local fire station dealing with securing premises where a fire has occurred. We are currently having good discussions with these people in order to try and resolve this situation. We know that there are roughly 15 to 20 cases a year.

[*Original*]

Mr. Fairgrieve: At the same public accounts committee meetings I mentioned, the Deputy Minister of Public Safety confirmed that the levy paid annually from insurance premiums collected here in the province had not gone down but that the total levy had actually increased slightly. This levy is dedicated to the operation of the Fire Marshal's Office, yet Michael Walton, President of the New Brunswick Association of Fire Chiefs, has disclosed that less than 55% of the levy collected from this dedicated fund has actually gone to the Office of the Fire Marshal. Will the minister inform this House as to where the rest of this money has gone?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Landry: We all know there is a budget, and I can explain to people how the process works.



With regard to residential fire insurance, we know that 1% of the funds goes to the Office of the Fire Marshal. There is also a portion of the automobile insurance for fire protection that goes to this office.

That being said, we all know that the insurance companies send these funds to the government. Here, we are talking about approximately \$3 million. We also know that \$1.5 million is reserved for the Office of the Fire Marshal, in addition to other things the department does for that office.

Knowing that, it has to be said that we are in the process of negotiating, because the money we receive is paid into general funds. We send the \$1.5 million from these general funds to the Office of the Fire Marshal.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.

Mr. Fairgrieve: Earlier this year, the Office of the Fire Marshal stopped dispatching its regional inspectors after normal business hours. Unfortunately, fires occur around the clock and fire knows no business hours. This has resulted in volunteers, volunteer firefighters, around the province having to secure fire scenes, often all night, in all types of weather. Then after working all night long as volunteers, they have to go off to their day jobs. Downloading a responsibility that belongs to the Fire Marshal's Office, not to volunteers, not to volunteer fire departments, not to municipalities and LSDs... Can the minister tell us whether he ordered this change, and if he did, why?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mr. Landry: At this time, I can tell you that we greatly appreciate the work carried out by the Office of the Fire Marshal. We also greatly value the work that firefighters do. I remember going to the home of a friend of mine who is a volunteer firefighter. His beeper went off, and I can tell you, I never saw a salaried employee act as fast as he did, and he works as a volunteer.

We expect no less from fire departments around the province, which I can tell you do an excellent job, especially over the holiday season. I also thank the Office of the Fire Marshal for the prevention activities it sets up. At this time of year, we ask people to check their fire alarms and make sure their detectors are in good working order. We would not want a disaster or tragic events to occur over the holidays.

[*Original*]

Mr. Speaker: Time, minister.



Roads

Mr. Urquhart: My question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Prior to the winter season...

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Urquhart: Have you ordered the fleet to be adjusted to cut the drop that the salt trucks are allowed to drop by 500 kg per kilometre, down from the usual 1 000 kg per kilometre? Have you ordered the fleet to be adjusted to drop to 250 kg of salt over the same from last year, 350 kg down to 250 kg? Have you ordered the fleet to adjust the blast, which, previously, on the hills was 1 000 kg per kilometre, down to 750 kg, making our hills even more dangerous, all at the same time, just to save \$1 million and to put the people in my riding in danger?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: I am really happy to get a question. I have been waiting because I have a lot of great news to share with New Brunswickers.

The first thing I will say to the member opposite's question is that the safety of the people who travel on our highways and roads is the number one priority of our department and is the number one priority of the great team of snowfighters, winter maintenance crews, and all our crews that work day and night to keep our roads clear and safe so that people can get to and from work and travel on our highways to visit their families and loved ones. Again, I want to thank the crews of DTI for the wonderful jobs that they do day in and day out, keeping the people of New Brunswick safe on our highway systems.

The only thing that was cut was the austerity years when the Leader of the Opposition was the Finance Minister. I will get into that more in the next two questions.

Mr. Urquhart: What has been cut has been ordered by DTI. The trucks have been brought in. The gauges in the trucks have been readjusted so that they drop only half as much sand on our C roads. They have been adjusted so that the salt on our C roads has been eliminated, except on the hills. On the hills, our salt has been dropped to a point that it is no longer viable even to get the school buses over them.

You are not keeping our people safe. My people are dying. I have been to the visitations. They have been killed on our roads already this year.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.



Mr. Urquhart: Do not talk about what they are doing and about how great we were in the past or whatever. You have adjusted the trucks that sand and salt the roads in my riding to a point that is no longer viable. Why would you make adjustments to trucks and lose the amount of salt and sand going on the roads just to save \$1 million?

Hon. Mr. Fraser: It is very unfortunate to hear those types of words coming from the supposed honourable member opposite. I will read some facts into the record—\$481 million, \$322 million, \$383 million, and \$381 million. Those are the numbers for the capital budgets under the former government when the Leader of the Opposition was the Finance Minister. Fast-forwarding to the four current years, they are \$514 million, \$524 million, and \$622 million, and this year's capital budget is \$688 million.

The member opposite wants to talk about cutting and slashing. He wants to look down the aisle to the Leader of the Opposition, who has said time and time again that his austerity ways of the past will be the ways of the future. I think that if the member opposite is concerned about the safety of New Brunswickers, he had better look to his left, not to the members opposite.

Mr. Urquhart: One thing I have in here is my honour. I am a credible member, and I have proven that over the years. I do not take that from you, him, or anybody else.

