

October 31, 2018

[Original]

Government Agenda

Mr. Higgs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, we learned what collaboration means to the Premier. Without any warning or notice to other parties, his office produced a 15-paragraph amendment to its own throne speech, adding a bunch of last-minute initiatives that the Premier suddenly has interest in. Yet, once again, the Premier sees collaboration as a one-party show where the other parties talk but the Liberal backrooms produce the final product entirely on their own. My question to the Premier is simple. Why does the Premier not understand that collaboration sometimes means having people other than the Liberals in the room when the final plan is made? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: First of all, I would like to let families affected by the situation in northwestern schools know we are thinking about them. I think people have seen, through the media, that a situation seems to be unfolding in that area. The safety of students and staff is paramount, and we encourage all New Brunswickers to follow instructions from the authorities.

[Original]

Also, Mr. Speaker, I would like to join many of my colleagues who have wished New Brunswickers a happy Halloween. We in the Legislature will certainly still be working, so we will not be able to hand out candies, but I know that we will all be thinking of our constituents as they, hopefully, have a safe and fun time tonight.

Mr. Speaker, we have listened to New Brunswickers' message about doing things differently and collaborating. We are here in the Legislature as a team, listening to the speeches, feedback, ideas, and suggestions given by the other parties, and that is why we proposed that additional information, directives, and clarification be added to the speech from the throne after hearing their feedback.

Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, it is not that it is a new phenomenon. We see the Premier generating policy on the fly. He still believes that throwing the word "collaborative" around means that he can carry on with the old politics, where the final product comes out of the office every time. Every item in this amendment was raised by the three opposition parties in the campaign. The items are not new. The only new thing is the pretense that he is interested in this work. If the Premier was really interested in collaborating with the opposition, why were these items left out of the throne speech in the first place? They were all there, Mr. Speaker. If you are creating a shopping list, why not just throw it all in to begin with? There is something for everyone, which is the mandate of this Premier. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I think that we have to clarify this. We had set up meetings with all political parties to get their feedback in advance of the agenda being laid out through the speech from the throne of this government. Some of them provided some feedback. Some of them simply told us: Go look at our platform.



Mr. Speaker, we did that. We included items from their platforms. We then had, after the speech from the throne, debate and discussion, and other political parties clarified that they thought there were things that were missing, things that should be clarified, and things that should be added. We would have loved to have had that conversation before, but the member opposite told me in a meeting: Simply look at our platform. He did not want to prioritize anything within his platform, so we did the best we could by taking elements from all political parties to show New Brunswickers we got the message that we have to collaborate more. Then we got their feedback on what we chose from all the political parties, and we further enhanced the strength of our collaborative agenda by adding even more points of clarification and other points from their feedback.

Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, this is not collaboration. It is desperation, spending tax dollars at will. The Premier keeps throwing more and more last-minute items on the agenda, with less and less commitment to the issues. As I said in my reply to the throne speech, the involvement he sees for the opposition parties is developing committee reports, but committee reports mean nothing if the executive branch does not act upon them.

My question is this, Mr. Speaker: If the Premier had to wait until beyond the last minute to include issues such as rural economic development and poverty reduction, why should this House have any confidence that he would act upon committee reports? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, our collaborative and progressive agenda laid out in the speech from the throne actually included many items that will help address poverty, such as raising the minimum wage and rolling out free child care for those who need it the most across the province. During the Leader of the Opposition's speech, he said that there was not enough on poverty. He mentioned that he would like to see an all-party approach to addressing poverty, as we had in the past. I imagine that Kelly Lamrock wrote that in his speech, and that is fine. It is a great point, and we added it to our subamendment. Other political parties, Mr. Speaker, mentioned that they thought there was not enough when it came to addressing poverty, and we listened.

Mr. Speaker, this is what New Brunswickers have asked us to do. They have asked us to act in an unprecedented way, listening to the other political parties, working with them, and taking ideas from their political platforms and their positions, because New Brunswickers recognize that no political party has a monopoly on good ideas. That is the way that we want to function as a minority government, and I think that is what New Brunswickers have asked us to do.

Family Support Services

Mrs. Shephard: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that even though a report on vulnerable children and families by George Savoury was in government hands a couple of months ago, the Minister of Families and Children had not seen it. When something is of great importance, a minister generally demands to be briefed. If the minister has not been briefed already today, will he commit to getting briefed and reporting back to this Legislature tomorrow? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question from the member opposite. The safety and security of our children is the top priority of this government. Mr. Speaker, I can tell the members opposite that I have not been briefed. I have not received the final report. Once the final



report is given to our department, I will certainly be briefed and I will ask the members opposite whether they want to be briefed before we make this public. We will certainly do that.