Why are we buying salt from the Magdalen Islands that is no good? The salt is full of gravel. It is full of red.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Urquhart: If you have ever been in any of our salt sheds, you would know that the sand is no good. Talk to the drivers. Talk to the people putting it on the roads. You tell us that on our C roads, every now and again, you would put a load of salt in with the sand if the supervisor says that it is okay. It is no good. It is from Saint John. The only good salt is coming out of Pugwash and going into Shediac and Moncton. In the rest of the province, we have garbage. It is not working at the temperature. Why are we not buying the good salt and putting it on our roads?

Mr. Speaker: Time.

Hon. Mr. Fraser: Again, safety is our number one priority, and the member opposite knows full well that the previous salt supplier notified the Department of Transportation that it would not be able to fulfill its contract. We did our due diligence, and we put out a tender. We had five bids that came in. K+S Windsor Salt was awarded the tender to provide 150 000 t of salt annually to support our winter maintenance program.

The member opposite asked whether I had been to any of the sheds. I have been to every one of the sheds. I have been to every one of the sheds that are operated by my team. I have been



there to tell them that they do not have to worry about the austerity ways of Blaine Higgs because he is no longer in charge of the finances of the province. They know full well that we are going to continue to invest.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Mr. Fraser: We are going to continue to invest in our highways, roads, and bridges, unlike what they did when they were in government.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Employment Standards

Mr. Steeves: My question this morning is for the Labour Minister. We in the opposition have been asked for clarification on the new public holiday, Family Day. We have been referred to section 23 of the *Employment Standards Act*, which reads:

23 *Where any class of employers or employees is covered by a collective agreement that became effective after July 16, 1976, and provides for a minimum of seven paid holidays, including New Brunswick Day, that class of employers and employees are exempt from application of section 18 to 21.*

This section was not amended to allow for the addition of Family Day. Therefore, it is leaving the majority of union workers in the province out of enjoying Family Day, which this government has touted. Does the minister understand this to be the case as well?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I have to say that it is a great question for us to be able to get up and remind New Brunswickers how the Leader of the Opposition did not and does not support Family Day, just as he did not support our raising taxes on the 1% richest so that we could invest more in education and health care, just as he did not support us on raising corporate taxes on large businesses to invest more in things that can grow the economy for all New Brunswickers, just as he was against our putting free tuition in place for those who need it the most so that they can go to university and college in this province, and just as he was against our enhancing the CPP to help seniors be able to retire with dignity and respect. He was against as well the minimum wage, which we raised to help workers get more money in their pockets.

But do not fret. We do not want to focus on the wealthy and large corporations as the Leader of the Opposition does, and that is why we passed Family Day.



Mr. Steeves: The Premier goes on about how the government members love Family Day. They love Family Day except for anybody who works for a union. Apparently, they do not love unions.

23 *Where any class of employers of employees is covered by a collective agreement that became effective after July 16, 1976, and provides for a minimum of seven paid holidays, including New Brunswick Day, that class of employers and employees are exempt from the application of sections 18 to 21.*

Family Day is therefore leaving out the majority of union workers in the province. Union workers are the heart and soul of some of our major companies in this province. Family Day was designed for them. Family Day was to give them some respite and to give them some time with their families, to give them time together, but no. Apparently, if you work for a union in this province, the government does not like you. The government does not want you enjoying time with your family. Does the minister also understand this to be the case, that Family Day is not for people who work for unions in this province?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: It is incredible. It is incredible. I am excited for 2018 for many reasons, and one of them is that the opposition members are not going to get to speak out of both sides of their mouths anymore. They are going to go through a campaign, New Brunswickers are going to ask them for clear answers and clear positions, and the media are going to start to put them under the microscope. They will not get away with saying that they do not support Family Day yet get up today and try to advocate that there be more people who get it. It is incredible.

It is pure politics, but do not fret. We here on this side of the Legislature are there for our labour, we are there for our workforce, and we are there for New Brunswickers. That is why we passed first contract arbitration. That is why we were able to sign 25 of 25 collective agreements. The opposition could not sign any. That is why, despite the Leader of the Opposition opposing it, we passed and gave New Brunswickers a Family Day.

Mr. Steeves: I am sure that everybody is going to love Family Day, especially when your kids get the day off school but the teachers who are unionized apparently have to go to work now. Moms and dads who are unionized are going to have to go to work now and find some day care for their kids.

Do you know what? It is wonderful to think of Family Day as a time to get together in the middle of winter, in the cold, to go out sledding, to go out snowmobiling, and to go out skiing with your family and have a nice long weekend with your family unless, apparently, you are unionized. Apparently, if you are unionized, you do not get a chance to do that in this province. Your kids are going to be home alone.

Thank you to the unions that have been protecting our workers over the years, but unfortunately, this government is not worried about protecting you and giving you a break and



having you enjoy time with your family as well. Does the minister understand that union members are not getting Family Day off? That is my question.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Does the member opposite understand how hilarious it is to have him get up and advocate for Family Day when the Conservatives and the Leader of the Opposition opposed it? They opposed giving Family Day to New Brunswickers, just as they opposed raising the minimum wage, just as they opposed raising taxes on the 1% richest in this province and raising taxes on large corporations so that we could invest more in education and health care, just as they opposed raising the CPP to help seniors in this province retire with dignity, and just as they opposed ensuring that we give those who need the most support free tuition to study here in this province.

They opposed all of that for a simple reason. They want to focus on an austerity agenda, and we want to invest in New Brunswickers. They want to cut into education and health care, which would retract our economy. We want to invest in our multiyear plan to grow the economy, our 10-year plan to strengthen education, and our multiyear plan to improve wait times in our health care system.