Our department has always been open and transparent. I encourage anybody who has issues within his or her riding to come to us at Social Development, whether it is housing, whether it is social development, whether it is jobs—anything. As a minister, I continue to work with the people at Social Development, and we will continue to help the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, once this report is finalized, again, I will be briefed and we will share it with the public. Thank you.

Mrs. Shephard: Mr. Speaker, this report is extremely important, and I cannot imagine, even though it is not final, that the minister has not been briefed on its content. To submit further questions and to ask for more clarity, that is a general practice. Can the minister not tell us that he has at least seen an advance draft of the report? When can we expect that it will be tabled in this House? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Horsman: That is an important question. I can tell you that the department received a draft report from Mr. Savoury during the election period and he is now preparing the final report. When we receive it, I will be briefed and we will have it translated and prepared for release to the public. I can commit to briefing the members opposite on the report before it is made public.

It is important. I want to thank Mr. Savoury for doing the work that he has done. He has travelled throughout the whole province. Not only is he dealing with people in Social Development, but also he is going out to meet those in Education and Public Safety. We did not want to focus on just one small part of protecting our children in our province. We looked at the whole scope, and I am very proud of our department for making sure that we looked at everything.

We are not afraid to say that we have made mistakes. We can always do better, and we will continue to do better. As a minister of Social Development, I want to do my best for the children of this province.

[*Translation*]

Federal Funding

Mr. Fitch: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[*Original*]

I would like to ask the Premier about a preelection budget announcement that was made possible by \$109 million in extra revenue from the federal government. I wonder this: When did the Premier know he would be receiving this windfall from the federal government to create this announcement, and how long did the Premier wait before this information was made public?



[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I would like the member of the official opposition to clarify exactly what he is talking about.

However, I can tell you this: We are very proud of the work we were able to accomplish over the past four years with regard to the financial situation of our province. We have focused on growing the economy so that it benefits as many people as possible. So, we are proud that the economy has grown every year for the past four years. Wages earned by New Brunswickers have increased significantly in several of those years. Moreover, we have managed to reduce unemployment here in New Brunswick and increase the population.

That being said, I think that, in the last election, the people of this province clearly indicated that their government should focus more on the financial situation, and that is why we have listened to the ideas put forward by the other political parties and have included them in our agenda, which was outlined in the speech from the throne.

[Original]

Mr. Fitch: You know, Mr. Speaker, I understand why people have lost confidence in this Premier. This is an announcement that was predicated on the \$109 million from the Trudeau federal government, and the headline of the announcement could not exist without that amount. People in my riding were asking: Is this election skulduggery? Is this accounting theatrics, or was the Premier as surprised as everybody else to be getting this money?

Could the Premier explain what specific interactions he undertook with the federal government in order to obtain this extra \$109 million that he announced just days before the election?

[Translation]

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Once again, I am asking the opposition member to specify which announcement he is talking about.

I can tell you once again that we are very proud to have had the opportunity to have a budget surplus during our mandate, which was the first surplus in 10 years in New Brunswick.

[Original]

Mr. Speaker, the government, the civil service, and New Brunswickers have worked very hard for us to be able to reduce our deficit by more than half over the last four years, to the point where we have the first budget surplus in a decade. We should all be proud of that. It came with a lot of hard work and some tough choices in the first two budgets that we, as a government, introduced. We certainly made some mistakes along the way, and we will be the first to admit that. However, we are happy with the outcome. Our deficit is going down. It has been cut by more than half, all the while ensuring that we have a budget surplus and that we are investing more in education and health care. With that said, we have laid out in our collaborative and progressive agenda, through our speech from the throne, that we



need to do even more when it comes to addressing the finances of the province, and we look forward to working with the other parties in doing so.

Mr. Fitch: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the Premier has had a clairvoyant moment. He remembered what the announcement was all about. Maybe he will remember that before the election, he said he did not want to work with the People's Alliance Party. Before the election, he said that he did not want to work with the member for Kent North. Mr. Speaker, those are the types of things that have caused the people to lose confidence in this government.

This money from the federal government seems to be as volatile as a pot stock on the TSX. Can the Premier tell us whether this adjustment is going to be retracted at some point in the future? Also, what effect would that have on the next subsequent budgets that we will be facing in New Brunswick?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I now understand what he is trying to get at. The budget surplus that we were able to effectively create and produce, the first in a decade...

(Interjections.)

Hon. Mr. Gallant: The word "create" means that we worked on it, and there were audited financial statements by the Auditor General. I certainly hope that the opposition is not going to start questioning the credibility of the Auditor General.

It was a budget surplus, the first in 10 years. It was because there was a lot of hard work by civil servants and by New Brunswickers who helped us roll up our sleeves to get our finances under control. The ability to have this budget surplus is very much helped by the fact that we had approximately \$150 million in extra revenue, largely due to corporate income taxes being higher than predicted. This is largely due to the fact that we have an economy that has grown over the past four years and that had grown in that particular year faster than predicted. We need to continue to double down to ensure that we grow the economy and work with the other parties to address our finances, as we laid out in our agenda.

Salmon

Mr. Stewart: The Atlantic salmon is a unique and vital part of the culture on the Miramichi, and it is a species at risk. The CAST program, or the Collaboration for Atlantic Salmon Tomorrow program, is a partnership of scientists, environmental groups, and industry participants dedicated to reversing the decline of wild Atlantic salmon. Earlier this month, the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans stopped CAST from its release of wild and mature salmon back into the Miramichi river system. Is the Premier familiar with this situation, and if so, what is he doing about it?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: Thank you very much. I appreciate the question, and I must say that I am the new Acting Minister of Aquaculture and Fisheries in the province. I must say that I am not as well versed as I would like to be when it comes to the salmon file. I would appreciate taking that question under advisement, and I will return with an answer. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stewart: Mr. Speaker, in the October 3 *Miramichi Leader*, we read the headline: "Salmon release experiment yields positive results". I cannot tell you what a hopeful feeling it was for Miramichiers to



read that story. Then on October 22, we read this headline in the *Miramichi Leader*: “Feds reject fish release in N.B. river”. What a letdown it was to read that story. Has the Premier made any attempt to intercede with his federal partners on behalf of the CAST program on the Miramichi River system?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I said, I will take the question under advisement, and I will return. I can also state that the wild Atlantic salmon is a tremendously important species in New Brunswick. It is more than just a symbol. It creates a lot of jobs. It is appreciated here in the province as well as outside the province.

The CAST program, which is conserving Atlantic salmon for tomorrow, has a lot of experts at the table, and these are experts on salmon conservation. They are identifying innovative new ways to help the salmon population to rebound. As we know, there are some challenges regarding the repopulation of the salmon in New Brunswick. We continue to encourage DFO and stakeholders to work together for the good of our salmon population. We are working with DFO on this file. We want to make sure that the salmon populations here are healthy, not only in the Miramichi River but also in all the rivers in the province where we find them. Thank you.

Mr. Stewart: The minister might realize that it is the Department of Energy and Resource Development that salmon would be under.

Learning to fly-fish has been a part of growing up in Miramichi since I was a kid. The Atlantic salmon plays a critical role in the economy of the Miramichi. Salmon are listed as endangered, yet just weeks ago, DFO banned CAST from releasing young salmon this year, which means that it is left to try to salvage eggs and those adult mature salmon are probably going to perish. Last year’s program had positive results, so it makes no sense that the feds would be banning it this year.

Has the Premier been briefed by provincial staff on this bad decision by the federal counterparts? If not, will he get briefed and give us an update tomorrow?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I appreciate the member opposite for his questions. It is important that the salmon that we have continue to be a big part of our life here in New Brunswick. It is very important to enhance the quality of life, and it is important to our economy as well on many fronts but especially when it comes to tourism in our province.

With that said, I can answer the questions of the member opposite very directly. Yes, indeed, I had conversations, as did officials, to discuss the need for a program like CAST to be able to move forward. We, as a provincial government, invested in the CAST program. Unfortunately, as was pointed out by the member opposite, DFO made a decision. I can tell you that officials have been working to see what else can be done to make sure that this important program or something similar to it will be able to move forward so that we can ensure that for many years to come, there will be a livestock of salmon to enjoy in rural New Brunswick and to help increase economic growth and jobs in our province.

Ambulance New Brunswick

Mr. Austin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier. As we know, UNB constitutional law professor John McEvoy issued a lengthy arbitrator’s ruling concluding that Ambulance New Brunswick is allowed to be flexible in providing ambulance service in relation to language requirements. The Premier



has spoken of a court order which contradicts Prof. McEvoy's ruling. However, the only court order is indeed a consent order, something that this Premier and Serge Rousselle agreed to without any ruling from the proceedings of a court. Just so no one is confused, will the Premier now confirm for the House that there is no ruling and there is no jurisprudence to contradict Prof. McEvoy's ruling?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I think it is very important to underline that as a government and as a Premier, we have to follow the advice of the civil service to the best of our abilities, and I can tell you that we have received legal advice that the right approach to this is to have the judicial review which we have been undertaking to clarify this—to clarify which path the government of New Brunswick should be going down, exactly what rights are in place, and what path would ensure that we are respecting everybody's rights.

I would think that everybody in this Legislature would agree that we, as a government, would want to follow the legalities and the legal framework that we have to work with. To clarify that, we have asked for a review. I understand the member opposite and New Brunswickers wanting to have an answer right now. Unfortunately, that is not how our court systems work, and we need a bit of time. But we are trying to do everything that we can to have the answer as soon as we can. If the ruling of the judicial review is that we should follow the arbitrator's ruling, this government will do exactly that.

Mr. Austin: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. This is not about legalities or legal frameworks. This is about an agreement made by this government and Ambulance New Brunswick on what should be done. There is no legal ruling, and there is no judge that is ordering anything in terms of jurisprudence.

In paragraph 92 of Prof. McEvoy's ruling, he cites former Official Languages Commissioner Michel Carrier, who wrote: "As for the use of a telephone interpretation service, the Commissioner sees it as an acceptable solution as long as it remains provisional." In fact, Commissioner Carrier has acknowledged that flexibility while we work toward universal coverage is the acceptable practice.

Will the Premier acknowledge that there has been no court ruling and no jurisprudence since that report, which contradicts former Commissioner Carrier's position?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: We certainly disagree on this, and I disagree with the Leader of the Opposition that we have to throw away the idea of finding out exactly what the legal obligations of the government are. We believe that through a judicial review, it is only responsible that a government find out what obligations it has to clarify the path it should take. I do not agree with the Leader of the Opposition about throwing that away and pretending that we do not want to know what legal framework we have to follow.

We also understand that the member opposite who is asking the questions wants direct action to improve the paramedic shortage and the ambulance services. On that, we can agree. I think we all agree on that, Mr. Speaker. That is why yesterday we clarified that we would take direct action by increasing salaries for paramedics and that we would also hire everyone who is studying and graduates to become a paramedic.

Mr. Speaker, Greg McConaghy, President of CUPE Local 4848, whom I got to know very well during the campaign, said: "This is awesome news... What they have announced today is what I have been saying all along: our wages need to be adjusted and we need our jobs filled." We are taking concrete action.



[Translation]

Extra-Mural Program

Ms. Mitton: Since the management of extra-mural services was privatized in early 2018, I have heard about patients who now have a hard time getting this care. Thomas Thériault, of Saint-Quentin, is one of these patients who have been in the media quite a lot. Mr. Thériault lost access to extra-mural speech-language pathology and home physiotherapy. He now receives his speech-language pathology care at a local school and his physiotherapy at the hospital.

Can the Minister of Health tell me exactly how many New Brunswickers lost the extra-mural services they were receiving at home or at school since Medavie started managing all of this?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: What I can tell the member opposite with certainty is that people have not lost these services, which were actually transferred to the health networks. As for occupational therapy and speech-language pathology, these services have remained with the health networks, including Vitalité Health Network for the northwestern part of the province.

I can assure you that Extra-Mural Program services have not only been maintained, but I would even say improved. The number of home visits and referrals to the program has increased, and fewer people go to the emergency room thanks to this program, which is strengthened by this partnership.

I can tell you, then, that, no, speech-language pathology and occupational therapy services have not been cut; they have just been transferred to another body.

[Original]

Ms. Mitton: It concerns me that these services have been transferred. Some people who were previously able to get their services at home now need to travel to have those services, and that can be a real issue for people.

I have also heard that there has been an exodus of nurses from the Extra-Mural Program since Medavie took over. Dr. Hubert Dupuis of Égalité santé has said that this has created an ice jam of backlogs in our hospitals because patients cannot be released to receive care at home through the Extra-Mural Program due to a shortage of extra-mural nurses. This only further exacerbates the overcrowding in our hospitals when the Extra-Mural Program could provide an exceptional level of care at home that would be better for the patient. Can the Minister of Health tell me how many of the province's 700 extra-mural nurses have left the service since Medavie took over on January 5?

Hon. Mr. Bourque: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can say is that the Extra-Mural Program in New Brunswick is vital to the health care system that we have here. I have said this time and time again over the past year. It is one of the crown jewels of our system. I do believe that this system has been reinforced over the past year.



What I can say is that there are some staffing challenges within the Extra-Mural Program, but honestly, this is not a surprise to anyone here. There are staffing challenges throughout the health care system and throughout the health care professionals. It is not an exception with the Extra-Mural Program. What I would actually argue is that there is probably less of a shortage within the Extra-Mural Program as compared to the other... If you look at hospitals or other services...

I would argue that the Extra-Mural Program is in a good state. Yes, there are challenges. We are looking at those, but I can say that those services are assured for the population that needs it. Thank you.

Ambulance New Brunswick

Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, in the Premier's exchange with the member for Fredericton-Grand Lake, it was clear that there was no court ruling on the issue of paramedics. It was only a consent order that the Premier's government chose to accept rather than letting the courts rule. In the subamendment to the throne speech tabled yesterday, the Premier promises to act on the paramedic crisis if the current judicial review sets aside the previous court order. The Premier is the Attorney General, yet he chooses to defer or blame others for this judicial review. Given that the appeal court cannot set aside a consent order, is this not just another excuse not to act, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: I can say one thing. It is great to see that there is collaboration happening with the member opposite having a prepared page, knowing the questions of the leader of the third party who asked these questions on the ambulances. At least they are cooperating. That is great to see. I can tell you that the answer will not be any different.

As a Premier and as a government, you have a responsibility to respect the rights of all New Brunswickers. To do so, you need to define what those rights are. There is an arbitrator ruling about which we have been given legal advice by civil servants. If the member opposite forms a government, if ever that happens, he will get the same legal advice saying that they think that the arbitrator's ruling does not indeed help ensure that we are respecting people's rights. That is why we went with a judicial review. I think that a government and a Premier fully understanding their obligations to ensure that they are respecting people's rights is crucial. If the judicial review says that the arbitrator ruling should be upheld, this government will ensure that it is done.

Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has an obligation to protect the health and welfare of the citizens in this province. That is what this is about. Let's get our priorities straight.

After losing his majority and issuing one failed throne speech, the Premier's plan for the ambulance crisis is "to begin to address the issue of out-of-service ambulances". Now, there are synonyms for "fix", but "begin to address" is not one of them. Can the Premier advise this House of exactly what "begin to address" means? Is it another deferral program, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Mr. Speaker, Premiers have a responsibility to ensure that they respect their citizens' rights—all citizens. It is not for a Premier or for a government to cherry-pick which rights they will respect and which rights they will not respect. To ensure that a government is respecting those rights, we have to fully understand the obligations under those rights. That is why the judicial review is crucial. That is why it will help us understand whether or not the arbitrator's ruling should be upheld. If the judicial review says that the arbitrator's ruling should be upheld, then it will be.



Mr. Speaker, we heard the members opposite say that they want direct and immediate action when it comes to paramedics. We will have a review, an all-party review, that will last six weeks and will determine other action items to improve the ambulance services and address the paramedic shortage. However, we will take direct and immediate action by increasing paramedic salaries and hiring every paramedic that graduates here in New Brunswick—offer them a job, I should say—to address the shortage and improve ambulance services for all New Brunswickers.

Mr. Higgs: Mr. Speaker, it is about priorities. The health and welfare of citizens is a priority. We cannot see people dying in our communities in either official language because that is not right. It is about making decisions to fix a problem and then to deal with the consequences to ensure that our rights are protected in both official languages. First, you make decisions to protect people. That is what this is about. What I am hearing here is another case for a deferral, another case for not making a decision, another case for procrastination, and another case for a review or a study. Do you know what the Premier will not do? He will not get the job done. I will ask this one more time: Will the Premier put a priority on the health and welfare of citizens in this province and make sure that ambulances are there when people need them? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Interjections.)

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members.

Hon. Mr. Gallant: Of course, health care and ambulance services will be a priority of this government if it gains confidence on Friday, but it will not be at the expense of people's rights. I understand that during the campaign, there was some division in this province, and I take responsibility for that. As Premier, it is my responsibility to ensure that we are united as a province. However, we cannot have somebody who may be the Premier in a few days say that he is willing to push people's rights aside for short-term political gain.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all 49 MLAs in this Legislature to have patience so that the judicial review can tell us exactly how we have to ensure that we are respecting people's rights. If that judicial review tells us that we should put it aside, that we should uphold the arbitrator's ruling, then that is what we will do. We will take immediate action if we gain the confidence of the House, raising paramedics' salaries and hiring the paramedics that graduate in this province, to offer great ambulance services to all.

Mr. Speaker: Time, Premier.

